

## The Doctrines of Justification and Adoption: A discourse on Objective vs. Subjective Theology

*Conversion is not uniquely Christian, but Christian conversion is unique and uniquely true... Conversion has come to be understood in purely subjectivistic terms as changed behavior. The objective realities of conversion, its divine origin supernatural change and eternal results-- have been downplayed and rejected. If the truth of the gospel is tied to a testimony of transformation and change, then non-Christians can point to similar stories of transformation and change in non-Christian religions, sects, cults and even among users of certain drugs...*

David Wells, *Turning To God*

How would you distinguish the objective work of Christ vs. the subjective work of Christ for our salvation?

**Objective:** Refers to the work that Christ did for us within history (time and space). In that it stands outside of us, it makes us to appreciate the God-centeredness of our salvation, together with forming a criterion for evaluating the subjective work. In other words, the subjective work of Christ is unique as compared to other religions only in its relation to the objective work of Christ

**Subjective:** Refers to the work Christ does in and to us through the Holy Spirit as a result of his objective work. (effectual Calling leading to Repentance and Faith, Sanctification, Assurance)

## Chapter 12: On Justification

### On Justification by Faith Alone:

*Therefore we must now discuss these matters thoroughly. And we must so discuss them as to bear in mind that this is the main hinge (the doctrine of justification by faith) on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.*

John Calvin (Inst. 3:11:2):

*Indeed, when we consider how many of the fundamental points of theology are connected with justification, we can hardly assign it too important a place. Our view of this doctrine just determine, or be determined by, our view of Christ's satisfaction; and this, again, carries along with it the whole doctrine concerning the nature and person of Christ...*

R. L. Dabney (Systematic Theology p.618):

*There is no subject (justification) which possesses more of intrinsic importance that attaches to this one, and there is none with respect to which the Reformers were more thoroughly harmonious in their sentiments.*

W. Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, p. 1, vol. 2:

### Section 1: What Justification is and is not ( note the neg. and positive definitions in section 1)

- Freely (Rom.3:24, 8:30)
- By imputing faith? (Rom. 5:17-19)
- A.A. Hodges says that "Justification is a judicial act of God whereby he *declares* (rather than *makes*) us to be conformed to the demands of the law." AS a judicial act, what is the difference between "justification" and "excuse?"
- The heart of the Reformation debate with Rome was over the distinction between "imputation" and "infusion" of righteousness (LC #77). Note, for instance, what the Council of Trent said about the matter: "If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them...let him be anathema." (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, "On Justification", Canon XI). Luther often used the expression "alien righteousness" to describe the righteousness that is ours by faith. What was he attempting to accomplish by such language?

### Section 2: How is Justification obtained?

- What ever "repentance" is, what can't it be if a necessary condition to justification?
- Notice that "faith" is associated here with "receiving" and "resting?" What does this imply?

- However if by faith alone, is faith ever alone? (thus the importance of distinguishing objective from subjective theology)
- What then ought we to examine in order to know if we are “justified”?

### Section 3: In examining the objective Work of God—what then do we examine vis-à-vis our justification?

- Therefore, Scripture makes "the cross" the central focus of the Gospel, not our conversion.
  1. Central to Paul's Gospel: 1 Cor.1:17-18; 2:2; Gal.6:15
  2. Central to Peter's Gospel: 1 Peter 1:18-19, 2:24; 3:18; Ac.2:23
  3. Central to John's Gospel: Rev.1:5,18; 1 John2:22; 4:1-3
  4. Central to Christ's perspective and presented as the *telos* and climax of his mission: Mk.8:31-32; 9:31, Mt.16:21-23.
    - Notice especially how the confessions understands the object or termination of Christ's work on the Cross. E.g. It is God who is the terminus or “object” of Christ's work on the Cross—his justice, his law, his mercy and grace all being satisfied in Christ!
- What did the Cross Achieve?")
  - a. Substitution: "putting one in the place of another" so that Christ took our place in satisfying God's penal code representing his righteous character as standard.
  - b. Penal: Anchors Christ's substitution within the category of moral law. (not to be distinguished from, but consistent with, God's character. God's law is the means through which God condescended to humanity so as to reveal his glory.) Therefore, the penalty of the penal system was diverted to Christ. (Gal.3:10-13)
  - c. Forshadowed in Old Covenant Sacrificial system
    1. Blood is representative of life. (Gen.9:4; Dt. 12:23)
    2. Blood is indispensable to atonement. (Lev.17:11; Heb.9:2) "Life for life"
    3. OT examples corresponds to Christ's fulfillment.
      - a. Passover-- Ex.11-13; 1 Cor.5:7-8
      - b. Sin offering and Day of Atonement-- Lev.16:5-22; Heb.9:7-28
  - d. Five aspects of Penal Substitution: (Packer)
    1. Retribution: Wrath is a just penalty of which all men are without excuse and without hope of escape apart from Christ. (Rom.1:18ff)
    2. Solidarity: Christ is the second Adam. He carries our identity at the cross. (2 Cor.5:14)
    3. Mystery: Such love is mysterious to us. (Rom.5:8); The "god-man" is mysterious to us. (Philip.2)
    4. Salvation: God's chosen ones are the beneficiary
    5. Divine Love: Not of a kind that merely placates a fierce Father, but one that is compatible with the father's justice.

### Section 4: When are we justified? When are we aware of our justification?

**Matt. 25:34** Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; (c.f. Eph. 1:4, Rev.13:8)

### Section 5: One could say that we are “justified” while also being “justified.” How would you explain this?

- In what sense should we clarify that justification is by an once and for all act of God? **Heb. 7:27**
- In what sense should we clarify that justification is ongoing? (note then ascended ministry and justification—c.f **Heb. 7:25**. Eph. 4)

### Section 6: How were Old Covenant believers justified?

#### Chapter 12: On Adoption: (an overlooked doctrine?)

*"Therefore, God both calls himself our Father and would have us so address him. By the great sweetness of this name he frees us from all distrust, since no greater feeling of love can be found elsewhere than in the Father... He could not attest his own boundless love toward us with any surer proof than the fact that we are called "children of God." John Calvin*

- C.f. 1 John 3:1, rom.8:14-16, Eph.3:12, Heb. 12:6)
- What is the difference between being a “son” vs. a “slave” e.g. Read Gal. 4:4, Rom.8:14-16
  - One lives in response to the entitlements granted by grace
  - The other lives in fear in order to gain entitlements

## **Addendum: Theories in Atonement**

**At Issue:** What was "satisfied" by Christ's sacrificial death so as to secure the forgiveness of sins for those in Christ by faith.

**Warfield's Method:** Arranged them according to the conception each entertains of the person or persons on whom the work of Christ terminates as they fall naturally into five classes.

(B.B. Warfield's, *The Person and Work of Christ*,)

### **I. Ransom Theories, "Cristus victor":**

*Conceive of the work of Christ as terminating upon Satan, so affecting him as to secure the release of the souls held in bondage by him.*

1. A mainstream position in the early church. (Augustine and Origen. One also finds it in book one of the Narnia Chronicles by C. S. Lewis. It is defended in modern times by Gustav Aulen, Cristus Victor)
2. Biblical history is a great cosmic drama with the forces of good fighting the forces of evil. Central theme of the atonement is Triumph, Christ triumphs over Satan, death and sin.
3. Christ is the ransom paid to Satan to free us from his reign. It is Satan and not God who demand Christ's blood.
4. In so far as Christ is perfect, he cannot be held in Satan's grasp and thus a final victory is secured by his perfect obedience.
5. Important question for early church: Did God deceive Satan into believing he could have Christ as an eternal prisoner.

Yes: Origen and Gregory of Nyssa- but God alone can justly deceive

No: Satan thought he could control Christ out of arrogance and therefore no deception took place.

#### 6. Texts Used:

Mt.20:28; 1 Cor.6:20.

#### 7. Problems:

- a. Satan given too much power. The devil has rights of which God must satisfy.
- b. Sets God into a divine transaction with Satan.
- c. Lowers the work of God to a deception.
- d. Fails to satisfy God's justice. Forgiveness is still necessary and not merely a change of masters.

### **II. Mystical Theories:**

*Conceive the work of Christ as terminating physically on man, so affecting him as to bring him by an interior and hidden working upon him into participation with the one life of Christ. The fundamental characteristic of these theories is their discovery of the saving fact not in anything which Christ taught or did, but in what He was. (stress upon incarnation)*

1. Platonizing Fathers... Pseudo-Dionysius, in west, Johannes Scotus Erigena. In reformational age, Osiander, Schwenckfeld, Franck, Weigel, Boehme. In modern church, Schleiermacher and the "Mercersburg School."
2. Saving work is not in what he does for us but in what he does in us.
3. Human nature is assumed by Christ and kept from sinning and so purification from sin as the first fruits of humanity-- mystically applied to all humanity.
3. Assumes that the basic problem of salvation is in us. Christ makes us forgivable.

#### Problems:

- a. Equates sin with ignorance and loss of mortality.
- b. Platonic view of humanity is assumed. Christ becomes the "formal" or "universal" human in us.
- c. Leads to mysticism.

#### 4. Texts used:

"in Christ" passages, "first fruits" passages

### **III. Moral Influence Theories:**

*Conceive the work of Christ as terminating on man, in the way of bringing to bear on him inducements to action; so affecting the man as to lead him to a better knowledge of God, or to a more lively sense of his real relation to God, or to a revolutionary change of heart and life with reference to God.*

1. Peter Abelard, More recently, Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) , Hastings Randall.
2. Atonement is something done to us rather than to God. God is essentially love and therefore we do not need to fear God's justice.
3. Jesus comes to demonstrate god's love for us.
4. Sin is a type of sickness from which we must be healed.
5. Texts Used:  
Luke 19:10; 2 Cor.5:19;
6. Problems:
  - a. God's love is not inconsistent with his justice
  - b. Christ is a demonstration of God's love but of a costly love.
  - c. Scriptural notions of sacrifice are rooted in the OT. We do injustice to them if we read God's forgiveness without understanding the nature of these sacrifices.

#### **IV. Governmental Theories:** (atonement as a demonstration of God's justice)

*Conceive the work of Christ as terminating on both man and God, but on man primarily and on God only secondarily. These suppose that the work of Christ so affects man by the spectacle of the sufferings borne by Him as to deter men from sin; and by thus deterring men from sin enables God to forgive sin with safety to His moral government of the world... No less than moral influence theories, the atoning fact is man's own reformation.*

1. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) Reacts against Socinians.
2. Framework
  - a. God is holy and just in all his ways
  - b. God can forgive rather than punish if he so chooses.
  - c. The atonement shows what would happen if we continue in our sin. Christ's death serves to return us to obedience
  - d. Christ cannot take our sins since sins are not the sort of thing that can be transferred.
3. Problems:
  - a. Misses the substitutionary nature of the atonement.
  - b. Misses the pattern of representative headship in scripture and the corresponding "imputation" doctrine.

#### **V. Satisfaction Theories: (Penal Substitution)**

*Conceive the work of Christ as terminating primarily on God and secondarily on people. Christ sympathetically entered into our condition and became a true and perfect sacrifice offered to God, of intrinsic value ample for the expiation of our guilt and at the same time is a true and perfect righteousness offered to God in fulfillment of the demands of His people, and, on being accepted by God, accruing to their benefit; so that by this satisfaction they are relieved at once from the curse of their guilt as breakers of the law, and from the burden of the law as a condition of life; and this by a work of such kind and performed in such a manner as to carry home to the hearts of men a profound sense of the indefectible righteousness of God and to make to them a perfect revelation of His love and holiness.*

1. Anselm (1033-1109, Archbishop of Canterbury, Cur Dues Homo)
2. God alone is king over us, Satan is not owed anything.
3. Retributive justice entails not only that we change our behavior but also that just reparation be paid.
4. God alone can provide the infinite compensation necessary because of our sin and his infinite holiness.
5. Prerequisites of the atonement
  - a. atonement faithfully represent humanity
  - b. atonement fully compensate God
  - c. atonement finally defeat sin and Satan
6. The Sacrifice of Christ
  - a. as fully human he could serve as our representative
  - b. as fully divine he could fully compensate God
7. Biblical texts:  
Rom.3:21ff, 5-9  
Heb.9-10