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ARCHIVES

Justification by Faith in Modern Theology

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(Concluded)

"OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION"

WE shall begin the final installment of this article with the judgment that one of the truths about justification that St. Paul holds is that *justification is complete before there is such a thing as faith*. This fact of Paul's teaching has been known, particularly in the theological literature of "Missouri Lutherans," as objective justification. The term is not a good one, chiefly for the reason that the counterpart to it, subjective justification, if it means anything, should mean a justification that goes on in the believer, a thing which no "Missourian" ever held. Subjective justification, the justification of the individual sinner who believes, is every whit as objective as objective justification, the pronouncement of forgiveness for all men. To obviate this weakness of terminology, some have suggested that "objective justification" is merely a mistake for "objective reconciliation." Whether this is the answer to the problem of terminology seems to me to be doubtful. However, terms do not concern us at the moment, but the thing involved; and the thing to be substantiated is this, that to St. Paul justification and reconciliation are, to all intents and purposes, the same, and that faith, although it is also more than this, is, first and foremost, the trusting acceptance of an accomplished fact. Faith does not bring it about in any way, it receives it. Or, to put it in as strong a way as possible, justification does not follow faith, it precedes it.

That we must look at justification in this way is demanded by certain cardinal passages of St. Paul's letters, viz., Rom. 4:25; 5:9, 10; 5:17-19; 2 Cor. 5:14-21. Rom. 4:25 declares that Jesus "was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." *δικαίωσις* is the substantive corresponding to *δικαιοῦν*;

it is the act of justifying through the divine judgment of acquittal. The two parts of this statement are not to be separated, as though two distinct happenings are involved with two distinct facts connected with them. They are rather to be joined together as describing one great act of God for man's salvation. Transgression called for punishment, hence the deliverance (παρεδόθη) of Jesus into death and the cross; but the end of such deliverance into death for sin was that man should be pronounced not guilty, hence the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is the demonstration that all the claims of justice have been met. The resurrection was not merely a vindication of the claims and work of Christ, as in 1 Tim. 3:16: "justified in the Spirit" (ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι), it was also God's declaration of man's innocence before Him, τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν, our justification. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the justification of men. It makes not the slightest difference to this assertion that the first διὰ is causal, the second final. The assertion is most emphatically this, that justification is there already in the resurrection of Christ. The meaning certainly is not that Jesus was raised so that at certain future times, when various people have been given a new position through faith, God may justify them. Justification was there already when Christ arose. Justification is an objective fact of God's declaration, and the sign of it to men is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The firm, solid, unshakable objectivity of justification is shown also in the passage Rom. 5:9, 10. The absence of the concept of faith in almost the whole of the fifth chapter of Romans, apart from the first two verses, is most striking, and needs to be heeded more than is usually the case. Except for the recurring "we," the sentences from v. 6 on are entirely objective and external as far as man is concerned. In vv. 8 and 9 we have phrases closely connected with the text we have just considered. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (v. 8; cf. Rom. 4:25 a); "much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved . . ." (cf. Rom. 4:25 b). This is the objective situation because of the act of Christ. One cannot add anything to such a state of affairs by faith, one can only enter into it, and, of course, one can cancel it all for oneself by refusing to enter in stubborn unbelief. The next verse says the same thing as v. 9, except that the picture is now

that of reconciliation rather than that of justification. Christ's death has meant the changing of a state of enmity into one of peace between God and man. Notice again the lack of any reference to faith. The one material factor which has brought about the change in the divine-human situation is the death of Christ. For man there remains nothing but the acceptance or rejection of an accomplished fact. Paul rejoices and boasts in God because he has received the reconciliation, v. 11 (AV "atone-ment"). The next section, particularly vv. 17-19, with its extended comparison of Adam and Christ, simply underlines the objectivity of justification as an act finished and complete in the work of Christ. Without any knowledge, volition, or desire on their part, all men since Adam have been inexorably drawn into the realm of sin and death. Just so, says the apostle, through the one Man, Christ, there has come for the human race, apart from their own desires, will, and knowledge, God's kingdom of righteousness, justification, life. The whole comparison becomes meaningless when a human decision is brought into it as prerequisite for justification.¹

With respect to the final passage bearing on this point of objective justification, i. e., 2 Cor. 5:17-21, I shall quote in a free paraphrase some enlightening comments of F. K. Schumann.² God is the author and subject of reconciliation. Reconciliation is that which God does with the world. It results in that action which is the central thought of justification, i. e., the nonimputation of sin to the sinner by virtue of God's judgment. This reconciliation takes place objectively through Christ, but in such a way that it becomes actual where a man is reconciled. The act of God takes place as reconciliation and justification *in foro coeli* and *in foro cordis*. Reconciliation takes place through the word "Be reconciled to God," with which statement Paul links directly the boldest formulation of the teaching of justification, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (v. 21). Everything that is said here about reconciliation is simply identical with

¹ For a deep and powerful explanation of the apostle's Adam-Christ parallel see Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c. 1949), pp. 16—26 and 206—229.

² Friedrich Karl Schumann, "Versöhnung und Rechtfertigung," *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* (December 31, 1950), p. 371.

the fundamental ideas of justification. Justification takes place in that Christ became sin and we become God's righteousness. Reconciliation takes place in that God's righteousness gets through to the sinner. God's righteousness, accordingly, is in the center of reconciliation.

F. Buechsel, in his article on *καταλλάσσω* in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*,³ endeavors to uphold the position that the reconciliation of the world is not complete in the deed of Christ. The initial impact of the text is all against him. The past tenses in *καταλλάξαντος* and *ἦν καταλλάσσω* mark the reconciliation as already completed, while the double reference to the message of reconciliation, *τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς* (v. 18) and *τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς* (v. 19), simply underlines the fact that reconciliation is there and exists already. The arguments of Buechsel fail to convince.

He argues, first, that reconciliation includes the renewal of the human being.

καταλλάσσω signifies a change, a renewing of the condition between God and men, and therefore of men themselves. In 2 Cor. 5:18 reconciliation is introduced as the foundation for the most complete renewal that is possible for man. . . . The life of man in all its phases and content is renewed, not only his attitude or his legal relation to God.⁴

There is, however, no reason in the text for holding that v. 18 is subordinate to v. 17, or for holding that v. 17 somehow belongs to the *καταλλάξαντος* of v. 18. The statements of vv. 17 and 18, literally translated, run as follows: "If any man [is] in Christ, a new creation; old things have gone, behold [things] have become new. But [or, And — *δέ*] all things [are] from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ." Nothing of a formal nature, except the *δέ*, shows the relation between these sentences. The only inference possible from the progress of the sentences is that, in some way not expressed, the new creation of

³ Buechsel, *καταλλάσσω*, *TWNT*, I, 255—59.

⁴ "καταλλάσσω bedeutet eine Umwandlung, Erneuerung des Zustandes zwischen Gott und den Menschen, und damit der Menschen selbst. 2 Kor. 5,18 ist die Versöhnung eingeführt als Begründung für die umfassendste Erneuerung, die für den Menschen möglich ist. . . . Der Gesamtlebensbestand des Menschenlebens ist verändert, nicht nur seine Gesinnung oder sein rechtliches Verhältnis zu Gott."

v. 17 is related to, or possibly dependent on, the reconciliation brought about by God through Christ. It cannot mean that the new creation is part of the reconciliation. The text allows us to go no further in establishing a relation between the two things than the statement in *Das Neue Testament Deutsch* in a comment on this passage: "Wie Gott die neue Schöpfung wirkt, so ist auch die Versöhnung in Christus *seine* Tat."⁵

Buechsel declares, further, that reconciliation is not a completed thing and finds support for that contention in the ἦν καταλλάσσω:

"Our" reconciliation is complete. Paul speaks of it in the Aorist [i. e., καταλλάξαντος, in v. 18] . . . but he does not speak of the reconciliation of the world in that tense. ἦν καταλλάσσω in 2 Cor. 5:19 shows the reconciliation of the world to be not complete. . . . When and how this act reaches its conclusion is not the concern of 2 Cor. 5:19.⁶

This is passing strange. Surely ἦν καταλλάσσω, even if one grants the form to be a periphrastic imperfect (it is quite likely that the verb of the sentence is ἦν alone, with καταλλάσσω attached to the subject), is just as much past in idea as καταλλάξαντος. The difference is in the kind of action involved, not the actual time of the action. Vv. 18 and 19 are plainly very closely parallel. "God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ" is in line with "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself"; and "hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" with "hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation." This close parallel indicates that there is no intended contrast between "us" and "the world," as if in the one case reconciliation is complete, whereas in the second it is not. The only differences between the two parallel sentences are the transition to the descriptive continuous imperfect (granting that way of construing the ἦν καταλλάσσω for the moment) and the addition of the phrase "not imputing their trespasses unto them" in v. 19. If the change from ἡμᾶς to κόσμον

⁵ Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, in *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, p. 133.

⁶ "'Unsere' Versöhnung ist abgeschlossen, von ihr redet Paulus im Aorist [i. e., καταλλάξαντος, in V. 18] . . . von der Versöhnung der Welt aber nicht. ἦν καταλλάσσω 2 Kor. 5, 19 bezeichnet die Handlung der Versöhnung nicht als abgeschlossen . . . wann und wie diese Handlung dann ihren Abschluss erreicht, liegt 2 Kor. 5, 19 ausser Betracht."

is deliberate, then the meaning can only be: What God has done for us who believe He did for the world.

A third argument of Buechsel is even more incomprehensible than the last two. He argues from the phrase "the Word of reconciliation" that, since this service is not yet complete, it is wrong to think of reconciliation as a completed thing. The service of reconciliation, he says, "ist eben erst die Durchführung der Versöhnung." But the phrases "ministry of reconciliation" and "Word of reconciliation" cannot mean a service or message of something yet to be brought about, but the message or preaching of something that has already happened. That the actual service, ministry, work, is not yet complete has nothing to do with the completeness or otherwise of the content of that service or Word. That the service or Word of reconciliation is the mere proclamation to the world of a reconciliation that already exists is supported by vv. 20 f., where the apostle likens the messengers to ambassadors of Christ urging men to enter for themselves — καταλλάγητε (v. 20) — into the state of reconciliation that already exists.

Finally, Buechsel refers to Rom. 11:15, "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world" (εἰ γὰρ ἡ ἀποβολὴ αὐτῶν καταλλαγὴ κόσμου), and says that the reconciling of the world is just as little something finished as the casting away of the Jews; both began with the cross of Christ and still continue.⁷ This argument, too, is quite illegitimate. Paul is linking in a very special figurative way the reconciliation of the world and the rejection of the Jews (cf. also Rom. 11:11, 12), so that there is no real parallel at all between his use of καταλλαγὴ κόσμου here and the statements of 2 Cor. 5:18, 19. Hence the further step of arguing from the continuance of the ἀποβολή of the Jews is irrelevant.

In short, 2 Cor. 5:17-21 is an impregnable text, like Rom. 4:25; 5:9 f., 17 ff., for the objectivity of the act of justification. Christ's cross and the empty tomb are the justification of the world.

Now, it is true that when St. Paul speaks of justification, he usually brings that idea into connection with faith. Justification is διὰ πίστεως, ἐκ πίστεως. But these frequent phrases must not be

⁷ "Die καταλλαγὴ κόσμου Röm. 11, 15 ist sowenig etwas Abgeschlossenes wie die ἀποβολή der Juden; beides hat im Kreuz Christi begonnen und dauert noch an."

used to deny the fact that St. Paul also knows of a justification which happened when Christ died and rose again. Schrenk⁸ rightly declares that one dare not attack the view that δικαιωθῆναι (justification) means "den im Kreuze vollzogenen universalen Heilsakt" ("the universal act of salvation carried out on the cross"). St. Paul says both things: we were justified when Christ died and rose again; we are justified when we believe. This is also asserted by Schrenk: "Ein für allemal im Kreuze gerechtfertigt sein und persönlich im Glauben gerechtfertigt sein, das ist nicht zu scheiden." ("To be justified once and for all in the cross and to be personally justified in faith — these two things are not to be separated.")⁹

We may put this in another way. Nothing new happens when a person believes the Word of reconciliation, except in his own person. God does not pronounce a new judgment of forgiveness or justification. God is not continually in His court of law pronouncing new verdicts on new converts, nor repeatedly pronouncing the same verdict over against believers who have lost faith and have been restored again. There is only one verdict of justification, that contained in the resurrection of Christ, the verdict which every believing sinner makes his own as a verdict that concerns him personally when he hears and believes the message of reconciliation. The personal experience of Christians is in keeping with this. The believer who wishes to be assured of his justification and state of grace does not go back in thought or in faith to some moment in his life when a sentence of justification was pronounced for him by God, to some moment when he had a particularly precious experience of the pardoning grace of God. Of course not. He goes back again and again to the crucifixion and resurrection of his Savior, and there, at the cross and the empty tomb, he finds the certainty that he has been forgiven and that he is a child of God. One may, indeed, as admitted earlier, find fault with the terminology of "objective justification," but the thing itself is the common possession of every believer, the only source of his comfort and the one thing in which he finds support over against sin and a bad conscience.

⁸ G. Schrenk, δικαιώω, *TWNT*, II, 220.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Justification as the act of God in forgiving the world its sins through the death and the resurrection of Christ—and this is the object of faith—is a most important factor in determining what faith means. It simply demands the definition of faith in the matter of justification as *medium ληπτικόν*, the definition that faith is, above all, reception of a divine gift. To quote Pieper: "The objective reconciliation of all men to God through the work of Christ *compels* the proper understanding of the *Gospel* and of *faith*. The Gospel *can* be nothing else but the message and offer of the forgiveness of sins won by Christ, and faith *can* be nothing else but the mere acceptance of the forgiveness of sins won by Christ."¹⁰

The conclusion concerning the meaning of faith in St. Paul reached through consideration of its object is borne out by other facts concerning Paul's use of πίστις.

FAITH AS OBEDIENCE AND THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

In his section on faith in the chapters dealing with Paul's theology Bultmann declares that "Paul understands faith primarily as obedience." Since the evidence for this is neatly gathered together there, I shall simply quote Bultmann *in extenso*:

Paul understands the act of faith as an act of obedience. This is shown by the parallelism of two passages in Romans: "because your faith is proclaimed in all the world" (1:8) and "for your obedience is known to all men" (16:19). Thus he can combine the two in the expression ὑπακοή πίστεως ("the obedience which faith is," Rom. 1:5) to designate that which it is the purpose of his apostleship to bring about.

Cf. further, 1 Thess. 1:8: "your faith in God has gone forth everywhere" and Rom. 15:18: "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles." Further, he says of Jews who have not come to faith, Rom. 10:3: "they did not submit to (obey,

¹⁰ "Die objektive, durch Christum bewirkte Versöhnung aller Menschen mit Gott *erzwingt* die richtige Auffassung des *Evangeliums* und des *Glaubens*. Das Evangelium *kann* nun nichts anderes sein als die Verkündigung und Darbietung der von Christo erworbenen Vergebung der Sünden, und der seligmachende Glaube *kann* nun nichts anderes sein als die blosse *Hinnahme* der von Christo erworbenen Vergebung der Sünden." Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917), II, 414.

οὐχ ὑπετάγησαν) God's righteousness," and 10:16: "they have not all heeded (obeyed, ὑπήκουσαν) the Gospel." Correspondingly, the Jews' refusal of faith is denoted by "disobey" and "disobedience" in Rom. 11:30-32; cf. 15:31; Gal. 5:7. 2 Cor. 9:13 describes faith as "obedience in acknowledging the Gospel of Christ." Paul considers it his task, according to 2 Cor. 10:5 f., to "take every thought captive to obey Christ," and warns the unruly Corinthians that he "will punish every disobedience when your *obedience* is complete" (for obedience rendered to the apostle is identical with obedience to Christ). But he substitutes the word "faith" where we might expect to read "obedience" when he expresses the hope that he will become greater through them when their *faith* is increased (see 2 Cor. 10:15).¹¹

In examining this assertion of Bultmann we may operate with the short expression ὑπακοή πίστεως, since it is the compressed expression for Paul's interchange of faith and obedience. Although it is grammatically possible to take πίστεως as genitive of the object, which would yield the translation "obedience to the faith," still the evidence from Paul generally makes it pretty certain that that phrase should, indeed, be understood as "the obedience which faith is," πίστεως being an appositional genitive (cf. Bengel's translation: *obedientiam in ipsa fide consistentem*, the obedience which consists of faith itself). To Paul faith is obedience. Does he mean, then, after all, what the scholars with whose views we have to do understand by faith?

The answer to the foregoing question is to be found in the LXX. ὑπακοή is the frequent LXX translation for the Hebrew שָׁמַע. ὑπακούω is primarily a hearing, like the shorter ἀκούω. See the whole article on ἀκούω and ὑπακούω in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, and, in particular, the following quotations:

ὑπακοή is not in the first instance a statement about an ethical attitude, but one about the religious action from which such attitude proceeds of necessity.¹²

¹¹ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1952), pp. 314 f.

¹² "ὑπακοή is nicht in erster Linie Aussage über ein sittliches Verhalten, sondern über den religiösen Akt, aus dem jenes sich mit Selbstverständlichkeit ergibt." Gerhard Kittel, ἀκούω, *TWNT*, I, 225.

The character of the hearing is determined in the very nature of things by the content of the message. . . . Since in the NT this is always the offer of salvation and moral demand in one, hearing is acceptance of grace and of the call to repentance. That is to say: the characteristics of that true hearing as opposed to mere physical hearing are faith (Mt. 8:10; 9:2; 17:20 and *passim*) and doing (Mt. 7:16, 24, 26; Rom. 2:13 and *passim*). We shall not treat here of the relation of these two things. But this should be plain, that the hearing of the NT as reception of the announced divine will is in essence the affirming of this will (this will which calls to repentance and gives salvation) by the believing and acting human being. So we have the concept ὑπακοή πίστεως, obedience as perfect hearing, the obedience that consists in faith, the faith that consists in obedience.¹³

Faith is obedience, that is, appropriate hearing, the hearing appropriate to the message proclaimed by God. The hearing appropriate to the message of the reconciliation and justification once for all set forth before the world in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is glad and joyful reception, thankful acceptance of God's Word of forgiveness. It is the one response appropriate to the situation. Being such, it is really no exaggeration when Denney declares: "Faith is the whole of Christianity subjectively or experimentally, just as Christ is the whole of it objectively or historically, and it is as impossible to supplement the one as the other."¹⁴

πίστις is indeed ὑπακοή. This may be called Paul's definition of faith, and it is a definition which is completely consonant with that

¹³ "Die inhaltliche Bestimmung des Hörens ergibt sich, *wie das in der Natur der Sache liegt, aus dem Inhalt der Botschaft* [my italics]. . . . Da diese für das NT immer Darbietung des Heils und sittliche Forderung in Einem ist, ist das Hören Aufnehmen der Gnade und Aufnehmen des Bussrufes. Das bedeutet: Merkmal jenes wirklichen Hörens gegenüber dem bloss physischen Hören sind allein: der Glaube (Mt. 8, 10; 9, 2; 17, 20 uo) und das Tun (Mt. 7, 16. 24. 26; Röm. 2, 13 uo). Über das Wechselverhältnis beider ist an dieser Stelle nicht zu handeln. Aber dies muss deutlich sein, dass ntliches Hören als Vernehmen des kundgegebenen göttlichen Willens sein Wesen immer gewinnt an der Bejahung dieses Willens als des Heils- und Busswillens durch den glaubenden und handelnden Menschen. So entsteht als der das Hören krönende Begriff des Gehorchens, das in Glauben, und des Glaubens, das in Gehorchen besteht — ὑπακοή πίστεως." Ibid., pp. 220 f.

¹⁴ J. Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), p. 166.

view of faith which we have gained from other aspects of Paul's teaching.¹⁵

Even what St. Paul has to say about the faith of Abraham cannot be used as support for the view that faith is the basis for justification. In Romans 4 the apostle comes closest to saying things about faith which might be construed as giving an inherent value to faith, a value which might possibly be regarded as a true righteousness. Thus in vv. 20 ff. the apostle draws attention to a certain aspect of Abraham's faith: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness" (cf. also vv. 17 and 18). Yet nothing is made of this attitude of profound trust and obedience. There is not a hint that this attitude of heart was a true righteousness which could justify on the part of God a verdict of acquittal. The decisive factor which made Abraham the father of many nations was the promise he believed (v. 17a), not the faith by which he believed. As generally in St. Paul, so in Romans 4, too, faith is linked with

¹⁵ Paul's definition of faith as obedience, appropriate hearing, at the same time shows another modern view of faith to be mistaken. In an endeavor to avoid a merely subjective view of faith some theologians have fallen victim to a view of faith by which faith almost ceases to be a human activity at all. The reader is referred to the following sources: Schumann, op. cit., p. 374; Rudolf Staehlin, "Der Weg der Taufe," *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* (April 1954), p. 116; Kurt Schmidt-Clausen, "'Glaube und Werke' als Problem der neueren schwedischen Theologie," *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* (March 1, 1954), p. 70; and Nygren's *Commentary on Romans*, from which I quote the following extract: "For him (Paul) faith is not a subjective quality which must be present in man if the gospel is to be able to show its power. It is truer to say that one's faith is evidence that the gospel *has* exercised its power on him. It is not man's faith that gives the gospel its power; quite the contrary, it is the power of the gospel that makes it possible for one to believe. Faith is only another word for the fact that one belongs to Christ and through Him participates in the new age. Paul looks at faith in a much longer perspective than we usually do, a perspective resting on his view of the two ages.

"But salvation means that Christ, by the power of God, delivers us from the bondage of the old aeon and brings us into the new aeon. This is what occurs through the gospel. And thus to be removed from the realm of darkness and received into the kingdom of Christ is precisely what faith is" (pp. 71 f.). Where is *ὑπακοή πίστεως* if faith is merely the passive sentence of: God delivers man from the bondage of the old aeon and brings us into the new aeon? See for details and critical discussion the writer's monograph, *Justification by Faith in Modern Theology* (St. Louis: School for Graduate Studies, Concordia Seminary, 1957), pp. 67 f.

promise and grace and is sharply contrasted with works. Abraham, too, was not justified by works; he, too, had nothing to boast about (v. 2), where the οὐ πρὸς θεόν negates both the conditional clause and the main clause of the preceding sentence.

These statements should be sufficient to point the way to a right understanding of the quotation of v. 3 as St. Paul makes use of it: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." This sentence could on the face of it give rise to the thought of merit, especially in v. 22, but Paul's use of the verb λογίζεσθαι through to v. 9 makes that thought impossible. Paul uses λογίζεσθαι in almost all the senses that it has in classical Greek: "to reckon," as a merchant does in his business; "to think unemotionally," like the philosopher, as well as in the sense the word has in the LXX, where it is the regular equivalent for חָשַׁב, and where, accordingly, subjective, emotional, volitional elements are added to λογίζεσθαι as an act of thinking. It enters the religious sphere, as for instance in Jeremiah, where it is used of the counsel of God to bring punishment against the disobedient and rebellious people. The writer in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, the source of the material in the last sentences, declares with respect to Gen. 15:6 that faith is accounted for righteousness because that is the will of Jahweh, not because faith possesses this worth in itself. The rabbis through devious ways got the meaning out of the quotation that faith was entered to man's account as righteousness because it actually possessed this value.¹⁶ Paul, however, breaks with this interpretation in vv. 4 f. The two statements of these verses are general and particular respectively. In the general statement λογίζεσθαι keeps its business sense, its Greek and rabbinic sense. In the second, where there is no work to be counted, but only faith which brings nothing, for its object is God who justifies the ungodly, λογίζεσθαι has its Old Testament meaning: God thinks, reckons in such and such a way because it is His will, He decides. With this view of the text, the contrast in the phrase, "not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (οὐ λογίζεται κατὰ χάριν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ὀφείλημα), is given its due. The reckoning of v. 4, since what is involved is a business operation, is indeed κατὰ ὀφείλημα; the reckoning of v. 5, a free action of God's will, is described as κατὰ

¹⁶ Hans Wolfgang Heidland, "λογίζομαι, λογισμός," *TWNT*, IV, 292.

χάριν. This interpretation of λογίζεσθαι in the quotation from Gen. 15:6 is supported by the use of the same word in the quotation from Psalm 32. Paul's statement is that David speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputes, reckons righteousness without works, and then he quotes from the psalm: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (v. 8). The counting of faith for righteousness is equivalent to not counting or to forgiving sin. As the second action is complete grace and takes place apart from merit, so is the first. Accordingly, counting faith for righteousness is not a phrase which hints at an inherent value in faith. It is not in any way righteousness in itself. In his description of Abraham's faith, too, Paul looks on faith not as giving but as receiving.

IMPUTATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AN ETHICAL FICTION?

But the question will be put: If justification is merely God's verdict of forgiveness pronounced on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection, and if faith is merely acceptance of this message, does not all talk of righteousness become an ethical fiction? This is an objection continually to be met with in those writers who are critical of the traditional Lutheran position.¹⁷

This objection is one which does not strictly belong to our inquiry. The inquiry has been: What does St. Paul teach concerning justification? Does he teach that justification is approximately equivalent to regeneration? If the investigation leads to the result we have reached, and if someone sees in that resultant teaching an ethical fiction, then his quarrel is with St. Paul. He must state frankly that St. Paul's teaching involves an ethical fiction. He has no right, however, because he senses an ethical fiction, so to read the Pauline statements that the ethical fiction is removed. In other words, it is no objection to the picture of Pauline teaching which has emerged in this study to state that

¹⁷ Cf. Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, pp. 68 and 238; Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, p. 171; James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, pp. 255 ff. E. Goodspeed is particularly caustic in his statements. He writes: "If he (Prof. Metzger) means that God declares men upright, when they are not so, and God knows it, he is left with a theological problem I should hate to shoulder, in his conception of the moral nature of God." "Some Greek Notes," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (June 1954).

it involves an ethical fiction. We must take the apostle's teaching as it stands, ethical fiction or no ethical fiction.

If St. Paul were confronted with the objection that his teaching involved an ethical fiction, he would stoutly deny that the objection had any validity whatever. He has actually done so in Romans 3, where he says that God in setting forth His Son as Mercy Seat (ἱλαστήριον) has shown forth His righteousness, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον. In this whole transaction for man's salvation God has remained righteous, true to Himself and His eternal rightness, holiness, and love. St. Paul, it is true, never argues the matter, and the statement just referred to is, I believe, the only passage that has any bearing on it. Let us, however, take up the question briefly.

Does the teaching of St. Paul involve an ethical fiction? If we take one Pauline equivalent for justification, the forgiveness of sins, and make that the basis of our argument, we shall see that there is no ethical fiction involved. There is nothing ethically wrong about forgiveness itself, whether the person forgiven deserves forgiveness or not. Nor is there anything ethically wrong when a parent, for example, restores the proper relation between his child and himself by punishment as well as forgiveness. In the justification of the sinner we have these elements. God forgives men by His grace and as a free act of His loving will. He does not and cannot, however, forgive in accordance with the flippant bon mot of Heine: *Dieu pardonnera, c'est son métier*. His righteous reaction to sin is seen in the condemnation of His Son on the cross. It is in this action, if anywhere — not in the act of justification — that one might speak of ethical fiction, or, better, an immoral action. But no one has proved yet that it is immoral to punish the innocent for the guilty if the innocent one acts in complete freedom and willingness as another's substitute, which is just the way Christ acted. The preaching of the Gospel of reconciliation and the call, "Be ye reconciled to God"; the demand that the gracious Word of God be heard; in short, the call for faith, defends Paul's teaching against the imputation that salvation is automatic, a compulsory bringing of sinful men into the kingdom of God. That faith, besides being a receiving of the gracious gift of God, is at the same time the indication that a man has been

truly converted, regenerated, so that faith becomes the principle of a new life in Christ, merely reinforces the fact that salvation is not a physical, but an ethical process. It is not necessary at all to make faith the cause for man's justification in order to defend the teaching of Paul against the attack that it is based on an ethical fiction.

The view that justification is finally regeneration is itself open to a far more serious objection than the one of teaching an ethical fiction which its defenders fasten on those who hold a justification wholly without human contribution. This objection is that such a view of justification leaves the oppressed and despairing sinner without true comfort. Our hypothetical sinner, like David or the gaoler at Philippi, looks to one of the men we have opposed, a Dodd or a Taylor or a Stewart, for the assurance that he is right with God, that God turns to him a heart of love, that God justifies him. And the answer he gets is only that God will truly forgive him when he turns to Christ, who has revealed God to be a God of grace and forgiveness. He cannot say to the sinner directly, "Thy sins be forgiven thee!" He cannot say to him: "God has already, long ago, forgiven you in Christ's death on the cross; as surely as God raised Him from the dead, just so surely your sins are counted against you no more." He can say indeed: "God does not care where you are, what you are, how sinful you have been and are, as long as you turn to Him. It is by direction, not position, that God judges." But what if the sinner sees nothing but his own unworthiness, cannot see that he is now faced in a new direction, sees nothing but his own sin and the rebuke of the Lord? Only one message can help him in that situation, which is that, apart from all works, position, direction, any change in him whatever, God forgives, justifies. To hold that the change in man is the necessary prerequisite for God's justification is to place in jeopardy the sinner's assurance of salvation, and, in the case of the self-righteous, it will give nourishment to their self-righteousness; for faith as a human decision over against the grace of God, faith as regeneration, is, as the champions of that view declare, a true righteousness, and as such something for the self-righteous heart to boast in.

At this point we are back at the fundamental concerns of the Lutheran Confessions. It is just the teaching of justification as expounded by the Lutheran Confessions which preserves intact, without diminution, the grace of God and which gives pure, unalloyed comfort to grieving and terrified sinners.

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EDITORIAL NOTE. — We call attention again to the full dissertation of the author of this article, obtainable at the price of \$2.00 by addressing the Director of Graduate Studies, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

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