

## 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