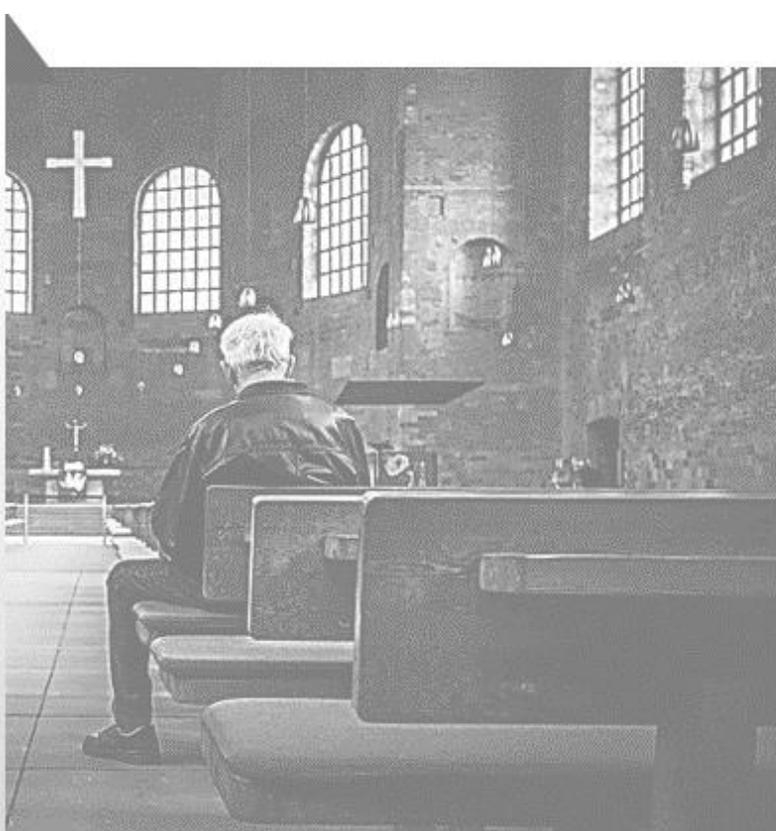




St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
www.anchoredminot.com



The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Chapter 5 Verses 18-21

Too often, people and churches dismiss doctrine and what is seen as the small trivial things of scripture. However, there is no such thing as having a neutral theology. There is no such thing as a non-denominational church. Those who claim to be non-denominational or neutral on doctrine are naïve at best. Therefore, we must pay particular attention to what Paul is saying in verses 18-21. If not careful, we can easily slide into ditch of what is called 'limited atonement,' or we can easily slide into the ditch of what is called "universalism." We Lutherans are not Calvinists. We are not Universalists like many ELCA Lutherans are.

So, what is going on in Romans 5 that is so important to understand?

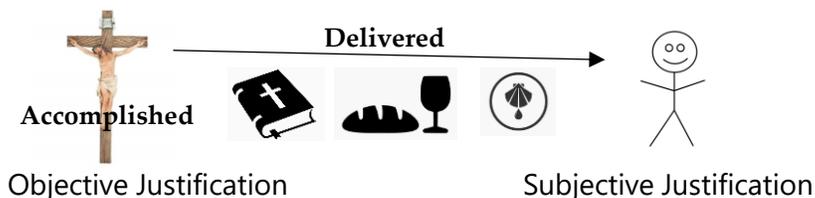
First, the Apostle Paul is establishing the doctrine of original sin. He states, "*For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners...*" In other words, he is showing that all of human kind is sin-sick due to the sin of Adam – the original sin. In our Lutheran Augsburg Confession, we stated, "*All human*

beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth, they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God." So, objectively and universally, all of mankind is sin-sick. We are conceived into this world as sinners. Our sins don't make us sinners; we sin because we already are sinners.

Secondly, in 5:19, Paul states, "*so by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous.*" In other words, because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, all of creation has been reconciled. The work of Christ on the cross objectively reconciles everyone! The work is universal, just as the original sin of Adam is universal.

Thirdly, Paul is very careful in these verses to make note that every individual must subjectively receive this accomplished universal work of Christ 'by faith.' Salvation was universally accomplished in 32 A.D. Now, it must be subjectively delivered to mankind through the Word and Sacraments. Objectively Accomplished → Subjectively Delivered.

With that said, we must return to the pitfalls that are in the church these days. Consider last week's drawing.



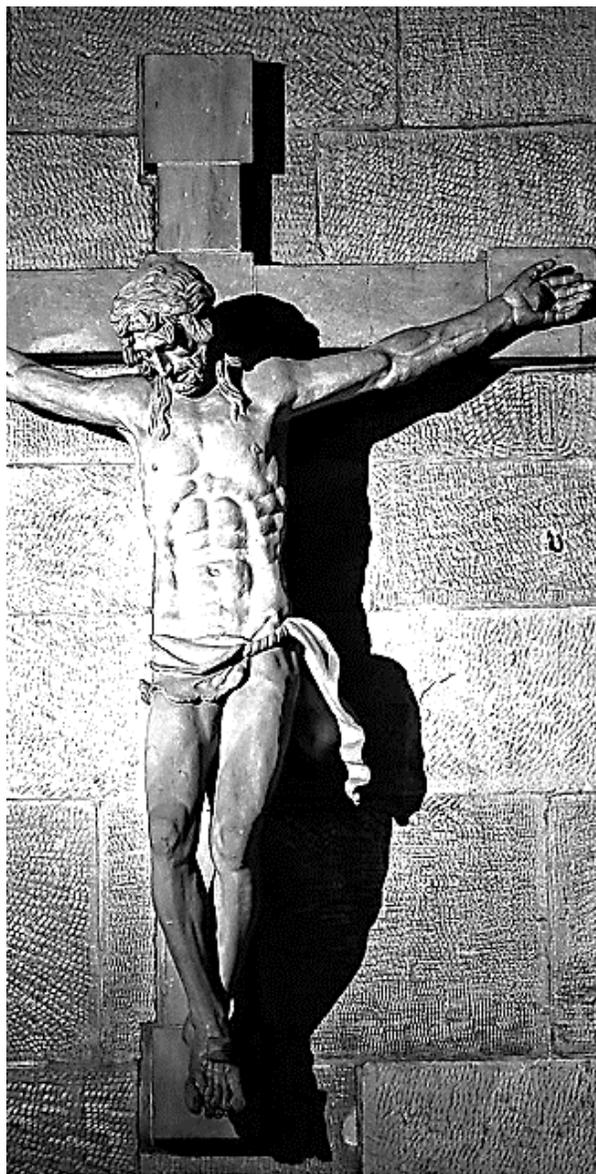
Now, to affirm the objective justification of Jesus is right. However, if we deny the need of subjectively receiving the benefits of Mt. Calvary via the Word and Sacrament, we become Universalists. Universalists say, "Christ died for all; all are saved." This is correct. However, what is missing? What is missing is subjective justification. Universalists do not emphasize that it must be received by faith. This denial of subjective justification not only leads to the belief that hell will be empty but also negates the need for the local church as the dispenser of God's gifts. Why go to church if one is universally justified? Why care at all if Jesus justifies everyone?

The other pitfall is that we can deny the objective and universal justification of Jesus – which is wrong as well. In other words, some Reformed Baptists and Reformed Presbyterians react to Universalists and hold to the idea that Jesus did not die for everyone, but died just for the elect. In other words, they affirm that Justification must be subjectively received by faith; however, they then say that those who have received by faith are the 'only ones' that Jesus died for on the cross. The atonement of the cross is 'limited' to the 'elect.' Christ did not die for the whole world but just for the limited elect.

To the point, Universalists uphold objective justification but deny subjective justification. Some Reformed Christians uphold subjective justification but limit objective justification. Both are opposite errors. But we Biblical Lutherans uphold the divine tension that Paul lays forth that all are objectively reconciled but the gifts must be subjectively appropriated through faith.

Reflecting Questions:

- 1) If one hold to universalism, is there any need to go to church? Is the church even needed?
- 2) Does universalism lead to a denial of hell?
- 3) How does limited atonement impact evangelism and the proclamation of the good news of Christ?
- 4) Can limited atonement lead to a lack of assurance?
- 5) How does the tension between objective justification and subjective justification lead to faithful proclamation?



Time permitting:

In verses 20-21, Paul shows that the Law was given to 'increase sin.' In other words, the giving of the Law made sin increase because it marked lawless living as 'sin.' The Law makes sin known. No wonder why we don't like the Law. If we can do away with the Law, we don't have to call sin – sin.

This is the main function of the Law – to reveal sin. The Law acts like a mirror. It shows back to us our flaws, failures, and the ways we have violated God's will. Therefore, robust Law uncovers hidden sin. The Law increases our awareness of our sin.

But thanks be to God that where sin increases, grace abounds more. There is more grace in Christ than there is sin in us. God be praised.

