

At Once And Forever

Why Justification Is Final With No Future Aspect

Steve Fernandez

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Why Is “Justification Final and Complete, So That There Is No Future Justification?”

Perhaps the most striking example of free justification found in the New Testament is the account of a Pharisee and a tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. The account reads,

(9) And He also told this parable to some of the people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: (10) “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. (11) The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (12) I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ (13) But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ (14) I tell you this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke tells us that the tax collector, “standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast” when he cried out, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” Christ at once says of the tax collector in verse 14, “I tell you, this man went to his house justified.” Christ could not have stunned His hearers more when He declared that the tax collector (and not the Pharisee), from the very moment of his cry of repentant faith, was at once and forever justified. Christ simply announced, “this man went to his house justified.”

The great and glorious truth of the gospel is that the tax collector’s justification was at once complete and final. In other words—as we saw in the previous chapters—through the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness alone, based upon the atoning blood and obedience of Christ alone, there need not be, nor is there in fact, any other righteousness required for final justification.¹

Christ’s teaching is in complete harmony with Paul’s in Romans and Galatians. For in laying the groundwork for Paul, Christ makes no reference to any need for a supplemental righteousness to be done by the tax collector. In fact, if any personal righteousness—even a righteousness done by the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit—is a necessary means or condition of final salvation or justification, the perfect righteousness of Christ is undermined and diminished. To put it bluntly, Christ’s atoning righteousness is not sufficient to justify a sinner! More than this, man becomes a partial cause of his justification, boasting is not entirely excluded, and God does not receive all the glory!

The truth of a complete and final justification is under attack today. Instead of a complete over-and-done-with justification, a two-stage justification has been put in its place. The two-stage justification doctrine teaches that believers are justified now at the present time, but they also must wait for a final justification to be declared at the last day; a justification that is contingent and conditioned on their perseverance in faith and godliness to the end.²

I believe a future or second justification doctrine is in direct conflict with the gospel of grace. It, in effect, empties present justification of any significance so that in reality there is none at all.

¹ This does not mean that righteousness and works of obedience are not a non-negotiable requirement for the justified (1 John 2:4-11, 3:4-10). Righteousness and good works are a required accompaniment and evidence of a justified state. However, they are never a condition, means, or cause of justification. This order is being denied by some who insist that the believer’s works will be evaluated in order to be justified in the last day.

² N.T. Wright is very direct about a two-phase justification. He asserts, “Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publically...on the basis of the entire life.” Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 129. Elsewhere he writes, “The whole point about ‘justification by faith’ is that it is something which happens in the present time (Rom 3:26) as a proper anticipation of the eventual judgment which will be announced, on the basis of the whole life led, in the future (Rom 2:1-16).” N.T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 57. Wright does not hesitate to state that final justification is based upon the “the entire life” and “the whole life led,” a clear affirmation of justification conditioned on works.

This can be illustrated very simply: When a defendant in a criminal trial is acquitted, the acquittal is complete and final. The defendant is forever freed from the charges against him, so that there is no longer any liability to punishment. There is not a future evaluation of the person to determine if he will be finally and forever acquitted. It would be viewed as a travesty of justice. The acquittal would, in fact, be no acquittal at all—and any thinking person would know it! It is the same with justification. Justification, being a verdict and declaration, has either been declared once-for-all or it has not.

It needs to be pointed out that the two-phase justification doctrine is not new. It has long been at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on justification. In fact, it was at the center of the Reformation controversy with Rome. John Owen was well aware of the controversy over a double or second justification and spoke clearly of its danger. He writes,

I say, therefore, that the evangelical justification, which alone we plead about, is but one, and it is at once completed. About any other justification before God but one, we will not contend with any ... Those of the Roman Church do ground their whole doctrine of justification upon a distinction of a double justification; which they call the first and the second ... This distinction was coined unto no other end but to bring in confusion into the whole doctrine of the gospel. Justification through the free grace of God, by faith in the blood of Christ, is evacuated by it. Sanctification is turned into justification, and corrupted by making the fruits of it meritorious. The whole nature of evangelical justification, consisting in the gratuitous pardon of sin and the imputation of righteousness, as the apostle expressly affirms, and the declaration of a believing sinner to be righteous thereon, as the word alone signifies, is utterly defeated by it.

I believe Owen is right. The doctrine of a future or last-day justification, conditioned on the evaluation of the believer's works, undoes the gospel. The gospel of grace is utterly defeated by it. Therefore, in this chapter, my aim is to present the biblical case for a completed once-for-all justification: a justification which has no future aspect.⁴ To do so, I will attempt to demonstrate the reality of one central biblical truth.

This is the parallel made by Paul in Romans 5:12-19, between the final and complete condemnation of all men by the one act of Adam, and the final and complete justification of all who are in Christ by the one act of Christ. Paul's whole point is that as the condemnation of all in Adam is certain and complete, with no future aspect, so also the justification of all who are in Christ is certain and complete, with no future aspect.

The Comparison between Adam and Christ Demonstrates a Completed Over-And-Done-With Justification with No Future Aspect

³ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 5 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), pp. 137-138.

⁴ There are a few Scriptures that some understand to teach a future declaration of justification. Others understand them to teach only a manifestation, or perhaps a vindication of justification. In either case, they are unclear and tentative (those usually cited are Romans 2:13, 5:19; Galatians 5:5; 2 Timothy 4:8). Richard Gaffin, for example, acknowledges that "explicit references in Paul to a still-future justification for believers, if present at all, are minimal." Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, Not By Sight* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), p. 80-81. He also states that there will be a future manifestation of justification, but not a declaration. He writes, "the final judgment will be the open manifestation of that present justification, their being 'openly acquitted' as we have seen. And in that future judgment their obedience, their works, are not the ground or basis. Nor are they (co-) instrumental, a coordinate instrument for appropriating divine approbation as they supplement faith. Rather, they are the essential and manifest criterion of that faith, the integral 'fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.'" p. 98. In response to this, it can be pointed out that a manifestation of justification is not, in a technical sense, actually justification. Justification is the declaration or verdict of a right standing, not a manifestation or even a vindication that someone is already justified. So, when all is said and done, there is in reality no actual future justification. Jesus Himself, declares that the believer no longer comes into judgment. He says, "Truly, truly I say unto you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). Why not drop the language of a last-day justification—it only confuses and muddles? In addition, there is much confusion and lack of clarity in the concept of "vindication." To some it seems to refer to a manifestation of those already justified. To others it is used to refer to a declaration of justification in the last day, as a reward for a life of obedience or covenant faithfulness, which is a justification conditioned on works. The lack of clarity in such a vital issue is inexcusable.

In this chapter we will look at just one of these biblical truths—Paul’s comparison between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-19. In this text, Paul has not yet left his great theme of justification which he began in 3:21.⁵ While the passage prepares for what follows in chapters 6-8, the connective “therefore” in verse 12 leaves no doubt that the passage is connected to what precedes. The entire passage reads,

(12) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all have sinned—(13) for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (15) But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. (16) The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from the one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification. (17) For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (18) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. (19) For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

With the “therefore” in verse 12, Paul continues the theme of verses 1-11 on the finality and certainty of justification. One example, which demonstrates that this is his theme, is verse 9, it says, “having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.” Notice, that since we already stand completely justified before God, it is certain that ‘we shall be saved from the wrath [future judgment] of God.’

Other examples (verses 2, 10, 11) could be given as well, which seem to make it evident that the “therefore,” points to yet another reason why we can have a full confidence in a certain, over-and-done-with justification.⁶ Douglas Moo explains the connection this way,

The main connection is with the teaching of assurance of final salvation in the immediately preceding paragraph (vv. 2b, 9-10). The passage shows why those who have been justified and reconciled can be so certain that they will be saved from wrath and share in the glory of God: it is because Christ’s act of obedience ensures eternal life for all who are “in Christ.”⁷

The following references in the passage give further support as well, that Paul is still dealing with justification:

The judgment arose from one transgression **resulting in condemnation** [the opposite sentence of justification, as in Romans 8:33-34], v. 16b

The free gift arose from many transgressions **resulting in justification**, v. 16c

⁵ John Murray says succinctly, “We must not forget that Paul is still with his grand theme, justification by faith...the apostle is now demonstrating that the divine method of justifying the ungodly proceeds from and is necessitated by the principles in terms of which God governs the human race.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), pp. 179-180.

⁶ Owen says “therefore” begins a passage which is “a farther progress, as unto that whereon our glorying in God...does depend. And this is the imputation of the righteousness and obedience of Christ unto the justification of life, or the reign of grace through righteousness unto eternal life.” Owen, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 322.

⁷ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 316.

The **gift of righteousness** will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ [righteousness is what is pleaded for as the ground of justification, it is a basic word in the justification word group], v. 17b

So then as through one transgression there resulted **condemnation** to all men [once again the opposite sentence or verdict to justification], v. 18a

Even so **through one act of righteousness there resulted justification** of life to all men, v. 18b

Even so through the obedience of the One the many will **be made righteous** [more accurately; established or constituted righteous—once again justification language], v. 19b

The General Comparison between Condemnation in Adam and Justification in Christ

From the preceding context (verses 1-11) and the repeated references to justification in the passage itself, it seems conclusive that Paul's design in verses 12-19 is to give a final reason for the certainty and finality of a completed justification. But, how does he do it? He does it by a parallel and comparison between Adam and Christ. Verse 12 says,

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Paul's use of 'just as' makes it clear he is entering into a comparison between Adam and Christ. He does not complete the comparison until verses 18 and 19. Verses 13 and 14 are a digression to clarify verse 12, and verses 15, 16 and 17 are a comparison built on a contrast. Verses 18 and 19 are where Paul finally sets forth the full and explicit comparison between Adam and Christ.

That Paul is setting forth a comparison is also evident by his constant use of comparative language. In verse 12 he says, "just as;" in verses 15 and 16, he says "not like;" in verses 18 and 19 he says, "as through ... even so." However, it is in verse 14 that Paul expressly states that he is, in fact, making a comparison between Adam and Christ when he writes, "Adam who is a type of Him that was to come."

His reference to Adam being a type of Christ makes it clear that Paul's design in the passage is to show the parallel that exists between condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ. This parallel is Paul's grand climatic unanswerable proof of a free and final justification.

The Immediate, Once-For-All, Final Condemnation Of All In Adam, Parallels The Immediate, Once-For-All Final Justification Of All In Christ

But, exactly, what is this comparison? It is an explicit comparison between the certain, final, and over-and-done-with condemnation of all in Adam, and the certain, final, and over-and-done-with justification of all who are in Christ. Verses 18 and 19 are key. They read,

(18) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men, (19) For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

First, there is Adam's sin, of which Paul writes in verse 18a, "as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men." Then he brings in the comparison to Christ in verse 18b, "even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." Paul's point is simple: The one act of Adam's transgression, or disobedience (verse 19a), and its resulting final condemnation of all men, is compared to the one act of Christ's righteousness, or obedience (verse

19b), and its resulting final justification of all who are His.

Paul's sustained emphasis all the way through the passage (verses 15-19) is this: as all men received a complete and final condemnation in Adam, so also by parallel, all men who are in Christ, have already received a complete and final justification. Further-more, it is stressed that as there is not a future stage necessary to complete man's condemnation, so also by parallel, neither is there a future stage necessary to complete the justification of those in Christ.

A two-stage justification doctrine completely collapses Paul's comparison and undoes the thrust of the entire passage. It stands in direct conflict with Paul's grand final argument of free justification—by the comparison of Christ with Adam—that a believing sinner, by the one righteous act of Christ alone, is at once completely and forever justified.

The Particulars of the Comparison between Condemnation in Adam and Justification in Christ

The question remains. Specifically how is it with Adam and all men? That is, what are the particulars of the relationship that exist between Adam's one act of sin and condemnation, that parallels the particulars of the relationship that exist between Christ's one act of righteousness and justification? A closer look at the text indicates that at least three specific parallels exist in the comparison between Adam and Christ.

First, Condemnation By The Imputation Of Adam's One Act Of Sin Is Compared To Justification By The Imputation Of Christ's One Act Of Righteousness

The foundation of all Paul says is verse 12. We will quote it again,

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Paul says, "through one man sin entered the world ... and so death spread to all men because all sinned." This is his opening assertion that by Adam's one act of sin alone, death and condemnation came to all men. Paul states this truth over and over through verse 19. It is:

- v. 14 the offense of Adam
- v. 15 by the transgression of the one the many died
- v. 16 judgment arose from one transgression
 resulting in condemnation
- v. 17 by the transgression of the one, death reigned
 through the one
- v. 18 through one transgression there resulted
 condemnation to all men
- v. 19 through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners

Adam's one sin brought immediate condemnation to all men. But how? By the imputation of the guilt of his sin to all men. Verse 13 says, "Sin is not imputed when there is no law." By this statement Paul indicates clearly that he is still thinking in terms of imputation—as in chapter 4—when he speaks of Adam's sin and the condemnation of all men, and Christ's righteousness and the justification of all who are His.

Therefore, although he uses the word ‘impute’ only once,⁸ in verse 13, conceptionally it is his sustained emphasis throughout the passage.⁹ This is to bring home one point: as Adam’s one transgression was imputed to all men, and is the sole cause of their immediate and final condemnation, so also, by parallel, Christ’s one act of righteousness is imputed to His people, and is the sole cause of their immediate and final justification. Piper summarizes Paul’s words well,

The parallel here is this: The judicial consequences of Adam’s sin are experienced by all his people not on the basis of their doing sins like he did, but on the basis of their being in him and his sin being imputed to them. As soon as that becomes clear in Paul’s argument—just at this point—he brings in Christ as the parallel. The point is to make clear what the focus of the parallel is: The judicial consequences of Christ’s righteousness are experienced by all his people not on the basis of their doing righteous deeds like he did, but on the basis of their being in him and his righteousness being imputed to them.

It should be evident that Paul’s theology of justification has no place for the doctrine of a two-stage, or last-day justification. It flies in the face of all he labors to set forth about the grace of justification in this text.

Second, Condemnation In Adam Entirely Apart From Man’s Own Personal Acts Of Sin, Is Compared To Justification In Christ Entirely Apart From Man’s Own Personal Acts Of Righteousness

All men are condemned in and by Adam’s one sin alone, not by their own personal sins

The second particular to be observed in the text is a direct spin off of the first. It is the corollary fact that all men are condemned in Adam, and justified in Christ entirely apart from their own personal acts: either of sin, in the case of Adam, or of obedience, in the case of Christ.

Paul’s initial proof that all men are condemned in Adam, apart from their own acts, is the phrase “death spread to all men because all sinned” in verse 12b. At first appearance it seems that the phrase “because all sinned” means that all men personally and actually sin, and this is the reason for their condemnation.

However, a closer look reveals that “because all sinned” is best taken to mean that all are counted by God to have sinned when Adam sinned. That is, when Adam sinned we—all of us—were counted as having sinned together with him in his one act of sin.

This is evident by the fact that verses 13 and 14 are a digression taken from Biblical history, designed by Paul to prove that this is so. In other words, they demonstrate that, “because all sinned” doesn’t mean all men have personally sinned, but that all sinned in and by Adam’s one sin, and as a result died and were condemned. With this clearly understood, he proceeds to build upon it in verses 15-19. Verses 13 and 14 read,

(13) For until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death

⁸ Paul’s reiteration that Adam’s one act of sin was directly imputed for condemnation to all men, and the parallel that Christ’s one act of righteousness is directly imputed for justification to all who are His, is fatal to the view that God imputes faith itself, as our righteousness. A view held by many in their interpretation of Romans 4.

⁹ Owen says, “The design of the apostle is to prove, that as the sin of Adam was imputed unto all men unto condemnation, so the righteousness or obedience of Christ is imputed unto all that believe unto the justification of life...As the sin of one that came on all unto condemnation, was the sin of the first Adam imputed unto them; so the righteousness of the one unto the justification of life that comes on all believers, is the righteousness of Christ imputed unto them. And what can be more clearly affirmed or more evidently confirmed than this is by the apostle, I know not.” Owen, *Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 322, 333.

¹⁰ John Piper, *Counted Righteous In Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 2002) pp. 101-102.

reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

There are at least six things in verses 13 and 14 which prove that the phrase “because all sinned” means that all men are counted by God as having sinned in and by Adam’s one act of sin.

First, is the explanatory “for” which connects verses 13 and 14 to verse 12. They are Paul’s explanation of what he means in verse 12 by the phrase “because all sinned.”

Second, he says “for until the law sin was in the world but sin is not imputed [or charged] when there is no law.” This is a general principle or maxim, which states a simple fact: sin and its guilt are not charged when there is not a specifically revealed law that is violated. As a result, there is not a liability to the penalty of sin which is death and condemnation.

Third, people, in fact, did sin in the period “from Adam until Moses,” for Paul says “until the law sin was in the world.” However, it was prior to the giving of the law of Moses for Paul says, “until the law” there was sin in the world. Consequently, when men sinned, “from Adam until Moses,” they did not commit a chargeable violation of God’s revealed will—since the law had not yet been given,¹¹ and as Paul points out “sin is not imputed where there is no law.” Consequently, he states the nature of their sin this way, “those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam.” Clearly, Paul is pointing out a difference between the sin of men who lived “from Adam until Moses,” and the sin of Adam. The difference, which is significant, is this: unlike Adam’s sin, their sin was not against a revealed law so the guilt of their sin was not imputed to their account. More important than this, the punishment for their sin, which is death and condemnation, was not inflicted upon them.

Fourth, although men were not formally charged with their own sin and its guilt during this period, they nevertheless received the penalty of sin—they died and were condemned. Paul says, “nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses.”

Fifth, there is the clear inference (Paul says “nevertheless death reigned”) that there had to be some actual sin and its guilt charged against men for the simple reason that the penalty of sin—which is death and condemnation—was inflicted upon them.

Sixth, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the sin which must have been charged against them—and with it the guilt and punishment of death which it brings—is Adam’s sin. Therefore, Adam’s one sin alone, and not the personal, individual sins of men, was the sole cause of their death and condemnation.

So we can rightly conclude that verses 13 and 14 demonstrate that the phrase “because all sinned” in verse 12 is Paul’s shorthand way of saying that, by and in Adam’s one act of sin, all were counted as having sinned as well. This in turn resulted in all being placed under the sentence of death and condemnation. But beyond all this—and this is Paul’s main point—it proves that the personal sins of men are entirely excluded as having anything to do with their condemnation.

Just as all were condemned apart from their own personal acts of sin, so also, parallel to this, all are justified in Christ apart from their own personal acts of righteousness

But this is only the beginning, because verses 12-14 are foundational. They merely lay the groundwork for Paul’s real concern: the comparison and parallel between condemnation in Adam and

¹¹ I am aware that some, if not many, people in this period did have God’s laws revealed to them (Noah, Abraham, etc.). However, the great majority were without any specific revelation of God’s commands. He “permitted all nations to go their own ways,” (Acts 14:16). It was the “times of ignorance,” (Acts 17:30). The ordinance of God that the Gentiles knew (Romans 1:32) is most likely a work of the conscience, as Paul says in Romans 2:14-15, or it is the generation after Noah that knew of God’s judgment upon evil at the flood.

justification in Christ in verses 15-19. It is in this carefully worded parallel that Paul proves conclusively that justification, like condemnation in Adam, is accomplished by Christ's one act alone, entirely apart from the personal acts of men. A good example is verse 16, it reads,

The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification.

Notice that Paul, without ambiguity states, "the judgement arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation." This is a direct assertion that by Adam's one sin alone, and not by their own personal sins, all men were condemned.

The terms "judgment" (*krima*), and "condemnation" (*katakrima*), are significant. Speaking of *krima*, Moo says, "this word...differentiated from *katakrima* (condemnation) probably means "judicial verdict;" the sentence of judgment."¹² Commenting on *katakrima*, Cranfield writes, "Where the condemnation referred to is condemnation by God, *katakrima* often signifies not only the pronouncement of the sentence but also its execution."¹³

So, what we see here is that, used together, the terms indicate that not only a legal sentence, but also its execution and penalty were immediately carried out on all men on account of Adam's one act of sin.

Paul's precise language rules out a future sentence of condemnation. All men are already judged; they are already fully and finally condemned by Adam's one sin!¹⁴

This leads to Paul's parallel of justification in Christ. In parallel assertions (here in verse 16 and repeatedly until verse 19), those in Christ are already declared to be fully and finally justified by Christ's one act of righteousness! All of which eliminates a future declaratory justification.

Verses 18 and 19 are where Paul most clearly and conclusively asserts his argument. He expressly declares that by Adam's one act of disobedience alone, apart from their own personal acts of disobedience, all men were condemned.¹⁵ In verse 18 he declares, "through one transgression there

¹² Moo, p. 538.

¹³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary, Romans*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, Great Britain: T & T Clark, 1979), p. 287.

¹⁴ *Krima* (judgment) according to Cranfield "denotes simply a judgment pronounced." Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 287. Cremer comments that it is "the result of *krien* [the verb to judge] or the decision arrived at...in particular the decision of a judge." Hermann Cremer, *Biblical Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed., (Edinburgh, Great Britain: T & T Clark, 1962), pp. 372-373. Kittel says, "it is the decision of the judge." Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 942. *Katakrima* (condemnation), on the other hand, according to Cranfield, "signifies not only the pronouncement of the sentence, but also its execution" (p. 287). Cremer says the verb *katakrein* means "not simply to pronounce condemnation, but...to accomplish the condemnatory judgment," and he points out this use in Romans 8:3 where God actually executed the judgment for sin upon Christ on the cross. It says, "God, sending His own Son...as an offering for sin, He condemned sin [executed judgment] in the flesh." Kittel remarks that it refers to "the divine condemnation including its execution," (vol. 3, p. 952). From the above, it seems Paul's intent is clear: God acted as a judge upon all men as a consequence of Adam's one sin. The immediate result of His action as a judge (*krien*) was a sentence (*krima*) and the judgment was immediately executed (*katakrima*) in the direct and immediate condemnation of all men. Paul's precise language rules out a future condemnation of men when they individually sin. This, of course, does not mean that the personal sins of men do not increase the amount or degree of their final punishment. But the fact of their present already condemned state is a reality affirmed repeatedly in Scripture. John, for example, says, "he who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Paul says as well, that men are born into the world "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3).

¹⁵ Murray points out that there are "explicit and repeated affirmations of the context to the effect that condemnation and death reign over all because of the *one sin* of the *one man* Adam. On at least five occasions in verses 15-19 this is asserted...This reiteration establishes beyond doubt that the apostle regarded condemnation and death as having passed to all men by the one trespass of the one man Adam. This sustained appeal to the one sin of the one man rules out the possibility of construing it as equivalent to the actual personal transgressions of countless individuals." Murray, pp. 183-184.

resulted condemnation to all men,” and then in verse 19, “through the one man’s disobedience the many were made [constituted] sinners.”

Paul then brings in the parallel to Christ, which begins with “even so.” In verse 18b he asserts “even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men,” and then in 19b, “even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made [constituted] righteous.”

Paul’s intent is unmistakable: as all, apart from their own personal sins, were condemned by Adam’s one act of disobedience, so also all in Christ, apart from their own personal acts of righteousness, are justified by Christ’s one act of righteousness.

The term ‘made’ in verse 19 is best translated “appointed” or “constituted.” It vividly portrays the reality that by a single act, either of Adam or of Christ, all men assume a specific relationship to God’s law. In Adam’s case they were made or constituted sinners, and received a sentence of judgment and condemnation (as verse 16). The parallel in Christ’s case is that all are made or constituted righteous, and are recipients of a sentence of justification.

The translation of the Greek term *kathistemi* by the English word “made” is unfortunate. It can be easily misunderstood to mean that what Paul is teaching here is that men were personally made sinful by Adam’s sin or are personally made righteous by Christ—which Paul does elsewhere, but not here.

The meaning of the term, however, which reflects Paul’s focus throughout, is legal and forensic, not practical and personal.¹⁶ In short, Paul asserts that, just as all men were constituted sinners because the sin of Adam, was imputed to them (in the words of verse 13), even so, all in Christ are constituted righteous because the righteousness of Christ¹⁷ is imputed to them.

Third, The Abundance Of The Grace Of God Is "Much More" Certain To Result In A Once-For-All Final Justification Than The Sin Of Adam Was Certain To Result In A Once-For-All Final Condemnation

But Paul goes even further. In verses 15-17 he takes great pains to demonstrate the freeness and finality of justification, by piling up descriptive terms of God’s grace (which I will bold) in an ever-ascending manner.

(15) But **the free gift** is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did **the grace of God** and **the gift by the grace of the one Man**, Jesus Christ, **abound** to the many. (16) **The gift** is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand **the free gift** *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification. (17) For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive **the abundance of grace** and of **the gift of righteousness** will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Notice, he speaks (with two different Greek words—*charisma* and *dorea*) of the gift of grace five times. He speaks of the abundance (or abound, v. 15) of grace twice. But he does not stop there. In

¹⁶ Moo writes, “Some argue that it means nothing more than “make.” But this translation misses the forensic flavor of the word. It often means “appoint” [see Luke 12:14, where—using the verb form—Jesus said “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?”], and probably refers here to the fact that people are “inaugurated into” the state of sin/righteousness. Paul is insisting that people were really “made” sinners through Adam’s act of disobedience just as they are really “made righteous” through Christ’s obedience. This “making righteous,” however, must be interpreted in the light of Paul’s typical forensic categories. To be “righteous” does not mean to be morally upright, but to be judged acquitted, cleared of all charges, in the heavenly judgment. Through Christ’s obedient act, people become really righteous; but “righteous” itself is a legal, not a moral, term in this context...People can be “made” sinners in the sense that God considers them to be such by regarding Adam’s act as, at the same time, their act.” cf. esp. Murray. Moo, p. 345.

¹⁷ This, of course, is no more nor less than a restatement by Paul, in different words, of his great declaration in Romans 3:24-26. The declaration that by faith in the blood and obedience of Christ alone, based solely upon the propitiation of His atoning death alone, a sinner receives a justification that is at once complete and final.

verse 17 he specifically asserts that grace is preeminently displayed in the “gift”¹⁸ of righteousness” that is given to sinners for their justification.

But what is Paul’s point in his constant references in verses 15-17 to grace: “the free gift,” “the grace of God,” “the grace of the one man,” “the gift by grace,” “the abundance of grace” and finally “the gift of righteousness”? His point is to make a comparison by way of contrast between Adam and Christ.

This is evident by his “not like” statements. First he says that grace is “not like the transgression” (v. 15), and second, it is “not like that which came through the one who sinned” (v.16). The contrast is accentuated by the twice repeated phrase “much more.” It first occurs in verse 15, “much more did the grace of God ... abound to the many,” then it occurs in verse 17, “much more...the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life.”

It must be asked, what is Paul contrasting by the “much more” phrase? He is contrasting the fact that it is “much more” certain and “much more” just that God justifies sinners by “the grace of God” and the one act of Christ’s obedience alone, than it was certain and just that He condemned all men by the one act of Adam’s sin alone.

In other words, it is indeed certain and just, as a result of Adam’s one act of sin, that condemnation, at once complete and final, came upon all men. But it is surely even “much more” certain¹⁹ and just, as a result of Christ’s one act of obedience (through “the gift of righteousness”) that justification, at once complete and final, comes to all who are His.

In short, what Paul is declaring is this: although Christ’s one act of obedience parallels Adam’s one act of disobedience, it actually goes far beyond it in one respect. It goes far beyond it in degree—in the degree of the certainty and equity of its final result.²⁰

But, how can God justify sinners, at once and forever, by Christ’s one act of righteousness? God can do so because the grace of God abounds far beyond the sin of man. In fact, this is how Paul finalizes his whole argument in the climatic statement of verse 20b where he says, “but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

But, how can this be? How can grace abound beyond sin in the free and final justification of sinners? Paul directs us to Christ Himself. Christ is an infinitely glorious person, who has infinite value as God’s own Son. Therefore, His righteous-obedience and propitiatory suffering, satisfied and pleased the Father “much more” than Adam’s sinful disobedience (and our many additional transgressions, v. 16) had ever displeased Him!

¹⁸ The Greek word (*dorea*) in verses 15 and 17, translated “gift” [a free donation] is the same word translated “gift” in Romans 3:24 (it is also the word translated “without a cause” in John 15:25), where Paul says, “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” In context, it seems evident that Paul’s “gift” here in 5:17, which could be translated “the abundance of grace, even the free gift of righteousness,” is the same free gift of righteousness as in Romans 3:24-26, provided and accomplished entirely outside of us, for our justification, by Christ’s final obedience and propitiatory death on the cross.

¹⁹ Moo writes, “For them, Paul claims, the enjoyment of the gift and grace of God will be even more certain than the death that came to all in Adam. Condemnation through Adam is inescapable, and Paul says nothing that would diminish the horrible reality of this judgment under which all people stand. But alongside condemnation there is the grace of God...In keeping with its use in 5:10-11 (see the note there), it is more likely to have simple logical significance—‘how much more [certainly] will the grace of God...abound to the many (Meyer).’” Moo, p. 337.

²⁰ Owen comments, “The opposition is between *paraptoma* [transgression] on the one hand, and *charisma* [grace] on the other,—between which a dissimilitude is asserted, not as unto their opposite effects of death and life, but only as unto the degrees of their efficacy, with respect unto those effects...Besides the thing itself asserted, which is plain and evident, the apostle seems to me to argue the equity of our justification by grace, through the obedience of Christ, by comparing it with the condemnation that befell us by the sin and disobedience of Adam. For if it were just, meet, and equal, that all men should be made subject unto condemnation for the sin of Adam; it is much more so, that those who believe should be justified by the obedience of Christ, through the grace and free donation of God.” Owen, p. 327.

Notice that Paul makes a point to say, that it is not only “the grace of God” (v. 15b), but “the gift by the grace of the one man” (v. 15c). It is “the grace of the one man”—the grace of the infinite Son of God. It is also, His “gift of righteousness” (v. 17b) provided through His atoning propitiatory obedience on the cross (3:25-26). In other words, because of the infinite glory of Christ, His obedience was of infinite atoning and justifying value. Consequently, His atoning obedience is more than enough to clothe a sinner in a perfect righteousness which justifies a sinner at once and forever.

The Exaltation of The Glorious Sufficiency Of Christ In His Atoning Justifying Work

In the end, the whole matter comes down to the supreme value and glory of the person of Christ. Therefore, to supplement Christ’s justifying righteousness—even with a Spirit-enabled righteousness—does far more than undo Paul’s parallel between Adam and Christ. It also—and this is the core issue, the hill to die on—robs Christ of His full glory in the justification of sinners.

So Paul’s point is this: Christ’s atoning grace abounds. It abounds because sinners, at the point of saving faith, receive a “much more” certain and final justification. They receive justifying grace that super-abounds beyond Adam’s sin—justifying sinners at once and forever, not only from their sin in Adam but also from the “many transgressions” (verse 16b) that they themselves personally commit.

This is the gospel of grace which duly exalts the glorious sufficiency of the person of Christ and His saving work. It is the heart and center of Paul’s theology of grace. To posit a second or last-day justification based on an evaluation of works of obedience or covenant faithfulness²¹ undoes it all! May God forbid!

Paul’s design, in this great text, at every point, is to exclude man’s own working from having anything to do, either with condemnation in Adam, or justification in Christ. Paul’s language is so clear, his emphasis so constant, that if it does not mean this, it means nothing at all.

As said, all of this is absolutely fatal to the doctrine of a two-stage, or last-day, justification. It cannot be made to harmonize with Paul’s teaching at any point. This is so because a last-day

²¹ Some do this by merging justification and sanctification. This is, I believe, what Douglas Wilson has done with his view of justification. Wilson, in an interview, was asked if he viewed justification and sanctification as distinct steps or “all of one piece.” He answered, “Justification to them [not to Wilson, but to those who he disagrees with] is something that happens and has to be tied up with a bow, and then we can move on to sanctification. But when God gives faith, that faith does not immediately croak. It is a saving faith and that same faith is the alone instrument for sanctification also. One can’t be apprehended without the other. They are distinct but not separable. You can’t make an ontological distinction. It is an organic whole for us” (From CRE Presbytery Exam of Wilson, p. 7). In response, it is agreed that true faith is an active faith (it doesn’t croak) and it is also agreed that it is the alone instrument of sanctification. That however, does not relate to the question. The question is whether sanctification follows a completed justification. This Wilson denies. Three observations can be made about Wilson’s doctrine of justification: 1) Justification must not be considered as “something that happens and has to be tied up with a bow, and then we can move on to sanctification.” Here, Wilson clearly distances himself from the teaching that justification is at once complete and final. 2) Justification is a process, since it can’t be completed without sanctification. His words are, “one can’t be apprehended without the other.” Here he asserts that justification is apprehended [grasped or arrived at] with sanctification. He does not say that justification is evidenced with sanctification. The difference is everything. In my mind, it would be hard to find a more direct statement that justification is a process that involves our own doing. 3) Justification ultimately is not to be distinguished from sanctification. Although he says there is a distinction between justification and sanctification for “they are distinct but not separable,” apparently it is not a real distinction. For he also says, in contradiction to this, “there is no ontological [essential] distinction.” So to Wilson there is a distinction, that is in fact not a distinction at all! The bottom line seems to be clear: sanctification in his system is part of the process that leads to a final justification. Wilson has committed the fatal error of turning sanctification into justification. His affirmations in his writings about imputation, grace, and sola fide are qualified, since he sweeps away the doctrine of a complete and final justification. This also puts Wilson in the two-phase justification camp. CRE’s Presbytery Exam of Wilson, Question 23. Both quotes are in John M. Otis, *Danger in the Camp* (Corpus Christi, TX: Triumphant Publications, 2005), pp. 336, 343.

justification is completely unnecessary.²² Christ's perfect righteousness, as the sole and final cause, means, or basis of justification, has already been imputed to the believer's account. But it is not only unnecessary. It also diminishes the finality and perfection of Christ's justifying righteousness—a righteousness accomplished by His culminating act of righteous-obedience and His wrath-absorbing propitiatory death on the cross.

But beyond all this—and this is everything so it cannot be overstated—a last-day justification doctrine robs Christ of His glory. The glory which is His because He; by His grace alone, by His blood and obedience alone, justifies, at once-and-forever, repentant and believing sinners. This, is the gospel of the grace of God. To Christ alone be the glory!

²² Some argue that a last-day justification is a theological tension that we must humbly accept. It is true there are theological tensions in Scripture (such as sovereignty and responsibility), but a tension is not a contradiction. A two-stage justification, however, is a contradiction. It contradicts a once-for-all completed justification. In the end, we must accept the fact that Romans 3:21-5:21 is God's final word on how He justifies a sinner, and we search in vain there for a single word of a conditional last-day justification by means of covenant faithfulness, or Spirit-enabled works of obedience. Romans 2:10-13 is no exception. It is part of Paul's overall argument (1:18-3:20) proving the condemnation of all men. In fact, he expressly states that no one will be justified by works at the final judgment for "by works of the law no flesh will be [future tense] justified" (Romans 3:20). By this concluding statement, Paul leaves no doubt that 2:10-13 does not set forth God's method of final justification—a justification by works enabled by grace. On the contrary, Paul's point in 2:10-13 is to give a warning not to seek justification by works, even by those done by the enabling grace of the Spirit, since in that day "by the works of the Law **no flesh will be justified.**" It seems to me, to argue for a last-day justification, conditioned on works, in the midst of an overall argument designed to show that justification by works is impossible, is to disregard a cardinal rule of exegesis: the use of context and flow of thought. Therefore, other texts must be understood in the light of the clear statement of free justification set forth in Romans 3:21-5:21. The clear always interprets the unclear.