



*Paul and the  
Righteousness of  
Faith*

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## **The Parting of the Gods**

Paul and the Redefinition of Judaism

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Chapter 7 of *The Parting of the Gods* examines Paul's allusions to the justification and righteousness that believers in Christ attain through their faith or "Christ-faith." It also argues that, rather than standing in opposition to Second Temple Jewish thought, Paul's affirmation that believers are justified by faith rather than by works of the law would have been viewed as being fully in continuity with traditional Jewish teaching.

## CHAPTER 7

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### REDEFINING RIGHTEOUSNESS

Among Jews in antiquity, righteousness was defined primarily on the basis of the Torah. The righteous were those who were committed to living in obedience to the commandments that God had given to Israel. While uncircumcised gentiles might attain some degree of righteousness by observing the basic moral principles found in the Torah, that righteousness was not believed to be comparable to that of those faithful Jews who strove to live fully in accordance with the Torah.

When we look to Paul's epistles, however, we encounter a reality that is very different. According to those epistles, uncircumcised gentiles who come to faith in Christ and live in that faith are just as righteous in God's sight as the circumcised and law-observant Jews who share that same faith. While Paul seems to have expected Jewish believers in Christ to continue to observe the law and encouraged them to do so, he insists that such observance does not make them any more righteous than gentile believers who do not submit to that law.

Naturally, such a view lent itself to generating tension between those Jews who believed in Christ and those who did not. While Paul might insist that he did not abolish the law, as he does in Rom 3:31, his claim that through Christ people could attain the righteousness God demanded of all out of love for them independently of their observance of the Torah seemed to call into question the value of such observance. For this reason, Paul repeatedly found it necessary to clarify his views regarding the Mosaic law and the righteousness and justification of believers in Christ.

#### RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE TORAH IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

In ancient Jewish thought, it was widely recognized that the life of righteousness God desired to see in all was from beginning to end a gift of God. God

had made that righteousness possible by graciously giving Israel the guidance and instruction of the Torah, and when the people failed to live in accordance with his commandments, God graciously acted in various ways to attempt to bring them back into conformity with those commandments. Of course, it must be stressed once more that God desired and commanded that his people obey the commandments he had given them *for their own sake* rather than for his. Because of the intrinsic relation between obedience to the commandments of the Torah and the people's well-being, they could enjoy the blessings God desired for them only if they strove to obey those commandments. God thus commanded and demanded that the people practice justice and righteousness—which in both Hebrew and Greek were understood as being the same thing (*tsedaqah; dikaiosynē*)—out of love for them.

As E. P. Sanders argued in his 1977 work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, it was generally recognized that no one could fulfill the Mosaic law perfectly.<sup>1</sup> The law itself made provisions for this by prescribing means by which those who violated it might seek God's forgiveness and thereby remain within the community of the righteous.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, most Jews believed that it was possible for people to grow and increase in their obedience to the Torah and for greater numbers of Jews to do so. Many of those who expected God to redeem Israel from its present plight appear to have believed that both of these things had to happen before that redemption might come. However, God's people were to look to God in faith not only for that redemption itself but also for the obedience that was necessary for it to take place. All that God could expect of his people was that they trust in him by committing themselves to living as best they could in accordance with the commandments he had given them out of love for them. Even if they went astray, he would do everything in his power to bring them back in obedience to those commandments. As long as they continued to keep their eyes fixed on God and depend fully on him, therefore, God would be active to bring about in them the obedience and righteousness he desired to see in them for their own good.

For that reason, most Jews would have agreed wholeheartedly with Paul's claim that righteousness and justification were *by faith*.<sup>3</sup> By definition, no

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1. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 137-38, 204-5, 346, 420-22. Of course, perfection can be defined in different ways, so that there is a sense in which those who are fully committed to living in accordance with God's law can be said to obey it perfectly, even though they still fall into sin; see Kent L. Yinger, *God and Human Wholeness: Perfection in Biblical and Theological Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 11-22, 65-69, 104-21.

2. See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 422.

3. See, for example, the discussion in Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 5-7, 161-62.

one could live righteously in accordance with God's will without believing in God and believing that he had given the commandments of the Torah for the good of all. To believe and trust in God was inseparable from living in the way he had commanded in the Torah, since those who refused to live in accordance with those commandments were not truly believing and trusting in the God who had given them. Righteousness was therefore inseparable from faith and was regarded as the result or fruit of faith.

At the same time, righteousness and justification were said to depend on one's works or behavior. However, as Sanders also argued in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, contrary to many Christian caricatures of Judaism, the notion that one might *earn* one's salvation through one's works was foreign to ancient Jewish thought.<sup>4</sup> All who lived as God's people depended on his grace not only for forgiveness but also for the ability to do what he had commanded. The reason why God examined one's works when judging human beings was that they revealed what was in one's heart. If one was committed to doing God's will, that commitment would inevitably be manifested in actions that were in conformity with that will. Conversely, the absence of such a commitment would be reflected in a lack of the works or deeds that God desired to see. As Kent Yinger has shown, in Second Temple Jewish thought, "when it is said that individuals will be recompensed or judged 'according to their deeds,' this presumes a holistic or unitary view of human works. It is not a deed for deed inspection, but rather one's entire pattern of life is in view, one's 'way' . . . It is the standard Jewish expectation that one's outward behavior (one's *works* or *way*) will correspond to, and be a visible manifestation of, inward reality."<sup>5</sup> Obedience to God's commandments was therefore not understood "as sinless perfection, but as a consistent and wholehearted conformity to God's will."<sup>6</sup>

When God declared a person to be righteous, therefore, that declaration was based on that person's way of thinking and living. Because no one could obey God's commandments perfectly, an element of forgiveness was always involved when God judged someone to be righteous. Those justified or declared righteous by God were never thought to be sinless or guiltless, nor was God believed to be pronouncing them innocent or acquitting them of wrongdoing when he justified them. Rather, by virtue of their commitment to living in conformity with God's will, God simply overlooked their sin, since that commitment would be manifested in the type of life God desired to see in all out of love for them. In other words, even though they were not perfect and were constantly in need of forgiveness, God declared them righteous because they were committed to living righteously and

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4. See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 126, 181-82, 293, 371, 517-18.

5. Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment according to Deeds*, SNTSMS 105 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 284, 290.

6. Yinger, *Paul*, 181.

because that commitment manifested itself in the type of life he desired to see in them for their own good and that of others.

God's purpose in judging people was therefore to determine whether or not they were committed to living in a manner that would make it possible for them and others to enjoy the well-being and shalom that God intended for all. Such an understanding of God's judgment precluded the idea that one might earn God's grace and favor through one's works, since what mattered was not simply attaining God's approval but living the type of life that enabled one to experience the well-being that was an intrinsic consequence of obedience to God's will. In fact, God's approval could be attained only by living such a life, looking to God and his gift of the Torah for knowledge, strength, and guidance. God judged human beings for *their* sake rather than for the sake of his own holiness or justice, since his judgment was aimed at overcoming sin and evil and liberating the faithful from those whose way of life impeded and destroyed their well-being.

The belief in a final judgment responded to the same concerns. If God was to judge all people at the end of the present age, this was because only in that way could the world to come be free of the sin and injustice that made it impossible for people to live in peace and enjoy God's blessings, unmolested by those who refused to practice justice and righteousness. Therefore, it was necessary for God to determine which people were committed to living in conformity with his will, since the very nature of the life of the age to come required such a commitment on the part of all who would come to partake of that life.

As we have seen previously, this understanding of God and his will was fundamentally different from the understanding of the gods and their will that Jews associated with gentile beliefs. Those gods were thought to make demands of human beings for their own sake and not out of any concern for human beings themselves. This made it necessary for human beings constantly to be inquiring as to what those gods wanted in order to satisfy their needs, desires, and demands, which were often capricious and egotistical. What mattered was simply gaining their favor and averting their wrath. In the case of Israel's God, however, there was one thing alone that could obtain his favor and avert his wrath: the practice of justice and righteousness.

Curiously, many Christian interpretations of God present him as behaving in essentially the same way that the gods of the nations were believed to do. According to those interpretations, God desires and demands the practice of justice and righteousness, *not for the sake of human beings but for his own sake*. Ultimately, what matters to him is not that people in general actually obey him, live righteously, and practice justice, but that he receive from someone—be it human beings themselves or Christ as their substitute—the

perfect obedience, righteousness, and justice that his holy nature demands.<sup>7</sup> Thus, while the content of God's demand is said to be different from that of other gods in that what he demands is justice and righteousness, he is just like those gods in that his concern is ultimately for himself and his own nature rather than the well-being of human beings. If he gets from human beings the righteousness he wants and demands, he is satisfied, no matter who gives it to him. If he does not, he becomes irate and inflicts punishment. As long as human beings have Christ to give God what he requires and satisfy his demands in their place, they can live in peace, unbothered by him.

### PAUL AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

Rather than constituting a departure from Jewish thought, Paul's understanding of justification, righteousness, and faith is in full continuity with the Jewish beliefs just considered.<sup>8</sup> What distinguishes Paul's teaching on justification from that which we find in Second Temple Jewish literature in general is his understanding of the will of God. Because it is Christ rather than the Mosaic law alone that defines God's will, the faith that leads to the righteousness that God desires to see in all is not merely faith in the God of Israel, but faith in Christ as his Son as well.

#### *Traditional Interpretations of Paul's Doctrine of Justification*

Since the period of the Protestant Reformation, it has been customary to claim that in Paul's thought there are two grounds for the justification of believers: Christ's death and their faith.<sup>9</sup> Supposedly, Christ's death was

7. John M. G. Barclay notes with regard to John Calvin's interpretation of Paul, for example: "It is characteristic of Calvin that he will not allow God's mercy and grace to suggest any diminution in God's just demand for perfect righteousness" (*Paul and the Gift* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015], 129). Similarly, N. T. Wright ascribes to Paul the idea that "the task of the Messiah, bringing to its appointed goal the single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world, was to offer to God the 'obedience' which Israel should have offered but did not" (*Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009], 104).

8. On what follows, see David A. Brondos, *Jesus' Death in New Testament Thought*, vol. 2: *Texts* (Mexico City: Theological Community of Mexico, 2018), 665-68, 724-33.

9. Simon J. Gathercole, for example, claims that for Paul justification is "on the basis of faith" and "on the basis of trust in Christ," while at the same time claiming: "The atoning death of Christ is, for Paul, the ground of the justification of the ungodly" ("Justified by Faith, Justified by his Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21-4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. Donald A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, WUNT 2/181 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 169-84 [161, 183]). Often those who interpret Paul's doctrine of justification in this way make a distinction between the *ground* or *basis* for the justification of believers, which is Christ's atoning death, and the *means* by which they are justified, which is faith in Christ and his death; see, for example, George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the*

necessary in order for God to forgive sins and declare sinners righteous. While in principle the sins of all human beings are forgiven by virtue of Christ's death, it is still necessary for them to come to faith in order to make that forgiveness theirs. The content of that faith is generally said to be the efficacy of Christ's atoning death to take away sins.<sup>10</sup> In order to be justified by God, that faith is sufficient. While good works should follow upon such faith, they do not constitute the basis for one's forgiveness and justification. Salvation and justification are by grace alone and through faith alone, and for that reason, those who have faith can have full assurance that they are forgiven and justified, independently of any works on their part. Justification is also forensic in that it involves a declaration on God's part that someone is righteous rather than a recognition on God's part that one actually *is* righteous on the basis of one's conduct, works, or way of life.

Such an understanding of Paul's teaching on justification is highly problematic for a number of reasons. By positing faith as a second basis or condition for justification, it reduces Christ's death to a formality that does not actually obtain the forgiveness of sins for anyone, since no one is ultimately forgiven on account of his death unless they *believe* that they are forgiven on account of his death. Faith in the efficacy of Christ's death tends to be seen as the one work necessary in order to be justified, and it is not clear why good works and a sanctified life must necessarily follow from one's justification. If those who have been justified by faith do not come to produce good works as they should and instead continue to live in sin, the question arises as to whether their justification is thereby nullified. If one answers that question affirmatively, then even if justification is initially by faith alone, subsequently it depends on one's works. In that case, ultimately it is *not* by faith alone. If one instead answers that one's ongoing condition of being justified does *not* depend on one's works, then those works become unnecessary and superfluous for one's justification and salvation.

For centuries, those who defend this traditional understanding of justification have attempted to get around these problems, yet in reality they admit of no satisfactory solution. For that reason, proponents of this view inevitably fall into contradictions. Thus, for example, Leon Morris, who was renowned as one of the most capable and ardent defenders of the view of justification just considered, maintained that "Christ has really put our sins out of the way, effectively and finally," yet at the same time affirmed: "There

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*New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 490. As long as faith is considered an indispensable condition for justification, however, in reality it also becomes a basis or ground upon which one is declared righteous by God, since without it one is *not* justified.

10. According to Ladd, for example, "Faith means acceptance of this work of God in Christ, complete reliance upon it, and an utter abandonment of one's own works as the grounds of justification" (*Theology*, 490).



is a divine wrath against every evil thing and when that has been put away by what Christ did we must have a due horror of arousing it again.”<sup>11</sup> Here it is clear that, if one can arouse God's wrath again, it has *not* been put away “effectively and finally” by Christ's death. Believers must still live obediently in order to remain free of that wrath.

This interpretation of Paul's thought also seems to run contrary to some of the affirmations Paul makes in his epistles. In particular, Paul states that all people will be judged by their works.<sup>12</sup> In Rom 2:13, he even affirms that “it is the doers of the law who will be justified.” This verse is so problematic for the traditional interpretation of Paul's teaching on justification that some Pauline scholars have claimed that Paul is here alluding to Jewish teaching rather than expressing his own thought.<sup>13</sup> Scholars often respond to these difficulties by claiming that judgment is by works only because one's works provide evidence of one's faith.<sup>14</sup> Yet this raises the question of how many works are necessary to demonstrate that one has saving faith. Rather than having full assurance of salvation because of their faith, believers must constantly be examining their works to see if they provide sufficient evidence that they do indeed possess the faith God requires of them in order for them to be justified and saved.

The problems associated with this forensic understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification have led many Pauline interpreters to follow Sanders in claiming that Paul's soteriology is primarily *participatory*. According to Sanders, “the prime significance that Christ's death has for Paul is not that it provides atonement for past transgressions (although he holds the common Christian view that it does so), but that, by *sharing* in Christ's death, one dies to the *power* of sin or to the old aeon, with the result that one *belongs to God*. . . . The transfer takes place by *participation* in Christ's death.”<sup>15</sup> In this case, believers are forgiven and justified because through faith they participate in Christ's death. It has also become common for adherents of this participatory soteriology to claim that when Paul speaks of the faith of Christ or *pistis Christou*, rather than referring to faith *in* Christ, he is speaking of Christ's own faith or faithfulness. Supposedly,

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11. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 6; *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 204.

12. See Rom 2:6-16; 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Thess 4:1-6; cf. 1 Cor 1:8; 4:3-5; 6:12-13; 2 Cor 11:15; Phil 1:9-10; 1 Thess 3:13; 5:23.

13. E. P. Sanders, for example, claimed that Rom 2:13 must have been taken from a synagogue sermon from the Jewish diaspora, since it runs contrary to the thought of Paul (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 126-29).

14. Herman Ridderbos, for example, writes that “works are indispensable as the demonstration of the true nature of faith” (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 180).

15. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 467-68; cf. 447-511.

Christ's faith or faithfulness is salvific in that people may now participate in it.<sup>16</sup> As we have noted in Chapter 3 of this study, the notion of participation has often been understood in ontological terms: in some mysterious fashion, believers in Christ become united to him in a real and literal sense and even come to constitute one person with him, in addition to participating in the event of his death on the cross.<sup>17</sup> Paul's allusions to dying and being buried with Christ in baptism in Romans 6 and his repeated use of the phrase "in Christ" are interpreted on the basis of these ideas. This participatory understanding of justification also focuses primarily on salvation from sin *as a power* rather than from "sins" in the plural.<sup>18</sup>

Precisely what scholars mean when they speak of Paul's understanding of participation in Christ and his death is by no means clear. Those who affirm that Paul understood such participation in a literal, ontological, or "real" sense are generally forced to admit that it is impossible for us today to grasp adequately Paul's thought in this regard.<sup>19</sup> Evidently, we are incapable today of conceiving of something that was perfectly clear and comprehensible to people in Paul's day.

The most serious problem with these interpretations of Paul's thought, however, has to do with the concepts of God and salvation associated with them. As just noted above, according to forensic interpretations of Paul's thought, if God wishes to forgive and save human beings, his nature requires that his justice first be satisfied. His perfection requires that human beings be perfect in their conduct in order for him to accept them, yet because this is impossible for them, God's Son had to become human and live a perfect and sinless life before dying on the cross in order that his perfection might be reckoned to others or accepted by God in their stead. In

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16. Svetlana Khobnya, for example, speaks of "the universal consequences of Christ's faithfulness" in Paul's thought: "Through Christ's obedience many will be made righteous because Christ overcomes not only Israel's unfaithfulness but all human unrighteousness and sin. This opens up a possibility for believers to participate in Christ's faithfulness" (*The Father Who Redeems and the Son Who Obeys: Consideration of Paul's Teaching in Romans* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013], 165).

17. So, for example, Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 453-72, 519-23; Stanley K. Stowers, "What is 'Pauline Participation in Christ'?", in *Redefining First Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, ed. Fabian Udoh et al. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 352-71. For further references to these ideas, see Brondos, *Jesus' Death*, 2:674-84.

18. On this point, see Simon Gathercole, "'Sins' in Paul," *NTS* 64 (2018): 143-61.

19. See, for example, Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 522-23; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 27; Richard B. Hays, "Crucified with Christ: A Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, and Galatians," in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 1: *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, ed. Jouette M. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 227-46 (242).

this case, God does not care *who* lives a perfect life, but merely demands that *someone* do so—whether Christ or human beings. What matters is not that sinful people actually *become* righteous but that God be able to *reckon* them to be righteous without compromising his perfect righteousness. The idea that believers must participate in Christ's faith or faithfulness in order to be saved also implies that, due to the perfection of his own nature, God requires a perfect faith or faithfulness on the part of human beings. Because they cannot attain that perfection on their own, through Christ's life and death a perfect faith or faithfulness must be brought about first in Christ so that others may come to participate in it and thereby fulfill God's just demand.

Such interpretations fail to take into account the intrinsic relation between the faith of human beings and their salvation. In biblical thought, faith in God leads to the well-being and wholeness of human beings (*sōtēria*) because it brings them to live in conformity with what God has commanded, not for *his* sake, but for *theirs*. In and of itself, such a life enables them to experience the well-being that God desires for all people. God's concern is not to be able to declare human beings righteous, as if this were all that were necessary for them to be saved, but to enable human beings to practice the righteousness that will allow them to be saved by being made whole. In the thought of Paul, the reason why God sent his Son and calls human beings to faith is not that he must satisfy some need found in his own nature before he can forgive or save them. Instead, it is the nature of the well-being that God desires for all people out of love for them that requires that they be brought to think and live in a way that makes that well-being possible. According to Paul, this is what takes place through Christ and faith.

### *Faith, Obedience, and Righteousness in Paul's Thought*

A proper understanding of the intrinsic relation between faith and righteousness is indispensable for understanding Paul's teaching regarding justification by faith. As scholars such as Teresa Morgan have argued, for Paul faith is primarily *trust in God* rather than the mere belief that certain propositions are true: "he sees *pistis* as predominantly an exercise of trust which involves heart, mind, and action. Like all trust, it is intimately connected with belief, on which it depends and which depends on it."<sup>20</sup> In other words, one will only trust in God if one believes certain truths concerning God and his activity in human history, yet what saves human beings is not simply belief in those truths but the life of trust in God that is *based* on those truths. If one truly trusts in God and his love, one will obey him and practice

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20. Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 261.

naturally the righteousness he desires and commands of all for their own good. Thus, *in and of itself*, faith in God leads one to live righteously as God desires. In contrast, any who refuse to live as God desires and commands for the good of all are not truly trusting in God and therefore cannot rightly be said to have faith in him.

As Paul argues in Romans 4, the clearest illustration of this relationship between faith and righteousness is the life of Abraham. According to Gen 15:6, Abraham was accepted as righteous by God before he had done anything other than believe in God's promises (Rom 4:3-12). The reason for this, however, was that his faith and trust in God would lead him to do all that God commanded of him so that the promises he had made to Abraham might be fulfilled. Had Abraham not obeyed out of faith, the fulfillment of those promises would not have come to pass. Throughout Romans 4, Paul seems to presuppose that his readers are acquainted with the story of Abraham. If so, they would have known that, from the moment God revealed himself to Abraham and told him to leave his own land for another one, Abraham had obeyed. Obviously, he had done so because he believed God and trusted in the promises God had made to him. The readers of Romans would have been acquainted with the story of the binding of Isaac or *Akedah* in Gen 22:1-19, which was considered by most Jews in Paul's day to be one of the most important passages in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>21</sup> There Abraham demonstrates that he is willing to obey God no matter what God asks of him, even if this involves putting to death the son that God had miraculously given him. It must have seemed to Abraham that the death of his son would make it impossible for the promises that God had made to him to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, "hoping against hope," throughout his life Abraham believed in God and did not waver or weaken in his faith and trust in God (Rom 4:18-20). He remained "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (4:21). Thus, while it was solely on account of his faith that Abraham was accepted by God as righteous (Rom 4:1-12; Gen 15:6), *there was a reason for this*: Abraham's faith inevitably led him to obey God in everything so that God might accomplish his gracious will and purposes in and through Abraham.

For Paul, then, faith and obedience to God are inseparable. On this point, Paul is in full agreement with the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish thought. Where Paul differs, however, is in his understanding of God's will. Whereas in the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish thought righteousness was defined primarily on the basis of the Torah, in Paul's thought righteousness and obedience to God cannot be

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21. As Joshua Jipp notes, several Second Temple Jewish writings as well as the Epistle of James associate the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 with Gen 15:6 ("Rereading the Story of Abraham, Isaac, and 'Us' in Romans 4," *JSNT* 32 [2009]: 217-42 [223-24]).

reduced to observance of the Torah or simply equated with such observance. According to Paul, by virtue of his faith and trust in God, Abraham was regarded as righteous by God independently of any observance of the commandments of the Torah, which had not yet been given. For Paul, faith and trust in God are now to take the form of believing "in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord" (Rom 4:24). Those who truly believe in that God will live in accordance with his will as it has now come to be defined through Jesus. For that reason, like Abraham, gentile believers can be declared righteous simply by virtue of their faith in the God of Abraham and Jesus.

Elsewhere in his epistles Paul ties faith to obedience and righteousness explicitly. In Rom 1:5 and 16:26, he states the purpose of his ministry in terms of bringing about the "obedience of faith" (*hypakoē pisteōs*) among the gentiles or nations (cf. Rom 15:18). What Paul seeks is not simply that others come to faith, as if that were an end in itself, but that they come to practice the "obedience that leads to righteousness" by becoming "obedient from the heart" to the form of teaching committed to them (Rom 6:16-17). Through faith they become "slaves of obedience" and "slaves of righteousness" (Rom 6:16, 18-19). Because by definition faith is constantly "active through love" (Gal 5:6), it leads believers to live righteously in the way that God desires for their own good. In Rom 10:10, Paul affirms that "with the heart one believes unto righteousness" (*eis dikaiosynēn*). For Paul, then, by its very nature, faith results in a life of love, righteousness, and obedience to God.<sup>22</sup>

The idea that righteousness is the result of faith is reflected especially in Paul's use of the Greek phrase *ek pisteōs*, which appears over fifteen times in Romans and Galatians. While this phrase is generally translated as "by faith," it literally means "out of faith." It thus designates something that *arises* out of faith, *originates* in it, or has faith as its *source*.<sup>23</sup> In Rom 1:17 and Gal 3:11, Paul quotes Hab 2:4, which can be translated in two different ways: either "the righteous one will live out of faith" or "the one who is

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22. James Dunn captures well the relationship between faith and obedience in Paul's thought when he writes: "faith means total and unconditional reliance on God. . . , complete trust in God, total reliance on God's enabling. That is the root of obedience for Paul: unless obedience springs from that, it is misdirected. The 'obedience of faith' is that obedience which lives out the sort of trust and reliance on God which Abraham demonstrated" ("The Law of Faith,' 'the Law of the Spirit' and 'the Law of Christ,'" in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 62-82 [68]).

23. It can therefore be said, as Don B. Garlington does, that when Paul speaks of the obedience of faith, he has in mind "a twin idea: the obedience consisting in faith and the obedience arising out of faith" (*Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans*, WUNT 79 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1994], 72).

righteous as a result of faith will live.”<sup>24</sup> According to the first of these two translations, those who live out of faith will be righteous in the sense that their faith will constitute the basis for all they do in life. According to the second, those who are righteous as a result of their living out of faith will attain life. In either case, faith is the source of the righteous way of life that makes one righteous.

Particularly significant is Paul’s use of the same phrase in Rom 14:23, where he writes: “Everything that is not ‘out of faith’ (*ek pisteōs*) is sin.” Here Paul’s idea is that whatever does not proceed from faith or have faith as its source is sinful. Obviously, for Paul everything that one does in life is to be grounded in faith in some way. This passage is also significant in that it demonstrates that for Paul the righteousness that is brought about *ek pisteōs* does not merely consist of a forensic standing before God but involves a way of life and conduct. Just as the sin that results from *not* living out of faith involves an *activity* or *behavior* rather than a *status*, so also the righteousness that results from faith is not merely a forensic standing but the righteous way of thinking, being, and behaving that is the consequence of living out of faith. There is therefore an *intrinsic relation* between faith and righteousness: in and of itself, faith leads to the righteous way of living that God desires to see in all people. Undoubtedly, faith also results in a forensic standing before God in which he accepts one as righteous, yet that standing is based on the fact that such a faith will invariably lead one to live righteously in accordance with God’s will.

It is important to stress that, for Paul, to be righteous is not to be perfect or entirely innocent of sin. In this regard, Paul once again reflects the same thought we find in the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish writings. Undoubtedly, the God of Paul and the Hebrew Scriptures would like believers to be perfect in their conduct, yet this is not possible. In fact, in principle believers themselves would also like to be perfect in their righteousness, since they know that sinful behavior does them great harm and prevents them from experiencing fully the wholeness that God desires for them and that they desire for themselves. When they fall into sin, it upsets them just as much as it upsets God, since they know that sin undermines and destroys their well-being. While at times Paul speaks of believers being “blameless,” this word should be understood in a relative sense rather than a categorical one.<sup>25</sup> As in Jewish thought, for Paul one is righteous and

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24. On these two readings of Hab 2:4, which he labels “adverbial” and “adjectival,” see Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 78-79.

25. See 1 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:10; 2:15; 1 Thess 3:13; 5:23. On this understanding of blamelessness, see Yinger, *God and Human Wholeness*, 22-23, 126-28. On the idea of perfection in Paul’s thought, see 93-137.

blameless, not because one has never sinned, but because one is truly committed to living as God desires out of love for all.

### *Righteousness as a Gift*

In Rom 5:17, Paul speaks of “those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness” through Christ. These words have traditionally been understood primarily or exclusively in a forensic sense: in his grace, God graciously reckons believers to be righteous, despite the fact that they are not truly righteous but sinful.<sup>26</sup> God’s basis for doing so is supposedly both Christ’s death and their faith in Christ and his death. In reality, however, there is no reason to regard the righteousness of which Paul speaks in Rom 5:17 as purely forensic. Through faith, which is itself a gift of God, God graciously brings about in believers the new life of obedience and righteousness that he desires for all out of love for them. It is this new life, which believers receive by God’s grace alone through faith alone, that constitutes the basis upon which God also forgives them their sins and accepts them as righteous. Rather than being limited to his forgiveness, God’s grace is *all* of his activity in relation to believers—past, present, and future—, which is aimed at enabling them to live in the way that makes it possible for them to attain the wholeness and well-being he desires for them. That grace is not, however, something that God infuses into believers. Instead, it is a way of relating to human beings.

While in some of the passages in which he speaks of the righteousness of believers Paul undoubtedly has in mind a forensic standing, in numerous passages from his epistles righteousness clearly has to do with activity, actions, or conduct on the part of believers. In Romans 6, for example, Paul calls believers “slaves of righteousness” and exhorts them to present their members to God as “instruments” or “weapons of righteousness” (*hopla dikaiosynēs*; Rom 6:13, 18–20). He uses this latter phrase in 2 Cor 6:7 as well, where he speaks of having “the weapons of righteousness (*hopla tēs dikaiosynēs*) for the right hand and for the left.”<sup>27</sup> In 2 Cor 9:10 and Phil 1:11, Paul alludes to the “fruit” or “harvest” of righteousness that is produced in believers.<sup>28</sup> In Rom 8:4, Paul uses the term *dikaiōma* to refer to

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26. Thus, for example, Leon Morris comments: “That *righteousness* is a *gift*. . . shows plainly that Paul is thinking of it as a status, a standing; the term is forensic. We often use the word to denote an ethical quality, but such a quality cannot be given” (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 237).

27. As Paul Barnett notes, the phrase “weapons of righteousness” in 2 Cor 6:7 should be understood as referring to an ethical rather than a forensic righteousness (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 330).

28. Ben Witherington III rightly stresses that, when Paul speaks of the “fruit of righteousness” in Phil 1:11, he is not referring to a forensic righteousness (*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 66).

the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in believers. The fact that in Rom 5:17 Paul contrasts “the free gift of righteousness” with “one man’s trespass” indicates that in both cases he has in mind something that people *do* rather than a status they possess. In all of these instances, then, it is clear that when Paul speaks of righteousness he is referring to *righteous activity or behavior* and not merely to a forensic standing. Of course, as in Jewish thought, for Paul the righteous way of living brings with it a forensic standing of righteousness before God. Therefore, even when Paul has in mind this forensic standing, it is not divorced from the life of righteousness that leads to that standing.

Furthermore, contrary to many traditional interpretations of his thought, for Paul the life of righteousness is not the *result* of one’s forensic standing of righteousness before God but rather its *basis*. Temporally, of course, God’s declaration that one is righteous on the basis of one’s faith may precede the life of righteousness that follows upon that faith, yet as noted above, the reason that God declares those who have faith to be righteous is precisely because that faith will lead to the life of righteousness that he wants all to lead for their own sake. Such was the case with Abraham, whom God regarded as righteous merely because he believed, prior to any “working” on his part (Rom 4:3-8). Yet, as we have seen above, the reason why Abraham’s faith led God to account him as righteous was that it would lead Abraham to do whatever God asked him to do, thereby making it possible for God to accomplish his purposes through Abraham. Thus, even though the “working” would be *subsequent* to faith, that working, together with the faith that would lead to it, can still be seen as the basis upon which God declared Abraham righteous—not because those works would merit God’s favor or his forgiveness, but because they would consist of the righteous way of life that God desired Abraham to live for his own good and that of others.

The key to grasping this understanding of justification, then, is precisely the notion that God desires and commands that human beings live in conformity with righteousness and justice *for their sake and not for his*. According to most traditional views of justification, the ultimate objective of human beings must consist of fulfilling a requirement that God has deemed necessary in order to grant them his approval, forgiveness, and acceptance, whether this be faith alone or some type of work as well. The condition for them to be justified and saved is derived from God’s righteous nature and therefore must be fulfilled *for the sake of God himself and his nature*. However, once it is understood that in biblical thought God commands human beings to practice justice and righteousness *for their own sake rather than his*, then the focus and objective of human beings must be *to live in a manner*

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In 2 Cor 9:10, Paul’s allusion is probably to the fruit that is produced by righteousness rather than righteousness itself as a fruit; see Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 643-44.



*that makes their wholeness and well-being possible.* This alone can please and satisfy God and obtain his approval. Through faith, by means of his Son, his Spirit, the gospel, and the community of believers in Christ, God makes it possible for believers to live in such a manner out of pure grace. As they look to God in faith, God uses those means to bring about in believers the just and righteous way of life that enables them to experience the good that God desires for them out of love for all. On that basis, they are accepted by God as righteous. What God calls on all to do, therefore, is simply to look to him in faith and trust, depending entirely on him to bring about in them the way of life necessary for them to attain the well-being he desires for all. Those who do so are pleasing to him because they are doing what he wants, namely, living in a way that makes it possible for God to make them whole (*sōzein*). God also forgives them the sins that they continue to commit *contrary* to their own will by virtue of the fact that through Christ they are being brought to live in the way he desires for their own good and that of others.

In Rom 9:30–10:10 and Gal 2:16–21, Paul contrasts the righteousness that is the result of faith (*ek pisteōs*) with the righteousness that comes from the law (*ek nomou*) or from the works it prescribes (*ex ergōn nomou*). For Paul, to base one's life on the law alone is not to live out of faith: "For the law is not *ek pisteōs*" (Gal 3:10). In and of itself, obedience to commandments does not lead to the righteous way of living God desires to see in all. Instead, such a way of life is brought about by looking to God's love and promises in Christ: "For through the Spirit, *ek pisteōs*, we anxiously await the hope of righteousness" (Gal 5:5). According to Rom 9:30–32, even though the gentiles did not pursue it, they have received righteousness—that is, the righteous way of living God desires to see in all—*ek pisteōs* (v. 30). In contrast, "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it *ek pisteōs* but as if it were *ex ergōn*. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone" (vv. 31–32). A few verses later, Paul claims that those of Israel sought to establish their own righteousness rather than looking to that which is from God, evidently because they thought that the righteousness God desired was brought about by law-observance rather than by looking in faith to the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ, who is the end or goal of the law for all who believe (Rom 10:3–4). In contrast to the righteousness that is *ek tou nomou* of which Moses spoke, the righteousness that is *ek pisteōs* looks to Christ, who has risen from the dead after descending into the abyss, so as now to be Lord of all and save those who call upon him (Rom 10:5–13). In that way, the righteous way of life that the law anticipated but could not bring about is now given to believers as a free gift.

When Paul speaks of the works of the law, it is quite likely that he has in mind things such as circumcision, regulations regarding purity, and the

observance of the Sabbath.<sup>29</sup> If so, there is no reason to think that he rejected the value of obedience to such commandments among his fellow Jews or believed that Jewish believers in Christ should no longer observe them. Rather, what Paul apparently wished to stress is that in itself the observance of such commandments does not make one righteous. On this point, in fact, the vast majority of his fellow Jews would have agreed with him.

Once it is recognized that in Paul's thought righteousness involves a way of living or behaving that makes it possible for one to experience the well-being and salvation God desires for all, it becomes clear why he insists that righteousness is not brought about by the law or its works. For Paul, righteousness has to do with things such as those he mentions in passages such as Rom 12:1-21, 2 Cor 6:6-7, Gal 5:22-23, and Phil 2:1-5: love, kindness, goodness, patience, and similar ways of relating to others. Ultimately, as we have seen in Chapter 4 of this study, these are the things that God desires to see in human beings. Such behaviors are not brought about merely by observing commandments regarding circumcision, the Sabbath, and the distinctions between clean and unclean, even though in Jewish thought the observance of commandments such as these was thought to help promote righteous behavior. For that reason, for Paul it is good and proper for Jews to observe them. To impose the observance of such commandments on non-Jewish believers in Christ, however, is not only pointless but cruel. It is pointless in that they have no need for such observances in order to lead the kind of life that God desires to see in them, and it is cruel in that those observances would be a tremendous burden for non-Jews, who were not accustomed to them. Of course, this is particularly the case with regard to circumcision, which is the primary focus of Paul's argument in Galatians, since for non-Jewish adult males to undergo circumcision would be extremely painful for them.

In this regard, it is significant to note that Paul's language of righteousness is found primarily in the letters and passages in which he is engaged in discussions and debates regarding Jewish concerns and the Jewish law. Around forty of the approximately forty-five instances of the word *dikaïosynē* in Paul's epistles occur in Romans (especially chapters 3-10), in Galatians, and in Phil 3:2-9, where he is contrasting the righteousness of faith with the righteousness of the law in order to argue that it is those who live out of faith who are righteous. The fact that Paul speaks of righteousness primarily in these contexts, which are to some extent polemical in nature, suggests that he is adopting and using the language of his opponents in order to refute

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29. On this discussion, see especially Matthew J. Thomas, *Paul's 'Works of the Law' in the Perspective of Second Century Reception*, WUNT 2/468 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 39-61; Serge Ruzer, "Paul's Stance on the Torah Revisited: Gentile Addressees and the Jewish Setting," in *Paul's Jewish Matrix*, ed. Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor, StJC (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2011), 75-97 (78-83).

their arguments. At the same time, he is framing his own views in terms that they will readily understand and that are pertinent to the debate in which he is involved. Similarly, Romans and Galatians account for twenty-five of the twenty-nine instances in which the noun “justification” and the verb “to justify” appear in Paul’s letters, and outside of those two epistles Paul uses the adjective *dikaios* (“just” or “righteous”) only in Phil 1:7 and 4:8.

In contrast, the word “love” appears some eighty-four times in Paul’s epistles and is much more evenly distributed among them.<sup>30</sup> The most convincing explanation for this is that Paul prefers the language of love to that of righteousness. If one were to summarize in a word the many different qualities, attitudes, and behaviors that Paul commends throughout his epistles, that word would unquestionably be “love.” Nevertheless, the term “righteousness” would also be fitting, as long as it is stressed that to practice righteousness or that which is right is by definition to practice love as well. Any behavior that is not loving and does not seek the well-being of others is not righteous, just as any behavior that is unjust and unrighteous must be regarded as unloving.

According to Paul, it is God who produces in believers both love and righteousness as a gracious gift through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Throughout his epistles, Paul stresses time and again the idea that God himself brings about in believers the new life he desires to see in them. After thanking God for the grace given the Corinthian believers in Christ and for having enriched them in all speech and knowledge so that they are “not lacking in any gift,” Paul speaks of them “awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:4-9). The verb *bebaioun* used here by Paul means not only to confirm but to strengthen and sustain. Elsewhere Paul writes that God has given Christ to believers as the one who is for them “wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption *from God*” (1 Cor 1:30). When he chides the believers in Corinth for boasting, he asks them: “What do have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor 4:7). After telling the Corinthian believers that whoever is in Christ is a new creation, he affirms that “all of this comes from God” (2 Cor 5:17-18). It is God who makes believers “the righteousness of God” in and through Christ (2 Cor 5:21). In 2 Cor 1:21-22, Paul uses the verb *bebaioun* once more to affirm that God establishes believers in or through Christ, in addition to anointing and sealing them by giving them his Spirit in their hearts as a pledge. Believers are controlled or constrained by the love of Christ

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30. On the centrality of love in Paul’s thought, see Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 211-17.

(2 Cor 5:14-15), and through Christ they are strengthened and empowered to do all things (Phil 4:13). In Phil 1:9-11, Paul prays that God make his love abound “more and more” in the believers to whom he writes and that God enable them to be “filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ.” Here the idea that both love and righteousness are graciously brought about in believers by God is particularly clear. Even more explicit is Paul’s affirmation in Phil 2:13 that “it is God who is at work in you so that you may both desire and carry out what is well-pleasing to him.” The idea that God remains at work in believers is stressed from the very outset of the same letter, where Paul tells the believers in Philippi: “I am confident of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul speaks of God’s word performing its work in the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess 2:13). He tells the readers: “may the Lord cause you to grow and increase in love for one another and for all people, just as we also do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all of his angels” (3:11-13). Paul also reminds them that they have been “taught by God to love one another” (4:9). He ends his letter with the petition that God sanctify them entirely and preserve complete their spirit, soul, and body so that they may be “without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus” (5:23). In all of these passages, Paul makes it clear that it is the task *of God* to produce love, holiness, and righteousness in believers and preserve them blameless until the end. All that believers can do is trust in God by looking to God in the same way that Paul does, asking him to confirm, strengthen, and sustain them in the work he has begun in them until the coming of Christ.

Other passages from Paul’s epistles speak of God graciously giving believers the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of his Son.<sup>31</sup> Through that Spirit, God works to transform believers, producing in them the knowledge, holiness, gifts, and fruit he desires to see in them.<sup>32</sup> In Rom 15:13, Paul presents both God and the Holy Spirit as being active in believers: “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” It is God who “works all things in all persons” through that Spirit (1 Cor 12:6). As noted above, God gives believers the “hope of righteousness through the Spirit by faith” (Gal 5:5). The Holy Spirit also creates the obedience God desires to see in believers by guiding them, filling them with knowledge, and enabling them to put to death the deeds of the flesh.<sup>33</sup> Paul even affirms that the Holy Spirit helps believers in their weakness by interceding to God for them, since they are

31. See Rom 8:14-17; 1 Cor 12:7-13; 2 Cor 5:5; Gal 4:6.

32. See Rom 8:2, 13-14, 26; 15:16; 1 Cor 2:12-13; 12:3-11; Gal 3:5; 5:22-23.

33. See Rom 8:13-14; 1 Cor 2:10-14; Gal 5:16-18, 25.

not capable of praying as they should without the Spirit's assistance (Rom 8:26-27). Most importantly, in Rom 5:5 Paul affirms that the love of God has been poured out in the hearts of believers by means of the Spirit whom God has given to them.

In Jewish thought, of course, it was believed that the Torah was capable of producing in those who followed it almost all of the same qualities Paul repeatedly mentions, including especially love, knowledge, wisdom, holiness, and righteousness.<sup>34</sup> For Paul, however, the law is not able to bring about the same righteousness that is given to believers in Christ as a gift.<sup>35</sup> Paul's clearest statement of this belief is found in Rom 8:3-4, where he writes: "For what was impossible for the law, in that it was weak through the flesh, God has done by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin: he has condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement (*dikaiōma*) of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." These verses must be viewed in the context of Paul's argument in chapters 7 and 8 of this epistle, where he claims that the sin that dwells in human beings and the flesh that characterizes their existence in the present age do not allow them to do what is good and live in righteousness as God desires out of love for them. According to Paul, the law is incapable of overcoming this "sin in the flesh"; only Christ and God's Spirit can accomplish that task (Rom 7:14-8:13). As we have seen previously, in Rom 8:29 Paul defines God's objective in terms of bringing people to be conformed, not to the Torah, but to "the image of his Son." This involves bringing them to practice the same type of love that Paul identifies with Christ, that is, a love that cannot be brought about merely by commandments and legal prescriptions. Instead, what has made it possible for that type of love to become a reality in the lives of believers is that God sent his Son and handed him over to death rather than sparing him when his efforts to bring into existence a community in which all would live in that love led to the threat of death and the cross.

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34. According to Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, in rabbinic thought, "God gives the Torah, the antidote to sin, its laws intended to 'purify the heart of man,' which is what God most craves. For rabbinic Judaism, therefore, the Torah is the answer to the question of the fall of man from grace. . . ." (*Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 67-68). Elsewhere they add: "Through Torah God educates the heart of humanity to love, which cannot be coerced. The Torah purifies the heart of humanity, the commandments are media of regeneration and sanctification. . . . The rabbinic sages leave no doubt that Torah study changes disciples, producing humble persons prepared to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and might" (106-7). There is good reason to suppose that similar ideas characterized the thought of many Jews in the Second Temple period as well.

35. See especially Rom 3:9-24; 7:7-8:4; 9:30-10:10; Gal 2:15-3:25; Phil 3:9.

### *The Righteousness of God and Christ-Faith*

In the same contexts in which he speaks of righteousness as resulting from faith, Paul uses two genitival phrases whose meaning has been debated a great deal among Pauline scholars: the righteousness of God (*dikaiosynē theou*) and the faith of Christ (*pistis Christou*). For centuries, it was common to understand these phrases primarily as objective genitives.<sup>36</sup> The righteousness of God was interpreted as alluding to the forensic status of righteousness that believers attain before God through faith, while the faith *of* Christ was generally translated as “faith *in* Christ.” Since then it has become common among many New Testament scholars to understand both of these phrases as *subjective* genitives: God’s righteousness is his saving activity or faithfulness to his covenant, whereas the faith of Christ is the faith or faithfulness to God that Christ displayed throughout his life and especially in his passion and death.

Many of those who have argued that *dikaiosynē theou* should be understood as a subjective genitive do so in large part due to their rejection of the notion that Paul has in mind a righteousness that is entirely forensic when he uses the phrase. There can be little doubt that Paul uses the phrase as a subjective genitive in Rom 3:5–6, where he insists that, even though “our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God,” God is not unrighteous to bring his wrath upon human beings when judging the world. Here, however, rather than referring to God’s “faithfulness to his covenant with Israel” or to his “faithfulness to his own person and word,”<sup>37</sup> Paul clearly has in mind God’s dealing with the world in general by acting through judgment to deliver it from sin, evil, and injustice. While it is possible to make sense of Paul’s words in the other passages in which he uses that phrase by interpreting it as a subjective genitive, when those passages are viewed in light of what we have seen above, it seems more likely that in most of them it should be understood as a righteousness that comes from God or is given by him, as well as the righteous way of living that is truly in accordance with his will.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, this righteousness should not be understood as something that God communicates to believers or imparts to them as

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36. For summaries of the scholarly discussion on these two phrases, see Hultgren, *Romans*, 605–15, 623–61; Barry D. Smith, *The Meaning of Jesus’ Death: Reviewing the New Testament’s Interpretations* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 77–97; Matthew C. Easter, “The *Pistis Christou* Debate: Main Arguments and Responses in Summary,” *CurBR* 9 (2019): 33–47.

37. See respectively N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 800; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 190.

38. As John A. Ziesler insists, however, “we cannot accept that there is any one meaning of ‘righteousness of God’. It is not a formula in the sense of a recognised phrase for a consistent notion, having a specific and unchanging content” (*The Meaning of*

a *iustitia infusa*, but rather as a way of life that God brings about in them through the gospel, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the community of believers. According to this understanding of the righteousness of God, when Paul speaks of the righteousness of God, he has in mind righteousness as it is *defined* by God as well as righteous *activity* or *conduct*, as proponents of the subjective genitive interpretation of the phrase claim.<sup>39</sup> However, the activity or conduct of which Paul is speaking in most of the passages in which he uses that phrase is not that of God but that which is to characterize the lives of *believers*.

Such, in fact, is the meaning of the phrase in the two passages in the New Testament outside of Paul's epistles in which it appears. These are Matt 6:33, where Jesus tells his disciples to "seek first the reign of God and his righteousness," and James 1:20: "For the wrath of a man does not work the righteousness of God."<sup>40</sup> In these passages, the righteousness of God is something that one is to *do* and actively *seek*. In Phil 3:9, Paul speaks of wanting to be "found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law (*ek nomou*), but the righteousness that comes through the faith of Christ, that is, the righteousness that comes from God by faith" (*tēn ek theou dikaiosynēn*). Here, just as the righteousness of Paul's own involves a way of living and behaving that is grounded in the law, so also the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ should be understood as a righteous way of living that is given by God through faith. The reason that Paul would have referred to the righteousness of which he speaks as the "righteousness of God" is to stress not only that this righteous conduct is brought about by God but also that it is in conformity with his will as he has now defined or redefined that will *through Jesus*. Paul also appears to use the phrase "righteousness of God" to distinguish that righteousness from other conceptions of righteousness, such as the righteousness he associates with the observance of the Mosaic law.

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*Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry*, SNTSMS 20 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 186).

39. As most scholars recognize, such is the normal meaning of righteousness in both the Old and New Testaments. Wright, for example, comments: "The word *tsedaqah/dikaiosynē* and its cognates in the Israelite scriptures seem to have the primary meaning of 'right behavior'" (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 796). Cf. Ziesler, *Meaning of Righteousness*, 18-28.

40. In his extensive study on the subject, Benno Przybylski writes: "God's righteousness in [Matt] 6:33 must be understood as a norm for man's conduct. It is 'righteousness of life in agreement with the will of God'" (*Righteousness in Matthew and his World of Thought*, SNTSMS 41 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 90). Przybylski rightly notes that the same idea is present in James 1:20 (90), yet because he assumes that in Paul's thought righteousness is primarily a forensic term, he concludes that Matthew and Paul understand righteousness in two conflicting ways rather than recognizing the essential agreement between the two (105-6, 123).

The same understanding of the righteousness of God seems to be evident in Rom 10:3, where Paul uses the phrase twice when speaking of those who belong to Israel: “For because they were unaware of the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God.”<sup>41</sup> When Paul speaks of these two forms of righteousness, he has in mind not merely a righteous status before God but the way of life that *leads* to that status and constitutes its *basis*. This is the righteousness of God that Israel sought by observing the law but did not attain, since that righteousness is brought about through Christ and faith rather than merely by observing the commandments of the law. According to Paul, the righteousness of God is now defined primarily by God in Christ rather than through the law alone. Because that righteousness is brought about by living out of faith in the way that gentile believers now do rather than by practicing the works of the law, whoever does not live out of faith does not submit to the true righteousness of God or attain that righteousness.

This understanding of the righteousness of God would also explain what Paul means in Rom 1:17 when he affirms that the righteousness of God has been revealed as being *ek pisteōs eis pistin*, which can be translated literally “*out of faith into faith*.” Pauline interpreters have disagreed greatly regarding the meaning of this phrase, yet if it is viewed in light of the idea that the righteous way of life God desires and commands of all for their own good is brought about by living “out of faith,” then the meaning of this phrase becomes obvious: when people—including both Jews and gentiles—come to know that the righteousness that God demands of all out of love for them is a gracious gift produced by living *out of faith* (*ek pisteōs*), they consequently come *to faith* (*eis pistin*) so as to receive and attain that righteousness.<sup>42</sup> This is the righteousness of which Hab 2:4 speaks when the prophet affirms that the one who is righteous shall live out of faith or that the one who is righteous as a result of faith shall live. As those who are brought to faith as a result of that knowledge come to live out of faith, they

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41. As Smith comments with regard to this passage, “Because it stands in contrast to ‘their own righteousness’, the genitive phrase ‘righteousness of God’ can only be a genitive of origin: it is a righteousness that has its origin with God, the very opposite of self-righteousness through the Law” (*Meaning of Jesus’ Death*, 81). Nevertheless, in Paul’s thought, this righteousness that has its origin in God is not merely a righteous status or standing before God but the righteous way of life that results in that standing.

42. Curiously, this interpretation of Rom 1:17 is not even considered by commentators who survey the common scholarly interpretations of the passage; see, for example, Charles L. Quarles, “From Faith to Faith: A Fresh Examination of the Prepositional Series in Romans 1:17,” *NovT* 45 (2003): 1-21; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 1:99-100; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 176-78.



attain the righteousness of God. Here and elsewhere, Paul specifies that the righteousness of which he speaks is the righteousness *of God* in order to distinguish that righteousness from other forms of righteousness, in particular that which is based on the law alone.

At the same time, it might be said that those Jews who lived according to the law were also living out of faith in the sense that they believed that God had given Israel the law and had commanded his people to live out that belief and to trust in him by obeying that law. For this reason, Paul may have used the phrase *pistis Christou* to make a distinction between the general faith in God that characterized all who believed in the God of Israel and the faith that revolved around Christ as the Son of God.<sup>43</sup> While the faith out of which all were now to live was undoubtedly faith *in* Christ, it was also much more than that. The object of that faith was not merely Christ, but the God who had intended for human beings to be conformed to the image of his Son from the start and to that end had sent his Son in the likeness of human flesh, given him up to death, raised him from the dead, exalted him to his right hand, poured out on believers his Spirit, and established the *ekklēsia* as his body.<sup>44</sup> While Paul does speak of believing *in* Christ (Gal 2:16), for the most part he calls on others to believe not only in Christ but in *all* of the things God has done and will continue to do in and through Christ.

For this reason, the best translation of *pistis Christou* may simply be “Christ-faith.”<sup>45</sup> In that case, it can be understood as a genitive of content. This is in fact how Paul uses the genitive in many other phrases, such as “the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17), “the witness of Christ” (1 Cor 1:6), “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12), “the hope of our Lord Jesus

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43. In the words of Francis Watson, “The ‘faith’ in question pertains to Christ, differentiating it from non-Christian varieties of faith while leaving the precise nature of that pertinence unspecified” (*Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 2nd ed. [London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016], xliii-xliv).

44. See Rom 4:25; 5:5; 8:3, 9, 29, 32; 1 Cor 12:27; Gal 4:4.

45. A growing number of Pauline interpreters seem to be proposing a third alternative to the understandings of *pistis Christou* as either “faith in Christ” (objective genitive) or “the faith(fulness) of Christ” (subjective genitive), often claiming that the genitive *Christou* is best taken as simply referring to the faith that pertains to Christ in some way. See, for example, Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 243-44; Ryan S. Schellenberg, “οἱ πιστεύοντες: An Early Christ-Group Self-Designation and Paul’s Rhetoric of Faith,” *NTS* 65 (2019): 33-42 (40-41); Michael Wolter, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. Robert L. Brawley (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 75-77; Benjamin Schliesser, “‘Christ-faith’ as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23-26): A ‘Third View’ on Πίστις Χριστοῦ,” *JSNT* 38 (2016): 277-300; Garwood P. Anderson, *Paul’s New Perspective: Charting a Soteriological Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 149-50; Gupta, *Paul*, 171-76.

Christ” (1 Thess 1:3), and “the knowledge of Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:8). All of these phrases are clearly objective genitives and refer to the word, witness, revelation, and hope *concerning* Christ that revolves around him as God’s Son. Likewise, “the proclamation (*kērygma*) of Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:25) is clearly the proclamation *concerning* Christ, just as “the gospel of Christ” is the gospel *about* Christ.<sup>46</sup> Of course, such an understanding of these phrases does not exclude the possibility that Paul also had in mind a subjective genitive when he used them, since he no doubt believed that the word, witness, revelation, hope, knowledge, proclamation, and gospel that he shared with the world were the same ones that Christ himself had shared with all in his own lifetime. In fact, part of the gospel proclamation was that Christ had indeed remained faithful and obedient to God throughout his life all the way to his death (Rom 5:19; Phil 2:6–8). For Paul, however, the way in which Christ’s faithfulness and obedience to God all the way to his death have led to the salvation of others is not that others have come to participate in that faithfulness and obedience in some mystical or mysterious fashion or simply through imitation. Rather, that faithfulness and obedience led God to raise Christ and exalt him as Lord so as to bring about through him the *ekklēsia*, in which all are now committed to living under Christ’s lordship in the same faith, faithfulness, love, obedience, and righteousness seen in him.

When Paul speaks of “the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe” in Rom 3:22, he probably has in mind the righteous way of living in conformity with God’s will that is brought about in believers as a result of their faith regarding all that God has done and will continue to do through Christ. God justifies those who are *ek pisteōs Iēsou* (Rom 3:26; Gal 2:16) in the sense that he regards as righteous those who base their lives on that same “Jesus-faith,” which constitutes the source or origin of the new righteous way of living that God graciously brings about in them as a gift.<sup>47</sup> The means by which people are led to live in the way God desires and commands so as to be declared righteous and forgiven by him is thus not their submission to the Mosaic law but their faith concerning Christ as the one in whom all of God’s promises are fulfilled (Gal 2:16; 3:21–22). In Paul’s thought, then, the righteousness of God is brought about through Christ-faith.

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46. See Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 9:13; Gal 1:7; Phil 1:27; 1 Thess 3:2.

47. Thus Wolter, for example, affirms that Paul interpreted “the central mark of Christian identity, ‘Christ-faith,’ as a ‘behavior’ on the basis of which God declares a person *just*” (*Paul*, 396).

### *Justification and God's Judgment*

On the basis of what we have seen in this chapter, Paul does not understand justification in terms of acquittal. When God justifies believers, he does not declare them to be sinless, innocent, or free of guilt but merely acknowledges that they are committed to living in conformity with his will and on that basis overlooks their sins. At the same time, God himself is active to bring about that conformity to his will and righteousness as a gift, and he does so through the faith which he also graciously gives to believers by creating it in them. From beginning to end, their salvation as well as all that God brings about in them is a free gift of God rather than anything they obtain through their own merits or efforts. They are “justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24) in that, through Christ and by pure grace, God redeems them both from their previous way of living and from the condemnation that results from that way of living so as to bring about in them the new life of righteousness that is in accordance with his will. Justified as a result of the life that proceeds from their faith (*ek pisteōs*), they now have peace with God through Christ and obtain access to God and his grace through that faith (Rom 5:1-2). Because this life of righteousness is the work of God in them rather than their own work, they can have full assurance of their salvation as long as they look to God alone to bring about the way of life necessary for them to attain the well-being and wholeness God desires to see in them for their own good. Rather than depending on their own efforts or strength, they put their faith, trust, and confidence solely in God, knowing that because he loves them and desires their salvation he will accomplish in them the transformation necessary to make that salvation a reality.

In Paul's thought, therefore, to be justified is simply to be *declared righteous*. While of course God also brings believers to live righteously and in that sense can be said to *make* them righteous, when Paul speaks of justification, for the most part he has in mind not the process of transformation that takes in place in believers but rather the result of that process, namely, God's acceptance of those who are undergoing that transformation.<sup>48</sup> For the same reason, it is not necessary to use terms such as “rectify,” “rightwise,” or “righteous” as verbs to translate the Greek verb *dikaioun*, since the meaning of this verb is expressed perfectly well by the English verb “to justify” in the sense of “to accept as righteous.”<sup>49</sup>

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48. This point is rightly stressed by Stephen Westerholm: “One is *dikaios* (‘righteous,’ ‘upright’; Gk. *dikaios*) when one does *dikaion*—when, in other words, one lives as one ought and does what one should. To be *dikaioi* (*dikaioi*) is, in effect, to be given the treatment appropriate to one who is *dikaios*. . . .” (*Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 272).

49. On the use of these verbs as replacements for the verb “to justify,” see Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification, and the New Perspective*,

Once it becomes clear that God's gift to believers consists not only of faith and the forgiveness of sins but the righteous way of living that he brings about in them *through* the faith he creates in them, most of the difficulties commonly associated with Paul's teaching that all will be judged on the basis of their works disappear. In accordance with Jewish thought, the reason why Paul maintains that God will judge all by their works is that those works reveal what is in their heart. Paul himself mentions this idea when describing God's judgment. In Rom 2:6-16, where he affirms that God will "repay to each according to one's deeds," he contrasts "those who have sought glory and honor and immortality by persevering in doing what is good" with "those who act out of selfishness and do not obey the truth but instead persist in injustice" (vv. 7-8). If gentiles are able to "do instinctively what the law requires," it is because by nature what the law commands is written on their hearts, conscience, and thoughts (vv. 14-15). According to Paul, God "will judge through Jesus Christ the hidden secrets of all people" (v. 16). Several verses later, Paul adds that it is those Jews who keep the law, live as Jews inwardly, and possess the spiritual circumcision of the heart who obtain commendation from God (Rom 2:27-29). Paul's idea, then, is that what God sees when he looks at the hearts and the works of people makes it evident to him whether they are committed to doing what is good and right in accordance with his will as he has made it known in the law.<sup>50</sup>

Other passages from Paul's epistles reflect the same idea. When he thanks God that the Roman believers have become obedient to the teaching given them, he stresses that they have become "obedient *from the heart*" (Rom 6:17). In Rom 8:27, he speaks of God as "the one who searches the hearts of human beings." Similarly, after alluding to Christ's judging activity and his second coming in 1 Cor 4:3-5, Paul adds that Christ "will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God." In 1 Thess 3:13, he expresses to the believers in Thessalonica his desire that God and the Lord Jesus "strengthen your hearts so that they may be blameless in holiness before God our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones." Here it is not the *behavior* of believers that is blameless but their *heart*. Of course, as Paul also states here, it is God and Christ who graciously give believers such a heart and strengthen it in them. It is therefore not something that believers produce in themselves on their own but rather something produced in them by God and Christ through faith.

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PBM (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 6; E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 505-7; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 249-50.

50. On this point, see Yinger, *Paul*, 158-61, 181, 289-91.

Once again, however, it is important to stress the intrinsic relation between faith, righteousness, and salvation in Paul's thought. The reason why faith enables believers to be righteous and attain the salvation promised by God is that such faith is the cause, origin, basis, and source of the type of life that makes wholeness, well-being, and salvation possible. Such faith *produces* and *generates* all of the different behaviors that Paul exhorts his readers to make their own as its fruit (2 Cor 9:10; Phil 1:11). These behaviors in turn make it possible for believers to experience the righteousness, peace, and joy that Paul associates with God's reign (Rom 14:17). Only those whose lives are characterized by such behavior can experience the well-being and wholeness that will exist in the life to come.

Conversely, when Paul affirms that those who practice the types of behavior he condemns cannot inherit God's reign, it is important to capture his logic.<sup>51</sup> Paul's idea is not simply that those who practice such things *will* not inherit that reign because God will condemn them, but more importantly that they *cannot* inherit that reign because their behavior would make it impossible for them and others to experience the justice, peace, and joy that will characterize that reign. In Paul's thought, the reason that God will condemn those who refuse to submit to his will is not located in his own righteous nature per se but rather in the nature of the world to come: God condemns them, not because his righteous nature does not let him tolerate them on account of their sinfulness and impurity, but rather because the nature of life in the world to come does not allow for the kind of behavior that is contrary to the well-being of all. Paul's idea, therefore, is not so much that salvation depends on God's approval but rather that God's approval of people depends on his seeing in them the way of life that makes their salvation possible.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, just as there is a *reason* why faith saves, for Paul there is also a reason why unbelief prevents people from being saved. Faith in God leads to the righteous way of life necessary for people to live in the type of relation with God and others that will allow them to experience the blessings of the world to come. In contrast, those who do not live out of faith and trust in

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51. See 1 Cor 6:9-10; Rom 1:18, 32; 2:2-4; 8:8; Gal 5:19-21; 6:7-8; 1 Thess 4:3-6.

52. To affirm that in Paul's thought this way of life "makes their salvation possible" is by no means to claim that he believed that it was *impossible* for God to save human beings without Christ or his death, as later Christian theology came to affirm. Like other Jews of his day, Paul would have maintained that nothing is impossible for God. For that reason, the later theological discussions among Christians regarding the necessity of Christ and his death for human salvation would probably have seemed extremely odd to Paul. When Paul states that, by sending his Son, God has accomplished through him what was "impossible for the law" (Rom 8:3-4), there is no reason to suppose that he intended this impossibility in a categorical sense, as if the sending of his Son had made it possible for God to do something that he could not have done otherwise or in some other way.

God will not live the type of life that will allow them to experience those blessings. It is therefore not unbelief in itself that prevents people from being saved and leads God to condemn them, but the life of sin and injustice that results from unbelief. If the world to come is to be characterized by things such as justice, righteousness, joy, peace, well-being, harmony, wholeness, and everlasting bliss, those who insist on living and behaving in ways that destroy these things cannot be admitted into that life. How can love and harmony coexist with hatred and enmity? How can communion and fellowship coexist with strife, envy, bitterness, arrogance, deceitfulness, rivalry, or aggressive and abusive behavior? Or in the words of Paul himself, “What fellowship can there be between righteousness and wickedness? Or how can there be communion between light and darkness? What harmony can exist between Christ and Beliar? Or what can a believer have in common with an unbeliever?” (2 Cor 6:14-15). The idea that Paul expresses here is not that there *should* not be fellowship, communion, and common ground between light and darkness or Christ and Beliar, but rather that these things *cannot* exist together. Where light shines, darkness does not exist. Where there is belief, there cannot be unbelief at the same time. By definition, those who are committed to righteousness cannot also be dedicated to sin and injustice, just as those who are dedicated to sin and injustice cannot by definition be committed to righteousness and justice.

In Paul’s thought, it is this commitment to righteousness that the law demands for the good of all. On this basis he can affirm that “it is not those who merely hear the law who are accepted as righteous by God but those who do the law who will be justified” (Rom 2:13). To do the law is to practice righteousness, and this righteousness constitutes the basis upon which people are justified, even though it is not of course perfect.

As Paul himself states in Phil 3:4-9, where he claims to have lived blamelessly according to the law and speaks of having attained a certain type of righteousness by doing so, there is a kind of righteousness that one can attain through observance of the law, even though this righteousness is not the same as that which comes through Christ-faith (*pistis Christou*).<sup>53</sup> Paul also refers to “the righteousness that results from the law” in Rom 10:5. In fact, in Gal 5:3-4, Paul seems to affirm that such a righteousness can also lead to justification. There he tells the Galatians: “I witness again to all who submit to circumcision that they are under obligation to do the whole law. Those of you who would be justified through the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” It is commonly claimed that, when Paul speaks here of the possibility of being justified by means of the law, he regards such a possibility as existing only in theory. The

53. As Sanders observes with regard to Paul’s thought in Phil 3:6-11, for Paul righteousness by the law “is possible and is a good thing in and of itself. . . .” (*Paul: The Apostle’s Life*, 610).

Galatians may *seek* to be justified by means of the law, but they will not succeed.<sup>54</sup> However, such an interpretation raises difficulties for Paul's affirmation that those who submit to circumcision are under obligation to do the whole law. In light of what we have seen previously, Paul cannot mean that once circumcised they must then observe the rest of the commandments of the Mosaic law in order to be justified and saved, since for Paul such observance is not a condition for the justification and salvation of either Jewish or gentile believers in Christ. It therefore seems more likely that Paul means that, by submitting fully to the observance of the law, including the commandment to be circumcised, the Galatians may attain a certain righteousness that may even enable them to be justified, but that righteousness will be only that which comes from observing the law rather than that which God gives by grace through Christ-faith, namely, the righteousness of God of which Paul speaks. The distinction between these two forms of righteousness would therefore be the same that Paul mentions in passages such as Rom 9:30–10:10 and Phil 3:9, where he recognizes that there is a righteousness that can be attained through the law. In Gal 5:4, Paul's idea may also be that those who submit to circumcision are under obligation to do the whole law, not in order to be declared righteous by God, but rather to gain the acceptance they seek within the Jewish community.

While Paul repeatedly insists that the righteousness that God desires to see in all is brought about through Christ rather than the law, however, nowhere does he ever affirm explicitly that only those who believe in Christ will be saved in the end. In fact, his words in Rom 2:6–16 suggest that there are both Jews and gentiles who will attain the glory, honor, and peace of the life of the age to come simply by doing good, avoiding evil, and obeying the truth rather than wickedness (vv. 7–10). In Paul's thought, people who live in that way can be received into the life of the world to come even if they do not know Christ or believe in him, because their commitment to what is good, right, and just will enable them to share in that life without destroying the well-being of others. Paul may have believed that at the *eschaton* those who had lived in that way independently of faith in Christ will come to acknowledge Christ's lordship and live under that lordship, as Phil 2:9–11 implies. The reason why he proclaims the gospel concerning Christ, therefore, is not that only those who believe in Christ and the gospel can be saved, but that it is through Christ and the gospel that the wholeness, well-being, and righteousness that God desires

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54. Thus Martinus C. de Boer, for example, argues that *hoitines en nomō dikaiousthe* should be translated: "You are seeking to be justified," since in light of Gal 3:11 "Paul clearly does not mean to suggest that the Galatians are in fact being justified in the realm of the law. . . ." (*Galatians: A Commentary*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011], 314).

for all is given in its fullness.<sup>55</sup> As Paul insists in Phil 3:7-9, there are other forms of righteousness in the world, but none can compare to that which comes through Christ. While like many Jews Paul probably believed that all people who live righteously will in the end be saved by God, at the same time he was convinced that those who did not come to faith in Christ would never know in this life the peace, joy, and wholeness that he had found in Christ. In his words, “But whatever things were gain to me, these I now consider loss on account of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, on whose account I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them rubbish in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:7-8).

When Paul rejects the notion that one can be justified by works of the law, therefore, he is not rejecting the idea that people can attain a certain level of righteousness in life by observing the law and on the basis of such a life be declared righteous by God in the end. Rather, what he is rejecting is the idea that simply doing the works that the law prescribes without living in faith makes one righteous and constitutes sufficient grounds for justification. In other words, the mere observance of commandments regarding things such as circumcision, the Sabbath, and the distinctions between pure and impure does not make one righteous or enable one to be justified, even though the observance of those things may help promote a life of righteousness that can lead to one’s justification, as long as such observance is grounded in true faith.

In that case, what Paul denies in passages such as Rom 3:20, 28, and Gal 2:16-17 is not that the observance of the law can help promote a life of righteousness or that such a life can constitute the basis for one’s justification, but rather that simply observing commandments in itself without living out of the faith of which he speaks constitutes righteousness and leads to justification. In other words, one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law because true righteousness is brought about by faith in God rather than by works of the law independently of such faith. On this point, Paul would be in agreement with traditional Jewish teaching rather than contradicting it. There is no reason to suppose that Paul believed that his fellow Jews who did not come to faith in Christ yet were nevertheless committed to practicing justice and righteousness in their daily life as a result of their faith in the God of Israel were not regarded by God as righteous or were condemned by God as unrighteous simply because they did not believe in Jesus. Nor is there any reason to think that Paul would have denied that Jews who did not believe in Jesus could nevertheless believe in

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55. If salvation is understood in this way (see above, Chapter 2), then the desire Paul expresses in Rom 10:1 would be that in the end his fellow Israelites attain through Christ the well-being and wholeness God desires for all. Such would also be the expectation he mentions in Rom 11:26 (cf. 11:14).



God and entrust their lives to him so as to live in ways that pleased him. The same could be said of non-Jews as well. Paul no doubt knew many Jews and non-Jews who lived righteously and would meet the criteria he mentions in Rom 2:6-16 in order to be justified and saved when the end came. When Paul insists that people will be justified through Christ-faith and not by works of the law, therefore, he is not questioning the idea that works of the law are good and can help promote righteous living. Instead, he is simply insisting that gentiles who live out of Christ-faith can be righteous without observing the works that the Mosaic law prescribes, since it is not those works but a life of faith that leads one to live righteously and on that basis be accepted by God as righteous.