JUDGED CLEAN
WHILE YOU'RE
BEING CLEANED

"Justification"? Tell me what it is,

so I can tell others!

A cross-cultural missionary digs deep into key Bible texts on Justification. What is it, and how can we communicate it, "here or there"?

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Introduction—getting the terms right.

PLAINTIFF: “He stole my cow.

JUDGE: “You have been found in possession of a cow that your neighbour alleges is his. What do you have to say?”

ACCUSED: “I have the cow because it’s mine. He’s the thief. He came onto my land to steal my cow, and I stopped him.”

POLICEMAN: “That appears to be the case, your honour. We found a cow pat bearing an imprint matching the right boot of the accused. There is an unusual pattern on the sole.”

JUDGE: “Did you just find the one pat with a pattern?”

> “No, your honour: we also found a pat bearing the imprint of the plaintiff’s protruding nose.”

“Is this the cow?”

> “Yes, Sir.”

“Is this the exhibit?”

> “No Sir: that is not the exhibit I had in mind.”

“Then kindly produce the exhibit! And what on earth is this?”

> “If it please your honour, the cow is producing an exhibit, your honour.”

“Order in the court! The court will adjourn for one week. Bring a mop and bucket!”

THAT NIGHT, IN A POLICE CELL, THE JUDGE'S WIFE TO THE ACCUSED: "I have to tell you, it's not looking good for you, not good at all. The case against you is too strong. You realize that if his honour finds you guilty, you're inside for two years!"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"I think both you and I know that you stole the cow."

"That's true, Ma'am. It was a birthday present for my little girl, Patty. She goes to pre-school with your girl, Pearl."

"Then look, here's what we'll do. The case is adjourned for one week. My husband and I have set up a charitable fund to help poor people with legal costs. I want you to arrange for $500 to be brought to me as a donation to the charity. Do we understand each other?"

"Yes. Perfectly, Ma'am!"

ONE WEEK LATER.

JUDGE: "You heard what Constable Pat had to say concerning the cow pat pattern?"

ACCUSED: Yes, your honour."

"What have you to say for yourself?"

"Sir, my boots went missing one week before he went to his old friend, Policeman Pat. This is a set-up!"

"Constable?"

"With respect, your honour, the accused did not come to us and report the loss, Sir."

"My dear Constable, have you never lost your boots?"

"Yes Sir; last year."

"Did you fill out a loss report?"

"No Sir."

JUDGE: "Case dismissed! I find the accused 'Not guilty'! The cow is the property of the accused. The plaintiff will pay the court cleaning costs and do 100 hours community service."

Corrupt courts were around in the time of the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 5:20-23
Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!
21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
and shrewd in their own sight!
22 Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine,
and valiant men in mixing strong drink,
23 who acquit the guilty for a bribe,
and deprive the innocent of his right!

God was grieved by the evils among his people, whom he loved, including injustice in the courts. In 5:23, Isaiah's "write-up" on such cases—or God's write-up through him—uses interesting language, though it is tamed a little in the version above (ESVUK). The Authorized Version translates the Hebrew more directly, and it sounds a little odd. It says of the crooked judges that they "justify the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!"

"To justify", here at least, is the action of the judge when he judges someone to be "righteous". "Righteousness" is "innocence". It is what the judge judges you to have when he "justifies" you. It is the legal standing of someone who is found to have obeyed the law.

"Righteousness", here, is "innocence";
"to be justified" is "to be judged innocent".

For a bribe, a corrupt judge can judge a "wicked" person to be "righteous" (innocent). In our court scene, the judge "justified" the thief. What did he do to the poor farmer who really owned the cow? He took his "righteousness" (innocence) away from him and gave it to the thief. (He also took away his cow and gave it to the thief!)

Does God do that?

What sort of a judge is God? Does he ever let wicked people off? Clearly the God of Isaiah 5:23 does not take bribes! But can he find disobedient people innocent?

There was a major translation around in the time of Jesus and Paul that put the Old Testament into everyday Greek. This was still the "ordinary" Greek that Paul used. This translation, the Septuagint, was done in North Africa by a large team of Greek-speaking Jews. It took two or three centuries before it was completed—not long before Jesus was born. It is very interesting to see how the Greek words used in Isaiah 5:23 for "justify" and "righteousness" are used in the Greek New Testament—for example in Romans 4:1-5.

Does God ever judge wicked or ungodly people to have this same "righteousness" (*dikaiosunḗ*)? Does he ever give law-breakers the judgment that only law-keepers deserve? Romans 4:1-5 answers, "Yes, indeed: he does!" Paul says that the person whom God judges to have "righteousness" is the one who believes (or trusts) a Judge "who justifies the wicked" (v5)! And the Judge he has in mind is clearly God. How can this be? How can God possibly judge wicked people to be "righteous"? And *which* wicked people does he judge "righteous"?

To answer these questions, we will begin here in Romans with what is perhaps the clearest explanation of the gospel in the whole Bible. We are not likely to come across the word, "righteous", in the newspaper or on TV—except when we are talking about "holier-than-thou" people who are "self-righteous". Our aim in this book is to understand the concepts behind the words such as "righteousness" and

"justify", through careful reading of some key Bible passages, so that you, as a missionary, can translate them into the terms used in your target culture. And that might be Maasai cattlemen, or Kiwi farmers in "the uttermost parts of the earth", or Presbyterians and Pentecostals, the elderly, the post-moderns, or your own children, back home in "Jerusalem".

The cross-cultural missionary must always be on the lookout for cultural, religious or language blockers, filters that can interfere with the communication of the gospel. For example, in East Africa, many of the pastors I meet struggle with the notion of a sacrifice that covers future sin in advance. Perhaps it applies in many cultures where those who first passed down the Christian message to the next generation were converts from animistic thinking. The more obvious forms of *syncretism* (where "Christianity" is merely part of a "brew" of different religions put into one pot) may be strongly frowned upon by these people—for example, the notion of a Christian visiting the traditional doctor who consults the dead to get a diagnosis of his condition. And yet some baggage from pre-Christian thinking may have been passed down through generations of churchgoers, too.

I love to talk with the old men in rural Tanzania about what they think happens when the cultural leaders go into the bush to offer sacrifices. In African Traditional Religion (ATR), although the offerings to the spirits of the ancestors may be offered with a view to future blessing (success in hunting, for example), as a covering for offences against the spirits, they always (from what I have learnt so far) look back to prior

offences. People consistently tell me they have never heard of a sacrifice that is so pleasing to "the Fathers" that it even covers future offences in advance. This may help to explain why so many East African pastors—even in "evangelical" churches—hold to a very temporary "salvation" that you forfeit by knowingly sinning and regain by repenting. We, as missionaries, might come along with all the right teaching from Hebrews about the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, and people may say, "Amen! Praise the Lord! Thankyou, Pastor!", but it has gone straight over their heads. The concept of cover for the future is too counter-cultural; it is weird.

There can be many such filters between what the missionary evangelist intends to say and what his audience effectively hears. How can we find out if our message has penetrated? We have to seek for "feed-back" to see what our teaching looks like from the other side of the filters. That requires an interactive approach that involves asking questions of our audience. The great, world-wide filter in the path of the gospel, of course, is the delusion of the unregenerate person that he has the wherewithal to contribute something to the

God's sovereignty is no excuse for sloppy communication on our part.

work of his salvation.

Ultimately, getting through the universal anti-grace filters requires a regenerating miracle of God. The word brings new

life where the 'wind' chooses to 'blow'. But the sovereignty of God is no excuse for sloppy communication on our part. However, before we get to such communication challenges, the very first reason our audience may not hear the gospel from us could be that we, the evangelists, are not clear about it ourselves. The "evangelists" may not *accurately* understand the evangel. The aim of this book is to assist the missionary to get his message straight, so that he can then seek to effectively communicate it cross-culturally.

It would be quite wrong to write a book such as this, without some response to the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP) writers. Probably, Third World evangelists are still much more likely to encounter the views of Roman Catholicism, which are given more attention here, although the overlap with NPP thinking is not insignificant. Much has been written by others, challenging the synergistic[1] "justification" characteristic of NPP writers. One key task of this book is to study the Scriptures themselves on "works of law", which takes us to the very root of the NPP's questioning of what some call the Lutheran view of justification. Whatever "works of law" might mean to some Second Temple Jews, or even to some of Paul's Galatian opponents, the question for Romans remains, what does it mean to Paul's readers in Rome, and to Paul, himself, especially in Romans 3:28?

As you will see from the Contents pages, we look firstly at Paul's sobering teaching on God's universal judgment, establishing why we need to be justified by grace. Beginning

[1] i.e., where God and man work on it together.

with Romans, which is generally agreed to give us the Bible's clearest teaching on the subject, we then look at justification itself, the good news of the lasting cleanness of the believer in God's court. Next, we consider the fruit of this justification in the progressive cleaning of the believer's heart. Washed by Christ's sacrificial death, he is even now judged clean, while being steadily washed inwardly by God's Spirit. We then move on to some important implications of justification through faith alone, for Christian evangelism, including evangelism among people of other religions, and for Christian fellowship. For example, we consider the symbolic washing that Jesus left us, and the eating and drinking, symbolic of justification through his atoning death, and we ask if, the way many churches are doing the Lord's Supper today, we are clarifying justification or obscuring it.

Finally, we return to Romans 8, John 6 and 10, for a more detailed study of God's mercy in choosing to clean *some* of us, making clear that it is not because he sees merit in any of us. That brings us to the climax, Romans 8:30 and John 6:54. There is painful training here for God's children, but there is no such thing as temporary justification, or being our Father's child today and rejected by him tomorrow:

"… and (those) whom he justified these he also glorified."
"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

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A. Judged clean …

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1. Justification and the missionary's message.

Romans 1:16-17
16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The gospel is simply shocking! It's great news, but not exactly what most Jews expected. All the same, Paul is not embarrassed about broadcasting it. Before he gets to Romans 1:16, he has already told us that "the gospel of God" announces the arrival of the long-promised ruler, descended from King David, and a man who is also the "Son of God"! That is made plain by the Holy Spirit's powerful act of raising him from being dead. Now, in 1:16, Paul describes God's good message, "the gospel", as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes it (and "everyone" means not only Jews, but other ethnic groups as well—Gentiles). In v17, he focusses on what it is that makes this message powerful—and at this point, especially, all serious evangelists and missionaries should prick up their ears. The power of God for salvation, here, is not the mood-music or the mixer, or manipulative, mind-bending techniques, but the message.

What message? What is the doctrine he immediately highlights? In "it" ("the gospel", of v16) we get the news of a "righteousness" that answers the heart-cry of people of all tribes for "salvation". He is not likely to be talking about God's righteous character, since that would merely be announcing what we already know, that our Judge is just—which is most certainly *not* good news when you are on the wrong side of the law—unless, perhaps, you are merely thinking about other sinners, your enemies, getting their just desserts! Besides, how could news of God's just character be news that I, an offender, would "live" (v17)? No, Paul has something else in mind. This "righteousness" addresses the deep longing of the despairing heart to be found with a favourable judgment from God, the judgment that conveys life. The gospel, in 1:16-17, is the news of a "righteousness" that absolutely entitles you to life, but which nevertheless comes simply by "faith"—and nothing *but* faith (He will make this clear again in 3:28): "The one who by faith is righteous shall live." (For this translation, see the ESVUK margin here and with Galatians 3:11). By faith a person receives the "righteousness", or innocence, required for eternal life.

From 1:18, Paul begins a long section showing how the universal human condition is so bad that a favourable judgment cannot possibly be ours on the grounds of our obedience. Since "righteousness" is required for "life", and yet no-one is "righteous" (Jews included), and since the more you genuinely try to be "righteous" the more it drives you to despair, what hope is there for anyone to find life? That sad section ends in 3:20. In 3:21, he comes back to the gospel of 1:16-17: "But now …"

2. That was my story.

That sad story was mine. Until I was nineteen, I saw myself as “a good boy”, especially compared to those who used to rough me up. Being skinny and weak I was good target practice for any kid who had something to prove. At first, I was probably rather self-righteous, but as I learned more of God’s good commandments, I became more troubled. The only “help” I got from church was to learn what “good” really meant. Church was “Good” school. I knew that, in the end, I had to be as good, as loving and self-giving, as Jesus was when he died for us, if I were ever to have eternal life. That was the model I had to live up to. I had to be as good as King Jesus. I knew that he was somehow forgiving, and I used to think that what the minister did in the communion service helped me to be forgiven, but I wondered what would happen to me if I sinned and died before next Sunday. I was terribly religious, but I was struggling in vain to find peace with God.

I used to listen intently to sermons, and was so impressed by the ultimately good person, the minister, that I longed to be one, myself. I was a ‘server’, choir leader and youth leader. I’d had my baptism ‘confirmed’, and eventually was accepted to go for training for my dream job—while secretly I was full of doubt. Acceptance with God was elusive, the conditions for life plainly impossible. Looking back, in spite of all the sermons I had listened to intently, I did not hear the “But now…” of Romans 3:21ff.

3. The terms of God's final judgment —Romans 2:1-3:20

Hell is 100% just.

The glorious moral cleanness of God, and the unspeakable filth of disobedience is the reason any one of us deserves hell. And yet, buried in our natural mindset, the concept of condemnation and hell is unthinkable madness to us. The horror of its ongoing, eternal nature is not tamed for us even if we are told that hell's victims are continuously angry and unrepentant, "gnashing" their teeth at God. Who is he, to expect my full obedience to laws that I am so acclimatised to defying? But why must he excuse me for burying my head in the sand? Any discussion of justification must begin here, with the fact that God is a just Judge.

Let's begin by looking in detail into Romans 2 & 3, focussing on what God does in judgment, to see whether justification, here, is a judicial *decision* or a broader action, a *process* on which a later decision will hang.

1. 2:1-3—A judgment for sinners, based on what they do.

In Romans 2:1, "you judge" is *krineis*. Although *krino* can be a favourable or unfavourable judging, here it has the same meaning as "you condemn" (*katakrineis*). In 2:2-3, the "judgment" (*krima*) of God is cast on those "doing

(*prassontas*) such things": it is a judicial response to what people *do* (*poiōn*). Later, we see that it is also in response to what people *are* or how they *think*—e.g., defying the truth out of "self-interest" (or selfish ambition—2:8). Note that for sinners it is a negative judgment to "escape" from (2:3).

2. 2:3-5—A future judgment.

Although God acts in judgment even now (1:18ff), the judgment of 2:5-13 is his final (or "eschatological") judgment.

- He asks the man who hypocritically condemns others for what he himself does, "… do you think … you *will* escape the judgment (*krima*) of God?" (2:3).

- Before the judgment comes, the Judge is showing "*patience*" which should lead people to repentance. Notice that the real call for repentance, and the implied offer of mercy, does nothing to lessen or compromise the demand for absolute obedience. Mercy is relevant only where punishment is merited.

- He warns the hard-hearted, unrepentant man, who despises (2:4) this kind patience of the Judge, "… you are *storing up* wrath for yourself" (2:5).

- This judgment is at *a particular point in time* in the future, "the day of wrath" (2:5).

3. 2:5-6—It will be according to "truth" and "works".

On that day God's *right* judgment (*dikaiokrisias*) will be unveiled (2:5): His decision, in each case, will be the right one: it will be according to *truth* (*kata alētheian*, 2:2), and according to the each person's "works" (*ta erga*, 2:6).

4. 2:7-10—All people will be in two camps.

At that point in time, on that day, all people will appear divided into *two camps.* He "will give" (*apodōsei*) favourable and unfavourable verdicts:

- A favourable verdict will convey "eternal life" to those found with "endurance of good work" (*hypomonēn* ***ergou*** *agathou*—2:7). Glory, honour and peace will be granted to *everyone* "working good" (*ergazomenō agathon*—2:10), and the Judge will be impartial—at least as to whether people are Jewish or Greek, but of course partial to those found with consistently good works. This good working is clearly enduring, continuing. The participle, "working" (*ergazomeno*), is a present participle, unlike "will give"; the life that the Judge will give on that day is as lasting as the age to come, thus making his judgment one that *will not be reversed*. The person on the receiving end of a favourable verdict will have "*zōēn*

aiōnion", "eternal life", the very life pertaining to the unending age to come.

- On the other side, the Judge will pass an unfavourable judgment, conveying **"**wrath and anger", "tribulation" and "distress", on *every* soul "working evil" (*katergazomenou to kakon*—2:8-9), again without discrimination in favour of Jews. Again, although the "working" is a continuing and ongoing activity, the judicial response is decisive. In 2:12, "they will be judged" (*krithēsontai*). As we saw, it will be a day of "wrath" (*orgēs*), which is God's steady, controlled, and holy anger.

- We have seen that the judgment will be according to works and the truth. In 2:8, "unrighteousness" (*adikia*) relates to how one treats "the truth" (*tē alētheia*), with an unfavourable verdict being delivered to those "disobeying" (*apeithousi*—"refusing to be persuaded by") the truth, and

- instead, "being persuaded about unrighteousness".

5. 2:12-13—The meaning of "will be justified" in 2:13.

In 2:12-13, there are two broad groups of people:

- the first group (v12) "sinned" (*hēmarton*), and they, in turn, comprise two sub-groups, those who sinned

"*anomōs*" (out of the law) and those who sinned "*en nomou*" (in the law);

- the second group (v13) are "the doers of the law" (*hoi poiētai nomou*), in contrast to those who are merely "the hearers of the law" (*hoi akroatai*).

The first of the two sub-groups in v12 "will be judged" (*krithesontai*) for their sin, and the second will meet utter ruin (*apolountai*) for theirs.

By contrast, the *opposite judgment*, a favourable judgment, awaits those who are "righteous before God" ("*dikaioi para tō Theō*"): they "will be justified" ("*dikaiōthēsontai*"). What does this mean? In the context of the great judgment, the point is that the doers of the law will be *found to be* doers of the law. Such people do not need a character transformation to make them *become* doers of the law, and the word for, "will be justified", cannot here carry that meaning, so often given it by Roman Catholics. The Judge will do with them what he does to people who are already doers of the law: he will acquit them. V13, even in the New Jerusalem Bible preferred by many Roman Catholics, reads ...

> For the ones that God will justify are not those who have heard the Law but those who have kept the Law.

The NJB uses the active, "will justify", where the Greek verb is passive ("will be justified"). But the meaning is clear: this action of the Judge is not the process of changing sinners into

law-keepers. It is the action of judging them to be law-keepers.

As noted earlier, "will be justified" stands opposite to "will be judged" (*krithēsontai*) in v12, where sinners will be judged guilty—i.e., condemned. Now, he explains who it is who will *not* be condemned, "the doers of law". That is, in the judgment of vv12-13, not the hearers of the law but the doers of the law will be found righteous or innocent. Righteousness, here, is innocence, the *judicial standing* that qualifies a person for eternal life (2:7).

We have already noted that the judgment "on the day" will be a "righteous judgment" (2:5), "according to truth" (2:2). Each (*hekastō*) will be given his judgment "according to works" (2:6) or doing (2:2-3). But working or doing *what*? Now in v13, we learn that it is according to the working or doing of "the law". It is "the doers of the law" (or law-keepers—*poiētai nomou*) who will receive a favourable judgment. If people are judged, according to their works, whether "good" (*to agathon*) or "evil" (*to kakon*), to be (or not to be) doers of the law, the works they "work" or "do" must be works of *moral* law.

6. 2:14-16—Those "outside the law" are not *right* outside it.

In vv14-16, in further spelling out the terms of the judgment, Paul presents, for the sake of argument, the scenario of people without access to the written law, nevertheless "doing" the "law" that is in their hearts from birth. So,

whereas Jews will be judged "by the law" that is written large for them, others will be judged by the law that is available to them in their hearts (2:15).

7. 2:17-24—Moral Law.

Now Paul addresses the sheer hypocrisy of boastful Jews who rely on their law-keeping for their secure standing with God, and who proudly parade their knowledge of his will. Although they are so "instructed from the law" and are so patronizing with their guidance to "the blind", their light to those "in darkness", their instruction of "the foolish" and "the children", they still don't teach themselves. For all their boasting in the law, they blaspheme the name of God by breaking the law they preach—e.g., the laws on stealing, adultery, and idolatry (*moral* law).

He then explains what this means for their supposed circumcision. Through the lens of their disobedience, it has become uncircumcision. And it would be vice versa for Gentiles who "kept" the law (or "were to keep" it—this is hypothetical). They are still physically uncircumcised, but looked at through the lens of their obedience, they would present as circumcised.

Clearly, circumcision and uncircumcision are not identical, but one has taken the place of the other. In v25, circumcision is no longer circumcision, but "has become uncircumcision"; in v26, uncircumcision "will be counted to circumcision" (*eis peritomēn logisthēsetai*).

This Gentile's obedience will show up and "condemn" the disobedience of the person who calls himself a Jew. In fact, who is the real Jew? Real circumcision is a matter of the heart.

8. 3:1-8—God, justified by men.

In 3:1-8, there is a short discussion of the advantages of being a Jew, of the faithfulness of God despite the unfaithfulness of some Jews, and a brief defence of God's right to bring his wrath on them. Their sin in fact enhances his glory—despite the mocking jibes this brings from Paul's enemies.

In contrast to the Romans 2:13 justification of men by God, Romans 3:4 speaks of the justification of God by men. The same verb is used in both places. Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4, "… that *you might be justified* (*dikaiōthēs*), in your words". He anticipates a possible jibe, that the unfaithfulness of some of the Jews calls into question God's faithfulness to his promises. So, God himself is in the dock, here, and his faithfulness (3:3), truthfulness (3:4) and righteousness (3:5)—the truth, reliability, or justice of his words—is vindicated.

The point of the quotation from David is that God would be *recognized to be right* and just and true in his judging (or, possibly, in his being judged). His being *justified* here means that he is recognized as "in the clear". It is not that he is *changed into* being a good God. Here, again, justification is a judgment, and not a cleansing process.

In 3:4, the subjects of the recognizing or justifying action are hypothetical scrutinizers, whereas in 2:13 the subject of the justifying is God himself on the day of wrath, recognizing the doers of the law to be just that—doers of the law, obedient, and therefore righteous (innocent). However, in both cases the justifying is *a judgment or recognition* of the conformity of the one assessed to what is true or right. It is not *a process of changing him into being righteous* or just or truthful.

9. 3:9-10—Sin is universal.

In 3:9-19, sin is universal. In 2:5-13, Paul had listed the moral requirements for a favourable judgment on the day of wrath, as against the opposite behaviour ("have sinned"—2:12) incurring the opposite judgment. With their impenitent hearts they have stored up wrath for themselves on that day (2:5). Now, he reveals that those who have sinned are all of us, Jews included: "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin" (3:9). Who of us has the righteousness required for eternal life in 2:13? No-one (3:10).

10. 3:10-19—Who is so evil? What the Scriptures testify.

In a series of quotes from the Jews' own Scriptures (lest they should have read his earlier sad picture of man, in 1:18ff, as applying to Gentiles only), the Apostle gives a list of evils found universally, including among Jews.

Seeking for God is replaced by turning aside from him, and the complete absence of worth and of doing good (as

required in 2:7 and 2:10 for eternal life). He moves down a list to sins involving misuse of the mouth (deceit, cursing, bitterness) and the feet (walking in paths of ruin, misery, and conflict), to the utter absence of fear of God. In terms of 2:13, this places all men on the wrong side of the law and hence on the wrong side of the Judge.

In the first 19 verses of chapter 3, all the lawlessness mentioned relates to the *moral law only*, to …

- not understanding or seeking God (11),
- turning away from God (12),
- becoming worthless and not doing good (12),
- evil from their …

    (1) throats (that are "opened graves"—13),
    (2) tongues (with their tongues they "keep practising deceit"—13),
    (3) lips and mouth ("full of cursing and bitterness"—13-14),
    (4) feet (bloodshed, having "ruin and misery in their paths", not knowing "the path of peace"—15-17), and
    (5) eyes (no fear of God before their eyes—18).

These things apply not only to non-Jews but to Jews, who "have the oracles of God" (3:2): this list of evils is what "has been written" (3:10) in *their* Scriptures and applies to *them*. Paul is listing these evils to spell out his charge that Greeks *and* Jews are "*all* (*pas*) under sin" (3:9).

Who is excluded from this list? "None …, not one" (10), "no one, … no one" (11), "not one, not even one" (12)." Who, or

whose mouths, etc., are included? “All, together they”, “their” (x7). This is “none”, or “all”, of whom? Is this only Gentiles? No, “whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that *every mouth* may be stopped…” (19).

11. In 3:19-20, “works of law” must be works of moral law.

In 3:19 and 20, the same “law” both exposes sin and stops every mouth. In 3:19, when the law speaks, those who are “under the law” should not look away from themselves to others, as if the preceding parade of moral lawlessness did not apply to them. The law speaks “so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world held accountable to God”.

Verse 20 explains why the law has this effect: “… since through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” The law in both verses must be the same sin-exposing law. If it stops the mouth of anyone pleading, claiming or boasting in his obedience, and brings a person knowledge of *sin*, then (1) moral law cannot be excluded from “law” in either verse, and (2) works of moral law cannot be excluded from “works of law” in 3:20 (and hence 3:28).

12. The problem with the works of the law is that no-one does them.

The reason no-one will be justified “by works of the law” in 3:20 is the same reason no-one *is* righteous in 3:10ff, which is that no-one *“does good”.* The reason why, in 3:20, “no flesh”

will be justified in God's sight by works of the law, is not some moral problem with "works of the law", but that, as the "writings" given to the Jews testify, they too—not only Greeks and other nations—are "under sin": "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written …" (3:9-10).

After all, in Psalm 14:1-3, which Paul appears to have in mind in vv10-12, we are told what God sees as he "looks down from heaven on the children of man".[2] Note also how Paul's non-existent "righteous" in Romans 3:10, are in this, his source document, non-existent doers of *good* (Ps.14:1 and 3), where doing "*good*" is contrasted with "*abominable works*". *The list of evils from the Jews' own Scriptures consigns "the whole world" to being under sin*, and *this* is the reason that "no flesh"—i.e., including those "under the law"—will be justified in God's sight "by works of the law" in v20.

13. "Works of the law" identified.

The law that says, "… no-one is righteous", in vv9 and 10, is moral law and is the same law as that which "stops every mouth" in vv19. The law speaks "so that *every (pan) mouth* might be stopped and *all (pas) the world* be under judgment before God" (19)—i.e., all Jews, too, and not just Gentiles,

[2] We should also not read these citations as saying that all people are always as evil as they could possibly be. In chapter 1, he speaks of God as "giving up" people to their impurity (1:24), their passions (26), or a debased mind (28), which implies his prior restraining of them. In addition, we should not forget that what God sees is not just overt evil, but its seeds in the hearts of men.

are left speechless by the law. With every mouth so polluted, every mouth when called on to plead its case before the Judge will be stopped (3:19). Judged by God's good moral will and standards, we all stand culpable, Greeks *and* Jews. Put one way (3:19), "the whole world" (*pas ho kosmos*) is under condemnation as moral-law breakers.

Put another way (3:20), "no flesh" (*ou … pasa sarx*) "will be justified" (*dikaiōthēsetai*, future indicative passive) "out of works of the law" (*ergōn nomou*). In v20, by "works of the law" (the law that stops every mouth), "no flesh can be justified, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin." "The law" that exposes sin is the same moral "law" as in 20a. Hence, "works of (the) law" are the works commanded by the same moral law.

There is no basis in the text for treating "the law" flouted in vv11-18 as a positive (which it is) while pinning a negative, legalistic, nationalistic, or unspiritual label on "works of law" in v20. "Works of law" cannot be works of a Jews-only law, any more than vv9-18 apply to Jews only. The "works" of v20 must be works of the same law as that in v19. "The law", in v19, does the same as "works of law", in v20.

14. If "works of the law" meant anything else, 3:20 would not follow from 3:9-19.

The law that stops every mouth (19) must be the *moral* law that is universally disobeyed in 3:10-18. It is the law that condemns the "sin" of vv10-18, the absence of goodness, the not seeking God, the deception, cursing, bitterness and

peace-destroying, with no fear of God. If "works of law" in 3:20 did not mean the moral works commanded by God, then 3:20 would not logically follow from this long list of *only* moral lawlessness leading up to it. This is problematical for those who treat "works of the law", in 3:20, 28, as not including genuine works of moral obedience.[3]

To summarize:

According to the law, a man is justified by works of the law, but no-one abides in the works of the law. Therefore, no-one, neither Gentile nor Jew, will be justified by works of the law. The problem is not some evil attitude implicit in "works of the law" (which would introduce a novel thought from outside the text); the problem is that no-one measures up to the good "works of the law". Judged "according to works" (2:6), there are no "doers of the law", who are "righteous *in his sight*" (2:13, ESVUK—literally, "righteous alongside God"), or who can be "justified *in his sight*" (*enōpion*, 3:20).

Now, in 3:19-20, the deadly reality is that, on the grounds of their "works of (the) law", no flesh "will be justified". In other words, there are no "doers of the law". No-one is righteous, no-one is a law-keeper; on the day of wrath no-one will have so done or "worked" the law's requirements that it will win him recognition by the Judge as innocent. The dismal state of our works leaves us all "under sin". The question now is that

[3] Commonly, this is Roman Catholic apologists and those Protestants of the "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP) school, notably James Dunn and Tom Wright.

being the case, what hope is there that any of us might finally be judged, “A doer of the law”, and hence, “righteous”, as is required for eternal life (2:7)? What hope is there that any law-breakers might be given this positive “life” verdict?

But first, let’s be sure: this Judge will never be at peace with the *unpunished* disobedient.

4. By works of God's law, no-one is judged innocent

Leviticus 18:4-5
4 You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. 5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

Romans 10:4-5
4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.5 For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

Galatians3:12
12 But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

From Romans 2:13 (and Galatians 3:12, also) it appears that Paul has Leviticus 18:4-5 in mind when he refers there to the doers of "the law". To be justified is to be judged to have the cleanness of one who has followed, kept, walked-in, done and lived-by, what God commands. It is to be judged to have no moral debt to God—no debt to his holy will. This is clear from Romans 10:5, where Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 while claiming that it concerns "the righteousness that is based on the law." To be granted life is itself a judicial sentence handed down to the law-keeper. If a person does the commands of the law, he will live by them.

Leviticus 19:9-19, especially v18 …
18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

Luke 10:25-28, especially v28 …
28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

Deuteronomy 6: 1-25, especially vv4-5 …
4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.
5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

and vv24-25 …
24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. 25 And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.'

Deuteronomy 11:13 …
13 "And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, …"

“Do this and you will live?” Then what hope is there?

Coming back to Romans 2:13, the obedience required to merit the judgment, “Fit for life”, is an obedience that no-one has (3:10ff). More than that, as we saw earlier, seriously seeking for life by being obedient enough has the opposite effect—a depressing outcome. It brings to the surface our innate hostility to God and his will (19, 20).

In that case, *what hope is there for any of us to have eternal life?* Are all of us hopelessly lost? Or is there, perhaps, another way for us to get the judgment we need in order to live?

5. “But now”

Romans 3:21-26 …
21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

“But now” (3:21), since no flesh can be judged “righteous” if judged “according to works” (2:6) or “by works of the law”, since “all have sinned” (3:23), God has provided a way for a sinful man to be judged “righteous”, and to be so judged “apart from the law” (3:21). He has provided a way for a law-breaker to be judged compliant with the law, but to be so judged apart from his compliance with the law. God himself has graciously provided a Redeemer, who paid our debt to the law. He paid off the guilt, or debt of punishment, of all repentant law-breakers who trust him for redemption (3:24-25). God himself provided in him a redemptive Sacrifice (25).

God, in him, purchased our guilt-free, debt-free, standing in the eyes of the law—i.e., our righteousness. He did so at the unspeakable cost of Christ's anger-diverting blood, his death. Entirely as a gift to us, God purchased our utter innocence. Through "faith in Jesus" (22), a man is justified "apart from works of the law" (28). This righteousness is thus "of God" (1:17), and "apart from law" (3:21), while yet upholding the law (3:31). It is provided *apart from our obedience*, but by the sinless Christ's redeeming Sacrifice for our disobedience, which fully satisfies the law's requirements.

Remember 1:16-17:

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *a righteousness of God is revealed, from faith to faith*, as it is written, "The one who by faith is righteous shall live" (ESVUK—margin reading for 17b).

Verses 1:18 to 3:20 explain why we need the gospel. We need it because we need righteousness or innocence. The problem is universal defiance of God, and the hopelessness (and helplessness) of lawless people like us ever meeting God's just terms of judgment: "For by works of the law no

human being will be justified [judged innocent] in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." The "righteousness", or innocence, required for eternal life (2:6-13) is way beyond the reach of defiant rebels like us, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles (3:9-18). No-one is righteous. These verses stand in a parenthesis of despair between 1:17 and

3:21, from where Paul begins to explain God's radical solution—a Redeemer.

More on Redemption
—how a favourable judgment was bought for me.

"*But now* (*Nuni de*), apart from law, a righteousness from/of God has been revealed" (3:21—lit.). It is not altogether new, if you look at the *writings* of "the law" and "the prophets". It is "a righteousness of God" which is *through faith in Jesus*, the Messiah, for all believers without distinction (3:22). Recall the *revealed* "righteousness of God", of 1:16-17, that is "from faith". This is it. Since all have sinned (3:23—cf. 3:9), and come short of the endurance in good working that would bring them righteousness and glory (cf.2:7), they are now judged righteous "as a gift (*dōrean*), by his grace (*tē autou chariti*), through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus" (3:24). Note also "the righteousness of/from God" of Philippians 3:9, which stands opposed to "my own righteousness", and also "(the) righteousness of God" of 2 Corinthians 5:21, that we become "in him", as decisively as he was made sin for us (that was no long process).

This "redemption" of Romans 3 recalls Mark 10:45, where Jesus' spoke of his death as a ransom payment, or Galatians 3:10-13, where Paul says the same and spells it out more: the curse God's law warns of, the curse for disobedience, was inflicted upon Christ when he was hanged on a "tree" (cf. Acts 5:30), so that we, by faith, might be redeemed from it. And here, in Romans 3:24-25, he explains that there is redemption "in Christ Jesus", whom God put forward as a

propitiation (*hilastērion*) by his blood, to be received by faith (3:25). To be redeemed, here, is not merely to be set free, but to be set free through the payment of a ransom demand. But what was the payment?

Propitiation
—a favourable judgment on me was obtained by an act propitiating God's anger—turning it away from me.

God judges in favour of the disobedient—he "justifies" them—on the grounds of a colossal payment—a Sacrifice—that God has presented to God! That Sacrifice is Christ, whose death "propitiates" the Judge. Now that is slightly old English, and we *have* to explain it! Propitiating someone simply means turning away his anger and disfavour and winning his favour towards you (making him "propitious" to you). What Paul is saying in Romans 3:25 is that the killing of the Sacrifice (Christ), the shedding of his blood, has purchased the Judge's favour. God cannot just forgive people with a mere wave of the hand. That would not be the action of a just judge. It is only at extreme cost to himself that he forgives me. Justice has had to be done for my offensiveness.

The word, *hilastērion*, is used in the Septuagint for the golden lid or cover of the holy box, the ark of the covenant. This was originally found in the "most holy place" in the old "tent of meeting" (which the Israelites camped around during their desert wanderings), and later in Solomon's temple. The ark had the two big stone blocks inside with God's commandments etched on them. Also in the box were two powerful reminders that God's words must be taken seriously—the pot of manna and Aaron's staff that sprouted.

God's commands must be absolutely obeyed. This is the clear message of the instantaneous deaths of those who treated the law-box improperly in 1 Samuel 6 and 2 Samuel 6. When God speaks, he is deadly serious.

Above the box with its golden lid was a glorious cloud with a brightness that must have reminded the priest of Mt Sinai and the awesome glory of the Giver of those two law blocks. This symbolized that God was present at the centre of the camp of his people, wherever they were. He is present, seated in judgment, judging according to his holy commandments. Anything in any way out of line with the glorious purity of God and his law could not survive, even for a moment, that holy Presence. If the high priest came near casually, the purity of the law would expose the arrogant filth of his culpable lawlessness, and he would be struck dead in an instant. If the Lord, in his judging, were seated straight on the law, no law-breaker could stand in his presence. By breaking the law, the sinner has forfeited his life.

Once each year, on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16), the high priest sprinkled blood onto the lid of this box. The blood represented a punitive death, the punishing of a sinless life in place of lives forfeited by sin. It had to be a "clean" life. An injured or broken victim would not do. The priest himself had to be symbolically dressed in clean garments—even his under-clothes—and these had to be put on his washed body. Even then he had to enter with fragrant smoke to cover the lid (and him!) so that he would not die before he did the next thing, which was to apply blood to the lid. As he entered the inner room through the large curtain, he came not just with

the smoke, but also with a bowl of blood from a bull—a perfect, unblemished bull. It is the golden lid with this blood on it that is called the *hilasterion*, something that *propitiates*, or turns away, anger—or it can mean the place where that happens. It means something that "atones for offense" or makes up for it.

The holy Judge now saw the law-breaker against not just the clean, perfect law—which would have been the man's instantaneous death—but against the law covered by, or satisfied by, the blood, representing the due punishment for its infringement by the man. We might even say, the Judge was now 'seated' in judgment not directly on the law demanding just retribution for the offence, but on the law with that demand fulfilled—the infringement already punished in full. The punishment, symbolized by the death of the animal (whose perfection spoke of guiltlessness), symbolically made the Judge perfectly propitious or favourable toward the high priest.

Having "made atonement" in this way for his own sin (and that of his family) by the blood of the clean bull, the priest, now clean, would return on behalf of the people, bringing the blood of a clean goat. There are more details given in Leviticus 16, regarding this goat and another goat, which was not slaughtered; instead, the priest would place his hands on its head, confessing the sins of the people—every type of sin—and would then send it packing. Someone else would lead it well outside the camp, into the wild, and let it go.

When the first goat's blood was sprinkled on the lid of the law-box, the priest, representing the disobedient people,

could safely stand there before the glorious Presence. As he moved about, the sound of the small bells at the base of his garments told those outside that he was still alive. As he finally emerged and all could see him alive, there would no doubt be great relief and joy. His being alive meant one thing: God's favour towards them was won by blood. The necessary punishment for their disobedience was fully taken care of by the punishment of another. In other words, the death represented by the blood *propitiated* the Judge, and *expiated* their crimes—or cleaned away their guilt for their crimes.

The guilt of the people, their liability to punishment, which screamed for God to act against them in his good anger, was transferred to the clean substitute and dealt with. Between the glorious Judge and the clean law was the blood sprinkled on the lid, as the symbol of due punishment. The blood rendered the law-breakers *punished* law-breakers, and thus compliant, or compatible, with the holy law. The people stand "cleansed" or "sanctified" by the death penalty inflicted on the clean substitute.

It was all symbolic of a real Substitute.

Of course, as the writer to the Hebrews explains, "… it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:4—i.e., to take away the debt of punishment left by sinning). The whole OT sacrificial system was symbolic. The bulls, goats, or lambs, etc. were no real substitutes but only pointed forward to *the* Substitute, Jesus, the coming Christ. He, himself, is the blood-stained lid of the

law box. He is the One whom God put forward (or “publicly displayed”) as the propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:25-26). He is the only fitting Substitute. It was the punishing of this Substitute, not that of any goat, that saved Old Testament believers from the awesome anger of God (and that saves anyone today who trusts the Substitute to have dealt with his personal debt of punishment).

Continuing in Romans 3:25, this gift of judgment in your favour, where the blood-shedding of Christ propitiates the Judge and so obtains his favour for you, is received by “faith”. We will consider this “faith” in the next chapter.

6. Judged forever-innocent "by his grace"?

We have seen that there is a way to get the favourable judgment, 'Clean', quite APART FROM the law—that is, apart from what the law says about you, regardless of the fact that the law says you are not entitled to that judgment. This good judgment has to be sourced, or based on grounds, completely outside of you, and in God, himself.

It is due to culpable defiance that anyone is not clean in the eyes of God's good law. And yet, *not one of us* qualifies to be "justified" or found clean (2:13, 3:9ff, 19-20). Given the grim state of your repulsive offensiveness to the clean Judge, for you to escape his rightful hostility and the punishment due to you, or for you to meet the requirements for eternal life, there would need to be a legal cleanness (a judgment that you are clean) that is sourced totally *outside* of you and given

… there is a way to get that favourable judgment, 'Innocent', regardless of the fact that the law says you are not entitled to such a judgment.

to you. Can it be found? Can you be found with it?

Romans 3:21ff answers, "Yes". Righteousness, or judicial cleanness, can be found in God himself (v21): "through faith in Jesus Christ" (v22), we can be found by the court of heaven to have righteousness.

"Faith" is "Flopping".

What is it that the "believer" in Jesus is trusting him *to have done*? Romans 3:23-26 gives us the Apostle Paul's answer. Putting your faith in Christ is simply trusting him to have *paid for* your justification by the punishing he took for you, so that a good judgment comes to you as a gift. In vv24 and 25, the judgment *that you stand as a law-keeper* is a gift, and faith is to receive this gift. It is to submit to having a favourable verdict on you that is sourced totally outside of you. Faith is trusting Christ to have acquired this gift for you. It is trusting his "propitiatory" (anger-repelling) sacrifice to have paid for all your uncleanness so that the Judge's just anger is now diverted totally away from you, and he finds you clean. It means leaving confidently to your "Redeemer" the full payment for all your offences—for all your defiance, ever.

If you have given up trying to find any grounds in yourself for your salvation, "faith" is just flopping onto Christ-crucified, confidently collapsing onto him and the punishing he took for you (3:24-25). It means resting from the work of saving you (from condemnation) and confidently letting the whole task fall off you onto him, there on the cross. We'll learn still more about faith later when we come to Romans 3:28 and 4:4-5.

Justified means "judged up to the mark".

Something else is clear from 3:23-24a: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift …"

Since to be justified by grace in v24 is presented as the solution to the problem posed in v23, and that problem is defined as "falling behind and therefore left out"[4], missing the mark of what is required to enter "glory" (2:7ff), we can safely assume that "justification", by contrast, means being judged as clean as one who has *come up to the mark*.

Justified *now.*

Consider vv25 & 26: those who are justified are justified *now.* In v25, the fact that Jesus' death was propitiatory demonstrates how God can still be a just Judge at the same time as (1) his "*letting pass*", or his remission, of the punishment due to foregoing sins (i.e., the sinning of believers in the past) and (2) his justifying the believer in Jesus "at the present time". This shows us that justification is deliberately omitting to impute guilt for, and so punish, the sinning of believers in the past, but also believers' sins *now*; innocence is the believer's current experience. Looking ahead for a moment to chapter 4, the believer is as justified now as Abraham was when he believed the impossible about the Lord, prior to his circumcision. He is as justified now as David was "blessed" when he sang about the *covering* of his sins (4:7). He is as justified now as the believer is already reconciled "now" with God the Judge, in Chapter 5. This means that the "justification" of the day of judgment, in 2:13, has been brought forward to the present. It is as present to the believer as his faith. The judgment will be announced on

[4] Strong's Concordance, 5302.

that day, not least by his resurrection body, but the Judge's verdict has already been reached now. As we shall see, he has already found *forever* in the believer's favour by granting him eternal life through this same faith (1 John 5:11-13).

How can God acquit sinners, and do it justly?

God does not acquit just *any* sinners, but only those who have faith in Jesus (3:22). By grace, God gives the disobedient the judgment due to the obedient, and he does so in a way that accords 100% with the demands of his holy justice. But can that be done, or does justification by grace mean "justice denied"? Romans 3:25b-26 replies, "By no means!" He himself offered his Son to willingly be what the Son recoiled at being, the propitiation for our sins (3:25). God can now justly acquit us who believe because our sins have been punished: as the final verse of Romans 4 explains (v25), Jesus was "delivered up" for them, and then raised so we would believe this and be justified. The very next verse begins, "Therefore, justified by faith …" (Romans 5:1).

And again, in Romans 8:1, we read, "There is therefore *now* no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus". Why not? Because, by faith we are *in him*; we are found "in" that act of being punished. By faith we joined the ranks of all who are found "in" him-crucified—him in whom God "condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). We will look at this question in more detail when we consider 2 Corinthians 5 (p91).

Judged by *grace* to be up-to-the-mark.

Although everyone comes short of the mark, we have noted that disobedient people with faith in Christ are, by "grace", judged to be right up to the mark. Clearly there is an absolute standard to be met for eternal life. The Judge, by "grace", gratuitously judges in their favour—he hands down the verdict, "Up to standard", while they are not. While they themselves are *wanting* (*lacking* ethical righteousness) they are not "found" wanting; they are found judicially righteous.

To be justified by grace means that the Judge, who is also the prime witness of all your crimes, and who never takes bribes, finds you (who still sin!) "Innocent on all charges."

God's grace cost him dearly.

God's judgment in my favour is a total gift to me—it is free. At least, it comes free to me, but when you think of his Son's propitiatory death, this grace cost him (and him!) dearly. To God there is no such thing as "cheap grace". Even to us there should be no such thing. Cheap implies a low price; to us, it comes at no price. There are very costly consequences once the gift is given, however. Suffering for Christ is a gift that comes with the gift of faith and justification (Philippians 1:29). However, our suffering for Christ is no contribution to the cost of the gift of justification. That is something we can never reciprocate. Francis Foulkes, one of my old teachers, used to talk about "thanksliving". Living God's way is responsive living and not a condition for remaining with the

gift. It does not imply that an inadequate response to God's grace will prompt him to withdraw the gift. Jesus promised eternal life immediately upon belief (John 6:47), even though, sadly, the believer will still have sin in him for the rest of his earthly life. Of course, as we shall see later, chronic sinning and remaining at peace with sin, indicates that the gift has never been received! Our response is in no sense a payment. The gift of justification is completely free. Any payment we might imagine we can make "cheapens" justification, by implying a cheap estimate of the cost, to God, of his grace in giving us such a gift. This, in turn, comes from grossly underestimating the awesome holiness of the Judge.

Of course, if you are *truly* a disciple of Jesus it can cost you the earth; *justification*, however, costs the disciple nothing, not a 'cent' of obedience to any command. As I said a moment ago, for you, the disciple, it is not even cheap: it is absolutely free! On the other hand, if our response to God's grace is mediocre, that too shows that we have a cheap estimate of the cost to him of his grace to us. We *misunderstand* it as cheap grace.

Grace defined.

Romans 11:4-6 …
4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

In Romans 11:4-6, did God choose the remnant in Israel because, looking forward, he could see they deserved to be chosen? Verse 6 says, "No", that would be to base his selection on "works"; it would not be by "grace": the true Israelites were chosen by grace. Here, "grace" is defined even more sharply as the opposite of what you deserve (or merit). When Paul is talking of "works", in verse 6, he is talking merit; when he is talking about grace, he is talking about the *opposite* of merit. The choosing of the remnant cannot have been *both* by grace *and* by works; it must have been by grace alone, or grace would no longer be grace—i.e., it would take on a different meaning.

A serious issue in the accurate communication of the gospel arises from the popular limiting of the word, "grace", to God's power at work in people. Hence Roman Catholic scholars can insist that they believe in salvation by grace, and at the same time hold that our merit is also a contributing factor in our salvation. "Grace", here, comes to have a different meaning. It appears to be a *strengthening power* (conveyed especially through sacraments) that enables you, as you co-operate with it, to develop "virtues", which merit further such empowering, and thus you can spiral up to a condition of purity of character that merits your final justification and entry into paradise (in most cases after some final purifying suffering in a place of punishment and purging). This is not the "grace" of Romans 11:6, where Paul sets "grace" over and against works of merit on our part.

So, what in me can I boast about (Romans 3:27, 4:1-3)?

Returning now to Romans 3, the question may arise: "But surely, if I am justified, isn't there something about me that has helped bring me to this point, something I can pat myself on the back for?"

Romans 3:27 says, "No. Nothing!"

"So can't I take *some* of the credit for my salvation?"

"No. None of the credit goes to you."

Here, in vv27-28, "faith" and "works" are contrasted. If justification were on the grounds of your works, the justified person might have something to boast about (Compare this with Romans 4:1-3). But if boasting is absolutely excluded, what does that tell us? Is your justification granted even *partly* upon the basis of your works? One word in 3:28 should answer this and should put the answer beyond dispute: "*chōris*", "apart from".

Romans 3:28

We are all law-breakers (3:10, 19-20), but any person who has faith in Christ is justified (judged innocent) by means of that faith, "*apart from* works of the law". This is grace. It agrees with 3:21 where "righteousness", a favourable judgment of "Clean" (Innocent), is yours for the asking, "*apart from* (the) law".

I said above that "apart from" *should* totally rule out the idea that our works have any contribution to make towards our justification. However, many opponents of justification by grace—at least by the "grace" of Romans 11:6—find some

"wriggle room" in what follows "*chōris*". So here comes the big question: when Paul says, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from *works of* (*the*) *law*"[5] (v28), *what* does he have in mind by "works of (the) law"? What law? What are these "works of (the) law" that the believer is justified *apart from?*

It is the law that has been his main focus throughout 1:18 - 3:21. Is the focus, here, *ceremonial* law—laws relating to sacrifices, feast days, 'clean' food, etc.—or *moral* law? It is *this* law that, in 3:28, a believer is justified "apart from".

Apart from the law Paul upholds (Romans 3:31).

In particular, notice 3:31. When Paul speaks of "upholding" the law, surely he upholding the same "law" as he has had in mind all along, the *moral* law. He must assure his readers in v31 that he is upholding moral law because of what he has just been saying in v28. By saying that someone is justified by faith apart from obeying the good, moral commandments, he did not mean that this law should be ignored now. It is still God's will for us to obey him and come up to his good moral standards—of course! It is just that if you have faith in Christ, your justification does not depend on your coming up to those moral standards. By faith, you are freely judged to be as innocent as you would be if you measured up to those standards—when, of course, you don't! But now you can work on that, forever freed from guilt, and, as will become clear later, lived-in and led by the Holy Spirit.

[5] Lit. "for we consider a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law."

A brief break.

Before we go further, let's take a brief break, and see where we have come to. May I suggest photocopying all the verses from 1:18 to 3:21? Then read it all with two pens in your hand. Use RED underlining to highlight what gets a FAVOURABLE judgment—where you are judged to be innocent, clean, or "righteous". Use BLUE underlining to highlight what brings an UNFAVOURABLE judgment—where you are judged guilty. When you've done that, try to answer these questions:

1. *In 2:13, in the light of all that leads up to that verse, what is the judge doing when he "justifies" you? (a) Is he changing you over time and making you into an obedient person, or (b) is he judging you to be innocent?*

2. *Is all the talk about judging, here, just law-court imagery (an illustration), or is God really a judge, and does he really carry out his sentences? Note, especially, 1:18ff.*

3. *In 2:13 and throughout verses 1:18-3:20, what is the Judge responding to when he judges people? What is it that earns you justification or condemnation—obeying or disobeying what laws? Is he thinking of …*

1) *laws applying only to Old Testament Jews—laws about ethnic or ceremonial cleanness, 'clean' foods, special days, etc., or*
2) *laws about moral cleanness that everyone is supposed to obey, and not Jews alone?*

Keep these questions in mind as we consider other passages.

7. Does "justified" mean the same in 2:13 and 3:28?

Romans 2:13
For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who *will be justified.*

Romans 3:20
[20] For by works of the law no human being *will be justified* in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:23-25
[23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

So far, we have seen that to be justified by God is a judgment—not a cleaning process. It is to be judged "clean" in the eyes of his law. To be justified by grace is to be judged innocent when you have not obeyed God's law.

If I believe, is my eschatological justification a past event?

As we saw, when Roman Catholics speak of 'justification' as being a process—at least, post-baptism—it cannot be the justification of Romans 2:13, since that is not a process but a judgment. It is the Judge's response to the *status quo* at the time of judgment, the way things are. It is not about his getting anyone to the point where he is a "doer of the law".

Notice how "will be justified" (*dikaiōthēsetai*) in 3:20—and therefore "being justified freely by grace", through redemption, in 3:21-28, which provides the solution to the problem of 3:20—speaks of a judicial decision. This is supported by reference to its opposite in 3:19 (*hypodikos*—"under judgment", or "condemned"). The same is true in 5:16, where "the judgment … to condemnation" (*eis katakrima*) contrasts with "the gift … to justification" (*eis dikaiōma*). Again, in 8:33-34, "the one justifying" (*ho dikaiōn*) contrasts with "the one condemning" (*ho katakrinōn*).

Thus, God's action in 2:5-13 as the acquitting or condemning Judge, is the same act of judgment that is in mind elsewhere in the New Testament where the subject is God's final, or "eschatological", judgment of men. The obvious difference is that in Romans 2 the already righteous *will be* justified, whereas, from 3:21-28, believing sinners *are* justified.

There is no hint of discontinuity in Paul's use of "justify" from 2:13 to 5:21, except in 3:4, but even there we saw that it is used of God, himself, being judged by men to be righteous. It is not that God is transformed into being righteous! In the next chapter we look at, Romans 4, to say that Abraham "was justified" (4:2) is parallel to saying that something "was counted to him to innocence" (4:3). In vv4-5, the believer's faith "is counted to innocence". That means faith is counted "to the not-working-but-believing one" to *his* innocence, since the very next verse says that he is the blessed man "to *whom* God counts innocence" (v6), and that, in turn, means that he is the blessed man "whose sin the Lord will definitely not count" (v8).

In chapter 5, as we shall also see, justification is reconciliation with the Judge *now*, which guarantees our future safety (vv6-11). According to v9, "justified now by his blood, we will be saved from his wrath."

God's final judgment on me is decided now?

Yes, if you believe. That is what the Apostle says. And why not, if one is justified "by grace" (3:23-24) as "grace" is defined in 11:4-6? Why should the Judge delay his decision? To assess your future works? He already knows they will not be up to the mark. This judging is "apart from works" (3:28).

To be justified by *grace* is to be judged innocent when you have not obeyed God's law.

In Romans, the justification of 3:24-28 is the same favourable eschatological judgment as that of 2:13. What has happened, as we saw on p41, is that *God's final judgment has been brought forward to now*. When we rest on Jesus for our salvation, God's judgment is finalized in advance of that great day. When that day comes, God's verdict will be gloriously obvious to others, too. This will become clearer as we study chapters 4-8 in more detail.

Telling this to others.

If we want to tell people in any culture or language what "to justify" means in 3:24, we simply need to go to their local "news spreaders" and see how they report court cases. When a court is unimpressed with the evidence against the accused, and finds him in compliance with the law, how is that reported in the news? Sometimes, even in English, we make justification more difficult to grasp than it need be—even by using the word "justify" without explaining it! These days, when an accused person is cleared by a court of all charges against him, you will probably never hear it said that

When we rest on Jesus for our salvation, God's judgment is finalized in advance of that great day. When that day comes, God's verdict will be gloriously obvious to others, too.

he was "justified". But that is exactly what "justified" means.To be justified is to be judged by God to be innocent on all counts of disobedience. That is not complicated. And it should be transferrable into many languages. In fact, as I recall, when I was working with the Kaonde people in North-west Zambia, I found it easier to explain justification there than it was back in Australia. Even the local chief had his court, and so we could simply use the terms they used there. Likewise, where I work now in East Africa, it is very easy to speak in Swahili of being "judged to be an innocent person" (*kuhukumiwa kuwa mtu asiye na hatia*).

8. Romans 4—to "justify" a law-breaker is to count innocence to him

Romans 4:1-8
What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? [2] For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. [3] For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as [sic] righteousness." [4] Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. [5] And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as [sic] righteousness, [6] just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

[7] "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;
[8] blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

Paul now tells us more about what he means, in 3:28, when he says that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law. He takes us to Abraham, who indeed is an example of those whose sins took place beforehand (3:25) and were "passed over" by God (3:25-26). He points out, in v2, that if he "was justified" by his works—which he immediately, in v3, shows was not the case—then, contrary to 3:27, he would have had something to boast about. But he didn't—at least, not before God. Why not? Because God, himself, says in "the

Writing", that Abraham's *believing* was counted to him to righteousness (*eis dikaiosunēn*—4:3).

The question is, in vv1-2, what did Paul mean by, "Abraham was justified"? The next verse, quoting from Genesis 15:6, in Greek (LXX), makes it clear: to be justified by his works would have meant that his works were "counted to him to (*eis*) righteousness". The Writing, though, says that it was his believing that was counted to him to righteousness. "Righteousness" is what a person receives when he is justified, and it is not granted in response to any works, but simply in response to faith. There is no "and" after "believed God", introducing a list of works meriting this "righteousness" and giving Abraham grounds for boasting (vv4-5 build on this absence of works). That is, his believing *and nothing*[6] was counted to him to[7] righteousness.

We have already seen, from Romans 2 and 3, that "righteousness" here (e.g., in 3:28) is simply "innocence" or judicial cleanness. Therefore, "to justify" is *a counting activity* that brings this outcome. To say that Abraham "was justified" is to say that something—and v3 says it was solely his "believing"—"was counted" to him to this innocence, or favourable standing in God's court.

Note, this is justification by *God*, not justification by men. That is, it is God judging or attributing judicial righteousness to someone (as in 3:20-28, and 2:13 before that); it is not

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[6] This is what makes him someone who "is justified by faith apart from works of the law"—3:28—and this is what makes him "the not-working-but-trusting one" of v5.

[7] On *eis*, here, see below, pp59-61.

justification by *other people*, where moral uprightness is attributed to a person by human observers because of his upright action (e.g., Phinehas, in Psalm 106:31). It is not the justification (or rather, vindication) by other people of someone's faith, such as we find in James 2:21, 24 and 25 (cf. Luke 7:35). But it *is* that counting activity (*logizomai*) of the Judge, of James 2:23, which preceded by many years the human justifying of v21.

It is interesting that classical Judaism appears to have understood Genesis 15:6 as commending Abraham's faith. But not Paul. He clearly dissociates himself from such a view: Abraham had nothing in himself to boast in before God (v2). And, as we shall see, in the verses immediately following (Romans 4:4-8), where he addresses the faith of believers generally, he altogether excludes any role for their works *or godliness* in God's justification of them.

But the first point to take from vv1-3 is one of definition. To be "justified by faith, apart from works of the law", in 3:28, *is* to have your faith, and *nothing*, "counted" by God to a favourable judicial standing for you.

Two types of transaction.

In 4:4-5, Paul speaks of two types of transaction, (1) a wage, or debt-payment, and (2) a gift.

In 4:4, a wage is not counted "to the working one" (*tō ergazomenō*) "according to grace" (*kata <u>charin</u>*) but "according to debt" (*kata <u>opheilēma</u>*)—i.e., it is counted as a debt-payment; his boss counts his wage to him as what is due to him for his work. By contrast, the one "to whom" (*hō*)

God “counts righteousness apart from works" (4:6) is, literally, “the not-working-but-believing one” (4:5a). Remember, all this must be read against the background of judgment “according to his works”, of 2:6—*kata ta erga autou* (We will look again at that in a moment).

A worker’s wage is payment for his work; the boss is paying out a *debt*. It is payment estimated or reckoned to the worker *according to what is owed* in return for the work. By contrast, righteousness is here a *gift*, given *according to grace,* without reference to the work—“apart from works” (*chōris ergōn*).

The counting in 4:6 is the same counting as in 4:3-5.

We saw earlier that the *counting* of a person’s faith to him *to righteousness*, in 4:5, which is an act of grace, is contrasted to the *counting* of a worker’s wages to him as a debt payment, in 4:4. The counting in v4 is done with a view to the value of the working; what the worker has earned is the boss’s debt to him. His wage is paid to him “according to debt”. However, in v5, the “money” is conveyed not as a debt but as a gift, “according to grace”. The believer’s trusting, as opposed to working (“to the one not-working-but-trusting”), is counted to righteousness. It is counted “to him” to righteousness, which means that it is counted in *his* favour—i.e., bringing *his* righteousness. That is restated in 4:6 as God counting righteousness to him (recalling 3:22). This counting of 4:6 is the same counting as that of 4:5 and is therefore equally “according to grace”.

Faith is not debt-incurring.

The faith of v5 cannot be debt-incurring in any way. It cannot put God in debt to you, so that he is somehow obliged to give you righteousness. If it did, the righteousness would be a wage rather than a gift. Faith cannot even be a God-given virtue you have, or a "work" you do where, as a gift, God so works in you that you do it (For example, the context rules out translating *pistis*, here at least, as "faithfulness"—see below, p65). Why is this? Because …

(1) that would still make the righteousness a wage for your work,
(2) you, the one given the gift, would not be "the not-working …. one" of v5,
(3) the righteousness would not be counted to you "apart from works", as in v6, but counted to your working.

The believer is trusting God to be a Judge who justifies ungodly people. He knows he cannot trust his godliness to bring him peace with the Judge. He knows he cannot trust his works, and so he is "the one who does not work" towards his righteousness, but, by contrast, he trusts God to provide it "apart from works".

In v5, does Paul mean to say that God "justifies the one who used to be ungodly, but is now godly"? No; in the light of vv1-2, v5 must mean that *the ungodly* who trusts in God who justifies the ungodly, is justified. Why? Because Abraham was not justified by his godliness or works or anything that he could *appeal to* or boast to God about (4:1-2); it simply says (4:3), he believed God, and it was counted to him to

innocence. To be justified by faith is to have your faith counted to righteousness—and that as a gift (vv4-5)!

Verse 6 reinforces this. Justification is to have your faith counted to *your* righteousness. When Paul says that God justifies the ungodly who trusts (v5), he means that the trusting is counted to this ungodly person's righteousness, because v6 explains this as God counting righteousness to *him*. Hence, God counts righteousness to the not-working-but-trusting, or the ungodly-but-trusting.

The person to whom righteousness is counted by God, here, is as ungodly while trusting as, in 4:5, he is "the not-working-but-trusting one" (*tō mē ergazomenō pisteuonti*). *Ergazomenō* is a present participle—he is a *not-working* person when his trusting is counted *to him* to innocence. In the same way, *the ungodly* is ungodly when he is justified. The trusting is not some kind of good work or godliness. Faith is placed directly opposite to working or being godly.
How can the "not-working-but-trusting one" be justified? How can the "ungodly" who trusts be justified? Because …

- he is justified "by faith apart from works of the law" (3:28), which is to say …

- God counts righteousness to him "apart from works" (4:6), which is to say …

- his sin "is not counted" (4:8) in this counting. The "*ou mē*" in the Greek is emphatic: the sin of this

"blessed" man "is not counted *at all*!"[8] His evil works are *definitely not* counted—that is, not against *him*.

- But how can our sins not be counted to our just condemnation? God presented a sinless Substitute, who was "delivered up", for us, to God's just counting, so that we could be at peace with the same Counter (4:23-5:2).

In judging us, God does not count our sin. He does not count our ungodliness. This justification is not the reformation of someone's character; it is coming to a judgment on him *without counting* his character. There is a vast difference.

As we noted, for God to *not count* our sin to us, there was a price to be paid—but not by us. God had to present a propitiatory Sacrifice, in which his Son, the perfect priest and perfect victim, was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

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[8] Whether we follow those manuscripts which have "hō"

(to whom—i.e., (lit.) "blessed is a man *to whom* should the Lord not count sin"—with the sin assumed to be *his* sin, as with the parallel "lawlessness" and "sins" of v7),

or those MSS that favour "hou"

(of whom—i.e. "blessed is a man *whose* sin should the Lord not count"),

the outcome is the same: his sin does not feature in the judgment on him. It is not in the count—at least, not in the counting of innocence (righteousness) to *him*. The court, in coming to its finding on him, does not count his sin.

It is helpful to see how the prepositional phrase we meet in vv3 and 5, “to righteousness” (*eis dikaiosynēn*—which follows the Septuagint (LXX) on Genesis 15:6), is used in Romans 10:4 and 10:10. Literally, 10:4 reads, “Christ is the end of the law, *to* [*eis*] *righteousness*, for everyone believing”, and v10: “in the heart it [the word?] is believed *to* [*eis*] *righteousness*, and with the mouth it is confessed *to* [*eis*] *salvation*’. Compare also Romans 7:10 (lit.): “the commandment that was *to (eis) life* for me, this proved *to (eis) death*”. In Romans 5:18, “*eis*” is used in two different ways. Firstly, it introduces the recipients of the “trespass” of Adam (i.e., of its effects; see also v15) or of the gift of righteousness. Secondly, it is used in the telic sense, to introduce what each brings—the results. In fact, “to condemnation” there could be translated, “bringing condemnation”, and “to justification of life” could be rendered, “bringing justification of life” (compare v21).

In Romans 4:3, there is no excuse for the ESVUK’s translation, “*as* righteousness”. Abraham’s faith was not counted *as* his righteousness, as if the Judge had said, “That faith is good enough for the righteousness he does not otherwise have.” Not at all! his faith was counted *to* (*eis*) his righteousness, or to his favourable standing before the Judge. The English word, “as”, is an adverb, and in Greek would translate as an adverb such as “*hos*”, and the noun, “righteousness”, would be in the nominative case, *dikaiosynē.* The word “*eis*” is not an adverb, but a preposition, and it is accordingly followed by

dikaiosynēn, an accusative[9]. The "*eis*" is telic, pointing to the goal or end-result of the counting action—compare the Latin, "ad"; the Vulgate used "*ad justitium*" (*to righteousness*). See pp88-90 for more on this usage of *eis*.

Summarising Romans 4:1-8

The justifying of Abraham (4:2)
is the counting of his faith to him to innocence (4:3)[10].
The counting of the believer's faith to him to innocence (4:5)
is the counting of innocence to him (4:6).
Therefore, to be justified by faith
is the counting of innocence to the believer.
The person who has innocence counted to him (4:6)

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[9] This is overlooked by Don Garlington, "Imputation or Union with Christ? A Rejoinder to John Piper", in *In Defence of the New Perspective on Paul*, Wipf and Stock, Oregon, 2005, pp167-197):

> "In context, both literary and linguistic, the words "it was reckoned to him as righteousness" … embody a declaration that Abraham, in Genesis 15:1-6, proves to be a faithful person, trusting Yahweh's promise after all, in spite of temporary doubts."

In other words, he sees this as a commentary on Abraham's character. God considered his faith*fulness as being* righteousness. However, it was not Abraham's faithfulness but his *believing* God that was under discussion in v3; secondly, this treats "*eis*" not as a preposition, "to" (which it is), needing to be followed by an accusative (as it is), but as an adverb, "as", as pointed out earlier. Taking this further, the passive verb, "was reckoned", would then need to be a *link verb* (a "copula", which acts as a kind of "equals sign"), with "righteousness" as the subject complement of Abraham's faith. That would mean, as we saw, that it needed to be not accusative, but nominative, *dikaiosynē*.

[10] Presumably, if Abraham *had* been justified by works, Paul could have said quite rightly that his works were counted, or imputed, to him to innocence.

is the person whose sins are not counted (4:8).

We who believe, why are our sins not counted (or why is innocence counted to *us*—v6)? Because of "Jesus our Lord", who "was delivered up because of *our trespasses*" (4:23-25).

"Grace" in Romans 4:4-8.

There are still more treasures in these verses. In Romans 4:5, God "justifies the *ungodly*". Again, that is *grace*, the very opposite of what "the ungodly" *deserves*. As noted earlier, to be blessed by grace is to be blessed by God when you deserve to be punished by God. And "the one who does not work, BUT …", instead of trying to work for it, "trusts" this amazing Judge for it, is gratuitously judged "Innocent" of all disobedience. He is certainly in no position to trust himself, or his godliness, to get him off in God's court; he is "ungodly". Instead, he is trusting the Judge, himself, to have already got him off.

Notice the words at the start of …

v4: "… to the one who works …" (lit. "to the one working"—*tō … ergazomenō*), and ...

v5: "…to the one who does not work" … (lit. "to the one *not* working"—*tō…mē ergazomenō*).

And notice the word, "but" (*de*), which comes twice in v5,

1. at the beginning (translated in ESVUK, "however"), introducing the opposite idea to "the one working", of v4—"*but* to the one not working" (*tō de mē ergazomenō*)—and …

2. with "trusting"—"the one not-working-*but*-trusting" (*mē ergazomenō <u>pisteuonti</u> de*).

The first "but" contrasts "the working one" with "the not-working one". The second "but" contrasts that "working" with "trusting". Working for your pay is contrasted with "trusting", which is just giving in and accepting a justification you have not earned by good working. It comes to you as the "gift" of 3:24-25, earned for you by your Redeemer.

The background to "works".

The "works … does not work" (from *ergazomai*) in 4:4-5 should be read in the context of …

- the "works" (*ergōn*) of 4:2, that would be grounds for Abraham to pat himself on the back if he were justified by them, …
- the "works" (*erga*) that one is justified "apart from" (3:28), and …
- the "works" (*ergōn*) in 3:27, that the doer might boast in or appeal to, …
- the "working good" of 2:10 (ESVUK: "everyone who does good")—lit. "to everyone working (***erga****zomenō*) good"—is in contrast to "on every soul of man working (*<u>kat***erga***zomenou</u>*) evil" in v9.

Romans 3:28, in saying that someone "is justified by faith apart from works of the law", is certainly not saying that the person with this faith will now set out to live apart from obedience to God's law: that would prove he had the fake

"faith" of James 2. It is simply saying that a person is *justified* (i.e., by God) not by faith *and* by obeying, but by faith alone. He is judged as a perfectly obedient person would be judged—innocent—through despairing of finding anything in his obedience to merit that favourable judgment, and instead trusting Christ's death alone to merit it for him.

Note, it should go without saying, that you are not justified by professing to believe the doctrine of justification by faith alone; you are justified by actually *trusting* Christ alone to have finished all the work of saving you from hell. You are justified *by* the punishing Jesus took, and you are so justified the moment you confidently collapse, in self-helpless repentance, onto him and that punishing. It should be no surprize that proud people won't like this teaching. They can skilfully try to rewrite texts, such as Romans 3:28, so that your justification still rests to some extent on you and your faithfulness to God. Of course, simply knowing the doctrine does not justify anyone: you do need to "flop", to confidently collapse, onto Jesus. But it is important to know that Jesus can be *safely* "flopped onto". Anyone overwhelmed with his guilt needs to know that he can safely let it all roll off him and onto Christ crucified.

Does "by grace" mean, "by works done by grace"?

We have already noted how 3:27 rules out any understanding of "faith" that might give us grounds for boasting. In spite of that, some want to translate "faith", in v28, as "faithfulness", as if it were a virtue on our part. However, that would make it a meritorious work that we could plead before the Judge. The Apostle Paul won't have

that. Even if some say that their meritorious work is entirely the working of God's Spirit in them, 4:4-5 would rule out the meriting of justification even by that work or faithfulness, and it would do so for three reasons:

- The One doing the justifying (v5) justifies the *ungodly*—that is, the *unfaithful*—not those found with some arbitrary level of "faithfulness" or "covenant faithfulness".
- As we noted earlier (p56), the one justified here (v5) is the one who does not work but, instead, trusts. This faith entrusts all the working, all the meriting, to Another.
- The trusting of vv3-5 is the faith of Abraham who "believed God", not who "was faithful to God".

This is not a case of works performed by grace; here "grace" (*charis*) is set opposite to "working" (*ergazomai*) or "works" (*erga*); it is set opposite to a works-debt, just as the "grace" of 11:6 is set opposite to "works".

Faith is totally disengaging from the merit enterprise, taking your hands right off that work, and abandoning it confidently to the Lord. By the faith of Romans 4:4-5, you leave well-alone—you leave in better hands—the work of meriting your acquittal. As far as *that* task goes, you put your feet up and rest. Immediately, this resting in Christ-crucified is counted (legally imputed) to your total innocence (4:5b)—not *towards* it, but *to* it: you are immediately and finally judged innocent.

Justification even more clearly defined as a counting.

In 4:6, the same counting that God did with Abraham, in v3, is spoken of as the blessing that David sang about in vv7-8. In counting our faith to a judgment in our favour (4:4), God is not paying us off, as if our faith has put him in debt to us. He is not the employer paying a wage to the worker for his faith (4:4). We noted how Paul has been saying (vv3 and 5) that believing *is counted* to a person *to innocence*. Then he illustrates this: *God counts innocence* to David's "blessed man" (v6). But in doing so he quotes from what David sings about this man: the Lord *will not count his sin* (v8)! This is why he is judged or counted innocent "*apart from* the law" (cf. 3:28). Where sin is not counted, innocence must be the outcome. Where a righteous judge is judging an ungodly man, counting him innocent is the same as not counting his sin. This defines the meaning of "was justified", in 4:1, as "was judged innocent".

This justification is not the mere pardon issued by a national president who releases *still-guilty* prisoners because he wants to show his power. No, David's "blessed man" is no longer judged guilty. The disobedient David himself is judged a law-keeper, *apart from* what the law has to say about his adultery. Why? He is innocent because the Judge, in his counting, does not count his adultery, or any of his sins (v8).

His justification is not a measure or reflection of his moral standing; it is a measure of Christ's, his Substitute. Recall 2Corinthians 5:19: "… not counting their trespasses against

them …" Paul is speaking there about reconciliation between God and us. We are reconciled to the righteous God because our unrighteousness, like David's, is *not counted*. Why does God not count the unrighteousness of those of us whom he finds "in Christ"? It is because all our unrighteousness has been counted to Christ's condemnation (2 Corinthians 5:21).

It is not that David's "blessed" man has righteousness counted to him because of his works, though apart from works *done in his own strength*. Paul simply says, "apart from works". Works, including good works, are not counted (they are not in the count) in 4:6, just as evil works are not counted in 4:8. It is not that evil works are not counted where the doer is not responsible for them. Paul does not touch the question of diminished responsibility here. Of *course*, in Romans 4:7-8, Paul has in mind the "lawless deeds", the "sin" or the "sins", that are from the blessed man himself (v8). This is grace, the opposite of merit. With grace, works do not come into the count, whether good or evil. Justification is no process; it is a judicial counting.

The whole point is that, although "to be justified" means "to be judged innocent" in both 2:13 and 4:5, justification by grace through faith apart from works of the law *is not* justification of "the doers of the law" (as in Romans 2:13); it *is not* justification "according to works" as in 2:6. It is justification of the ungodly (4:5), "apart from works" (4:6). It is the counting to them, to their innocence, of the perfect Christ's perfect punishment-bearing for their sins. It is counted to them through their faith in that Sacrifice.

Were Abraham and David justified repeatedly?

Were Abraham and David each justified repeatedly through repeated acts of contrition by them and remission of sins by God (4:9-22)? Some Roman Catholics insist that Abraham's justification here is just one in a series of acts of remission of sin in a long *process* of "justification", restoring a person to "a state of grace". That rather defuses vv9-12. There, Paul speaks of Abraham as having "righteousness" by faith, making him the father of both all uncircumcised and circumcised believers. His righteousness by faith was "sealed" by his circumcision. He was not circumcised again every time he needed to confess. This righteousness was his even as an uncircumcised believer, and, in the same way, it is the legal standing of uncircumcised believers today.

Whenever the point was, when "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him to righteousness", the believing in question was a faith in God to do the impossible. Paul highlights the impossibility of an old, barren woman bearing a child—let alone the child of the promise of a nation of descendants, as many as the stars. Abraham believed *that,* because he believed *God.* His faith showed repeatedly, but he first believed *once*. The faith of Genesis 12 either came to be true faith later, or it was true faith that came more fully to light in Genesis 15 and was dramatically obvious in Genesis 22. But he was circumcised after believing, and once only; thereafter he always bore the seal of *a righteousness no less permanent than the seal, itself*. Consider v10: "How then was it [i.e., "this blessing", or "righteousness", of v9] counted to him?" Note he does not say, "How was it counted to him *the*

first time?" V10b gives the reply, righteousness was counted to him "not in circumcision but in uncircumcision." This is the language of a lasting "blessing", a judgment sealed by circumcision, not something that comes and goes. Looking forward into chapter 5, if justification were not lasting, 5:9 would lose its force, effectively being reduced from (literally),

> "… justified now by his blood, we will be saved through him from the wrath", to,
>
> "… justified now by his blood, we are safe—for now, at least—through him from the wrath."

And as for David, if he possibly needed to be re-justified again following his adultery, 4:7-8 would mean that only his past, repented-of, sins were not counted! That would contradict the certainty of 5:9, making it presumptuous.

His redeeming done, the Redeemer is raised.

Just as Genesis speaks of how Abraham believed the impossible, life from the dead (4:18-22), and was justified, so the same words apply to us, too (Romans 4:23-25)—i.e., to us who believe in the Christ who was not only "delivered over" (i.e., to die) "on account of" (*dia*) our sins (i.e., to deal with the guilt they would have left us with) but was raised to life "on account of" (*dia*) not our sins now (they are already atoned for) but our justification through *believing* in this full atonement. Hence, 5:1: "Therefore, justified by faith, …"
As Abraham looked past his century-old body, "as-good-as-dead" (*ne<u>nek</u>rōmenon*), and the "lifelessness" (*<u>nek</u>rōsin*) of Sarah's womb, we can now look to the raising of Jesus' dead body (dead because of our sinning) and trust his redeeming

death to have paid for our acquittal. The resurrection does nothing to redeem us; rather, it shows us the Father's acceptance of his Son's redeeming work. It is his vindication of the Son's perfect redemption payment, so that we can trust his redeeming work and be justified. It was the Judge himself—i.e., the wrathful Judge he "was delivered up" to—who now raised him. The phrase, "for our sins", tells us that in his death, our sins counted to his condemnation. Now that his death is past and he is alive, the sins of us who are "in him" no longer count in God's judging us. Believing, we stand justified, just as Abraham's faith in God's promise was counted to his good standing before the Judge (4:3,23).

My justification is *a decision*, not a moral transformation. It is God's final judgment on me, just as his final judgment on Abraham was *sealed* by his irreversible circumcision. We shall now see that the righteousness bought for me entirely by Christ's condemnation, immediately conveys eternal life.

How was Abraham "justified"? By works (4:1-2)?
His believing (*and nothing:* no good works are listed)
was counted to him to innocence (4:3).
The believer's faith (*and nothing*: any working is excluded)
is counted to him to innocence (4:5).
Thus, innocence is counted to him (4:6), which means…
His sins are not counted (4:8). Why not?
"Jesus our Lord … was delivered up because of our trespasses …"
(4:24-25).

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9. Dr Robert Sungenis, a Roman Catholic Apologist

A well-known Roman Catholic apologist, Dr Robert Sungenis, argues that Paul's statement, "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law", in Romans 3:28, does not mean that anyone is justified by faith alone. Rather, if I am reading him faithfully, he says that a man is justified by faith apart from *some* works. He is justified by faith not apart from just *any* "works", but apart from "works of the law", which are not good works but works Paul frowns on. These, he claims, are works done with a view to putting God in your debt, works done to give you some claim on him, or entitlement to his blessings.

Could "apart from works" in Romans 4:6, for example, mean that God counts righteousness to that "blessed man" by faith *and* by good works that are done with the right motive, but "apart from works" done to put God in your debt and oblige him to bless?

The first problem for this view is that the notion of such false "works" is not addressed by Paul here; such a concept would have to be imported from outside. Paul says nothing here about the motive for the works; he simply rules out works. There is no role for "works" in Abraham's justification (4:1-3). There is no place for "working" in the justification of 4:5-6: it comes to "the one not-working-but-trusting", or "apart from works".

The second problem relates to the context. If a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law, why must it be so? Why is it that "works of the law" have no role in our justification? And what are the works of the law that a believer is justified "apart from"? Are they good works or evil works (or good works done from evil motives—which is still abhorrent to God)? They are clearly the *good* "works of [the] law" of 3:20, through which no-one will be justified, since all, Jews and Gentiles, are under sin (3:9-19). It is true that works of the law done from wrong motives could not be counted in our favour. However, 3:19-20 shows that none of us has the works of the law that *could* count in our favour; no-one has the works, according to which, the judgment, "Righteous", will be handed down on the day of wrath (3:20; 2:5-13). No-one will be found with the endurance in "good-work", or the "working good", required by the law for eternal life (2:7-10). It is the "doers of the law" (2:13) who "will be justified". And yet, "no-one is righteous" (3:10); "by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight …" (3:20).

Why not? Why will no-one be justified in God's sight by works of the law? Is it because "works of the law" means "works done legalistically, or with a wrong motive"? Surely not. That would make them evil works since they are not done with a right heart. The law never suggested that anyone would be justified by evil works. "Works of the law" here are the *good* works we are commanded to do, and the reason no-one will be justified by doing them is that no-one's good works come up to the mark. No-one endures in working good as the law requires (2:7). This is why there needs to be a

justification that comes “apart from” *the law* (3:21), apart from *works of the law* (3:28), or apart from *works* (4:6). The “works” in 4:6 are the same “works” commanded by God’s good law in 2:6-13. It is the “good works”, as opposed to the “evil works” (2:8) forbidden by the law—that is, the works that characterize those who hypocritically profess their law-keeping (2:21-24). The whole argument all the way through from 2:1 to 3:20, is that since no-one has the “good works” commanded by the law and required for acquittal at the judgment, our only hope is an acquittal that comes “apart from” these “works of the law”, or without our obedience to the law being considered in the judgment. There is nothing negative about “works of the law” here (See the earlier comments on 3:9-20, on pp22-27).

In fact, works done to good effect but from a wrong motive of acquiring a claim or entitlement to salvation would not be the works of the law. Note: it is not that they would be the works of the law done from an impure heart; they *would not be* the works commanded by the law. The law nowhere commands doing good deeds with an evil, proud heart; that would be an impossibility, and such “good” works would not deserve the title, “works of the law”. Consider the foundational commandment to “love the Lord your God with … all of your heart”. It is impossible to obey that from wrong motives. And how does one obey the tenth commandment if not from the heart? Certainly, as Jesus explained the law in Matthew 5, all the commandments were to be obeyed from the heart. Anything less is disobedience.

Notice that the working that is the basis of a favourable judgment in Romans 2:7 is enduring in "working good". It is hard to see how this could cover working to good effect but *from an evil heart with wrong motives*. It is the "working good" that comprises the "works" commanded by the law, or the *doing* of the law required for justification and life in 2:13 and 3:20. And since no-one is righteous (3:10), it must mean that no-one has this "working good". Hence the only hope of being judged righteous is where that judgment comes entirely "apart from the law"—i.e., apart from the law with its insistence on "working good" as the requirement for life. We are dreaming if we imagine that the law requires only "working to good effect, but without a pure heart". This is a problem for Dr Sungenis' reading of "apart from works of the law" in 3:28.

Paul means nothing less than this: "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from his obedience of the law—apart from how he does the works commanded by the law, or apart from how his works measure up against the *endurance in working good* (2:7) required by the law for justification and life." In short, Luther was right: Paul in Romans 3:28 was saying that one is justified "by faith alone".

10. "Faith of Jesus Christ"—Galatians 2:15-21

Before moving to Romans 5, let's pause to look at some of Paul's words to the Galatians, which strongly support his later teaching in Romans 4:1-8.

Galatians 2:15-21
15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.17 But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

In the earlier part of Galatians 2, Paul has been addressing Peter's hypocrisy in Antioch. After eating with Gentiles, when some of the Jewish heavies from Jerusalem arrive on the scene, he withdraws as if had not been eating with them. And others followed him, even Barnabas, implying that such

fellowship with the uncircumcised was just not on. There was indeed a vocal group among the Galatians, who were pushing the Gentile believers to be circumcised, but Peter, more than most, should have been fully aware that, in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, cut and uncut, could enjoy full fellowship. If to withdraw from fellowship with someone is to treat him as an unbeliever (Matthew 18:15-17), they were treating believing Gentiles as unbelievers because they had not been circumcised.

The key to Paul's rebuke of Peter is in v14: "their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel". Peter's fearful siding with those wanting to "Judaize" the Galatian believers, at least by insisting on their circumcision, was at odds with the gospel. Paul has to help Peter openly here, since his fear of "certain men … from James" was openly pandering to Paul's local opponents, who were preaching "another gospel"—justification by faith *and* obedience.

The question therefore was, what was the basis of fellowship? Is a man saved by means of trusting Christ alone for his salvation, or by trusting Christ plus some reliance on his own goodness? It is the same issue as is discussed in Romans 4:1-8. To Paul, the basis for fellowship was faith in the adequacy of the righteous Christ's atoning death to fully pay for his justification. This is the faith "of Christ" (v16—i.e., Christ-oriented faith, commonly translated as "faith in

Christ"[11]) that stands opposed, here, to "works of law", which Paul's opponents added to faith as the grounds for salvation. Paul sees this as a gospel issue because, as he will later say in Romans 3:28, a man is justified by faith *apart from* works of law—i.e., apart from works of the law *altogether*, even apart from circumcision! To say that "No flesh" is justified by works of law (Galatians 2:16) means that "no flesh" is justified *even partly* by works of the law, since when he repeats this statement (word for word) in Romans 3:20b, he adds, "since through the law comes knowledge of sin". Sin contaminates all our mean attempts at obedience and making amends. Incomplete obedience is disobedience, and as for helping with atonement, being offered by the unrighteous it is a pipe dream. Nothing but the redemptive death of the righteous One can compensate for our unrighteousness. Besides, as we have also seen, the gospel leaves no saved man with any grounds for boasting in himself for his justification (Romans 3:27; 4:2).

Galatians 2:15-16 literally reads,

> "We, privileged Jews, and not those sinful[12] Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified through works of

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[11] According to Moises Silva, "in the course of nearly two millennia, virtually every reader—including ancient scholars for whom Greek was their native language—understood the phrase [faith of Christ] to mean "faith in Christ" and gave no hint that it might mean something else." https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/the-faith-of-jesus-christ-exegetical-biblical-and-theological-studies-the-pistis-christou-debate/

[12] Could he be saying, "We, upstanding Jews, and not those pesky Gentiles trying to get into righteousness the easy way, by-passing the law…"?

> law, [and is not justified] except through faith of Christ, even we have believed into (*eis*) Christ Jesus (*Christon Iēsoun*, accusative), in order that we might be justified by faith of Christ, and not by works of law, since by works of law no flesh will be justified."

Is "faith of Christ" the personal faith of Christ, himself, or is it perhaps "faithfulness of Christ", or is there another meaning? Is *Christou* ("of Christ") an objective genitive? The "objective genitive" names the direct object of the action contained in the noun associated with it—e.g., "blasphemy of the Spirit" (*tou Pneumatos blasphēmia*), in Matthew 12:31, is to blaspheme the Spirit. Understood this way, "faith of Christ" means "Christ-oriented faith".

There are two key statements in v16:

1. Knowing that a man is not justified except through faith of Christ, "*we* have believed into Christ."
2. *We have believed* into Christ in order that we might be justified by faith of Christ—i.e., by this, *our* believing.

Thus, "faith of Christ" is identified with our believing into Christ and must mean "Christ-oriented faith".

In v16, the works in question would be *ours*. But what is "works of law" set in contrast to? Is it not to "faith"? And is it to *Christ's* faith or *ours*? Or is it contrasted to the *faithfulness* of Christ? If *pisteōs Christou* is Christ's own *pistis*, then our works are contrasted with (1) his faith in (presumably) God the Father, or (2) his faithfulness to the Father, neither of which has come into consideration in Galatians up to this

point. In fact, however, *our* works for justification are directly contrasted to *our believing* for justification, which is *our faith* in *his* work for our justification.

The only other reference to Christ here is to his loving, self-giving for us, in v9, explaining why we can trust him, and not why *he* can trust the Father. This is the same later in Galatians, in 3:10-13, where what Christ does for our justification is not to believe but to give himself to be cursed. Even if his being cursed consists in, or is the outcome of, his faith in, or faithfulness to, the Father, that conclusion is not drawn. What is clear is the contrast between justification by *our* law-works and justification by *our* faith, where faith's object appears to be Christ, cursed for our justification by redemption.

Notice, in vv11 and 12, the contrast between *doing* on our part and *faith* on our part: "That no-one is justified before God by law is clear, since 'The righteous *by faith* will live', and the law is not of faith; rather, 'The one *who does* these things will live by them.'" As he then moves immediately to our redemption through Christ's being cursed, o*ur doing* works of law for justification is set over against *our faith in his doing* for our justification, *not his faith*. And, even if his doing were explained as the epitome of his faithfulness, verses 11-12 tell us we would not be justified except through *our* faith in that faithfulness to the Father!

Looking ahead to 3:22, we read, "… the Scripture imprisoned all things under sin in order that the promise, by faith of

Jesus Christ, might be given to those believing." Note the preceding words of v21: if a law had been given that could convey life (i.e., by *our* keeping it), then righteousness could have come by the law. Instead, the law made it plain to us that this was quite impossible, so that, "tutored" in this way, we might redirect *our* faith to Christ, and so receive the righteousness promised to the Christ-oriented faith of v22. The law has become our tutor "to [*eis*] Christ, so that, *by faith we* might be justified" (v24)—i.e., by faith that is directed *"to Christ*."

In Romans 3:22, Paul will speak of "… the righteousness of God through faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe…" Again, "faith of Jesus Christ" appears side by side with—in the same breath as—our believing. Some maintain that reading this as Jesus-oriented faith (faith in Jesus) makes the reference to believing redundant. However, this overlooks Paul's habit of reinforcing truths for emphasis. But, more than that, his point is that "all" (looking back to the "all flesh" of v20—Jews *and* Gentiles of vv9ff) are justified if they believe.

Coming back now to Galatians 2, in contrast to justification by works in 16c, to believe in order to be justified "by faith of Christ" (16b) *is* to seek to be justified "in Christ", in v17. Paul asks, by so doing do we make Christ "a minister of sin"? Here, he anticipates an objection from his opponents: "If being justified in him means that we ourselves who were once upright, righteous Jews (so unlike those dreadful Gentile "sinners"!) are "sinners" in need of grace, just as much as Gentiles, does Christ not make people sinners? That charge

he quickly dismisses. Christ did not make anyone a sinner. Nor did the law, but it was the law itself that exposed unrighteousness. Then, in v18, he explains that if he builds again these things he tore down—if he rejects justification by faith and puts himself under the law again—he is on the wrong side of the law, "a transgressor". But he has "died" to the law (i.e., by faith) with its demands for his death, since, with Christ's crucifixion, he himself has been crucified (v19). In other words, having been executed he no longer stands condemned as a transgressor, which means he stands righteous.

When he writes (v20), Paul has not physically died yet, but he is already alive spiritually through faith: "the life I now live in the flesh [the physical body] I live by faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Again, I read this "faith of" Christ as the faith pertaining to (oriented to) Christ. The attention is not on Christ's own faith in God—or even his faithfulness to God—but Paul's personal faith in what Christ has done for *him*. After all, this is the faith *he* lives by, since this is the faith he is righteous by, as we saw in Romans 3 and 4. That he "loved *me* and gave himself *for me*" is pure faith in him, Christ.

If it were not the case (v21)—if righteousness were through the law (which it is not)— "then Christ died for no purpose." That is, he died for my righteousness, but it was in vain. But no, he did not die in vain; he did not love me and give himself up for me for nothing. I can trust his death for my righteousness. Christ is the proper Object of my faith.

11. Romans 5: "Justification" is "Reconciliation with the Judge Now and Forever".

Romans 5:1-21
[1]Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

[6] For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. [12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— [13] for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no

14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Returning now to Romans, and to chapter 5, in the same way as we have seen in Galatians, the believer is justified by Christ's death but through faith in that death. The judging of the disobedient to be innocent of any disobedience—thus

qualifying him for eternal life—is procured for the believer "in/by his [Christ's] blood" (v9), and all this is wrapped up as "the free gift of righteousness" (v17).

Justified—judged righteous—we already "rejoice" (lit.: we "confidently hold our heads high") in the "certain expectation" (*elpis*) of glory (v2)—the very glory that only the "good-working ones" enter in chapter 2:10, and the "glory" that we all fall short of (Jews included) in chapter 3:23.

In chapter 5, we read more of Paul's (and our) present blessed standing, coming out of the prior event of his justification upon believing. Notice how "justified" in v1, comes first, before he can say, "we have", or "let us have", peace with God. Notice also how this is followed by the perfect tense verbs, *eschēkamen*, we have—i.e., right now, we have possessed—and *hestēkamen* (we have stood). Before we could have this access, we had to be reconciled with our angry Judge.

This was because, as enemies (5:10), we did not have access to this "grace" (i.e., the "peace" of v1) in which we presently "stand" (cf. v19). Now, being justified "by faith", as our father Abraham was (4:3), we have access to this grace "by faith". The Object of this faith—the One we trust—is Christ. We are "justified by his blood" (5:9); we are "reconciled with God through the death of his Son" (5:10). Our justification *is* our reconciliation with the Judge.

Why is it that in 5:2 Paul and the rest of us, his brothers and sisters in Christ, can have such a confident expectation of our ultimate glorification? It is because we have been "justified"

(v1—cf. Romans 8:30). This degree of certainty assumes a reconciliation that is nothing less than eschatological—it is our lasting and final state.

In vv3-4, we even "exult" in our troubles! This comes as a result of the granting of the Holy Spirit (a past event, now that we are justified) and his pouring out, in our hearts, of God's love—i.e., his love for us, since the demonstration of that love is given in vv6-8.

Incidentally, v6 explains why God could be a just Judge and still justify believers in former times (3:26—the likes of Abraham and David) or believers now. How can he judge "the ungodly" person (*ton asebē*, 4:5) to be innocent? Because Christ died for "the ungodly" people (*asebōn*, 5:6). Some writers insist that "the ungodly" of 4:5 means, not wicked people, *per se*, but *those* ultra unclean people, Gentiles. But no, here in v6 Paul includes himself, a Jew, amongst them.

In 5:9-10, Paul reasons in each case from our present state, issuing in turn from a past event, to what it means for our future. In v9, the aorist participle ("justified"—*dikaiōthentes*, the same as in v1) is followed by "now". The sense is unquestionably perfect, and it is usually translated accordingly ("having been justified").

Our justification *had* to be an absolute gift (Romans 3:24 and 5:15,17). Just look at our condition when Christ fully purchased it for us—ungodly, sinners, and enemies. What had we (and what have we still) to offer? Who could stand? But, incredibly, here we are (in v1ff), standing, by grace. When he speaks, in 5:9, of being "justified *now* by his blood

…", he is again referring to God's final, eschatological judgment on those of us who believe in Jesus. Why? Because, just as we saw already with v2, our justification finalizes our future safety: "…we shall be saved (*sōthēsometha*) because of him from his wrath" (5:9), and "… we shall be saved (*sōthēsometha*) by his life" (5:10). And so, in 5:11, he rejoices "in the reconciliation we have *now* received." Paul appears to have no doubt that the justification or good judgment he was granted when he believed (v1), and which was bought for him by the death of Christ, was nothing less than the Judge's final verdict on him. It remains only to be announced and made plain to all by his resurrection on the last day.

Being judged righteous, we stand, by grace, before the righteous Judge, at peace with him, reconciled with him. In v11, Paul is now exulting, boldly confident because this reconciliation is "now received". Again, the aorist indicative form of the verb with "now" effectively gives us a perfect. He goes on to speak of justification/righteousness/life as a gift—vv15,17. Our reception of reconciliation with God is now a past event—it is history, but with amazing implications for now, for the day of wrath, and to eternity. Since my justification is sourced outside of me, it is not affected by, or contingent on, my future obedience. Since it is sourced securely in the Lord, himself, the court's decision will not be overturned, someday, by my future disobedience. Romans 5 teaches a once-and-for-all reconciliation with the Judge. Now that may raise some questions, but it is true, nonetheless.

In 5:18, it is this "one act of righteousness" (or "the act of righteousness of one") that has secured our eternal life. Note

how Paul contrasts here not the *general obedience* of Christ with Adam's *disobedient act* in eating the forbidden fruit, but *two acts*. Adam's disobedient act and its effects are contrasted with the act that is the subject of 5:8-10, Christ's righteous act (or the righteous Christ's *act*) of sin-bearing and its effects. Some commentators try to squeeze all Christ's obedience into that "act of righteousness", but it is more likely that Paul is thinking of two specific acts. The life-giving act of the righteous Christ—i.e., the death that brought my justification (v9)—is contrasted with the deadly "trespass" that brought my past condemnation. This is not to deny that it was who Christ was, and his general righteousness, that made his death so effective.

Justification and life.

We have seen how, in Romans 5:8-11, Paul explains the present justification of his believing readers as their present reconciliation with the Judge, guaranteeing their future safety on the day of wrath. Note the *italicised* words:

> [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we *have now been justified* by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we *were reconciled* to God by the death of his Son, much more, *now that we are reconciled*, shall we be saved by his life.[11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we *have now received reconciliation*.

We who believe have been justified, which means, we have been reconciled with the Judge. This means nothing less than

reconciliation with the Judge of chapter 2, who will grant "eternal life" to those he will find righteous (2:10). In Romans 5:14-21, where sin and death used to reign over us, now, having received the "gift" of justification, *we* "reign in life". And in chapter 6, Paul will remind his believing readers that the one who has died with Christ (i.e., by faith), "has been justified" from sin (6:7), and they should count or consider themselves (lit.) "really (*men*) dead to sin but living to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11).

What follows is my literal translation of 5:14-21, set out in such a way as to hopefully display Paul's logic.

[14] *And yet death reigned from Adam till Moses, even over those not sinning in the way of Adam's transgression.*
[15] *But yet not 'as the gift so the trespass, too':*

THE ACT	THE JUDICIAL OUTCOME
for if by the *trespass* of the one,	
	the many died,
how much more the *grace* of God and the *gift* in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ,	
	to [*eis*] the many abounded.
[16] *And not through the one sinning, the gift:* For, truly, the [guilty] *judgment* of one man,	
	to [*eis*] condemnation,
but the *gift* out of many trespasses,	
	to [*eis*] justification.
[17] For if, by the *trespass* of the one,	
	death reigned through the one,
much more … those receiving the	

abundance of *grace* and of the *gift*
of righteousness
will … reign in *life*
through the one,
Jesus Christ.

[18] Therefore, just as through *one trespass*,
to [*eis*] *all* men
to [*eis*] *condemnation*,

so through *one act-of-righteousness*,
to [*eis*] *all* men
to [*eis*] *justification* of
life.

[19] For as through the *disobedience* of
the *one* man
the *many* were made
to stand *sinners*

so through the *obedience* of the *one*
the *many* will be made
to stand *righteous*.

[20] The *law* came along
so that the trespass
might abound,

but as *sin* abounded,
grace over-abounded,

[21] So that just as *sin reigned*
in death,

so too *grace might reign*
in righteousness
to (*eis*) eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our
Lord.

Does v21 imply that "eternal life" begins only in the future? No; no more than it implies that the reign of grace belongs only to the future, or that the gift of righteousness is only for the future. The move from death to life is no process, or

journey; it is the decisive move from condemnation "to justification of life" (righteousness). It is a revolutionary dethronement of sin and death, by grace and life. The one who, by grace and through Christ, is righteous, is the one who now reigns in life. The reign of grace begins decisively with the granting of the gift. In v19, it is as decisive as being stood, or instated, righteous (Note the fundamental contrast with those seeking to make-stand, or to protest, their own righteousness in Romans 10:3). The reign of grace and life begins with an act, with the justifying death of Christ applied to us by faith, just as the reign of sin and death began with the defiant act of Adam. But unlike the reign of death, in our case, this reign is never temporary. Note the certain "will … reign" of v17: "much more *will* those receiving the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ." The reign of death is finished for them. While, by grace, they are righteous (i.e., innocent), they are alive: they are innocent "to [*eis*] eternal life". Having received the gift, they now reign in life. It is not that they may *eventually* reign in life. They are innocent with immediate effect—the gift of life.

Note the earlier discussion of Paul's use of "*eis*" for "to", in vv15-18 and 21, indicating not only the *recipients* of either the trespass or the gift (all who receive it), but also *the judicial outcome* of (1) the *trespass*—"*to* condemnation" (twice)—or (2) the gift—"*to* justification", "*to* justification of life", "*to* eternal life"—cf. Romans 4:5 ("his faith is counted to him *to* righteousness"). See pp59-61.

12. 2 Corinthians 5—More on "Reconciled".

2 Corinthians 5:9-21

9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

How can there possibly be reconciliation between the righteous Judge (Let us call his state, "X") and unrighteous offenders (non-X)? How, with justice, can the non-righteousness of the non-X not be counted against them (5:19)? How could the Judge remain a just judge while "not counting/imputing to them" (*mē logizomenos autois*) their sins?

It is not that God was in *us*, by his Spirit, reconciling us to himself by making us less sinful and more ethically righteous like him; it is not that, in Christ, we are being reconciled to him by *becoming* righteous as he is. Instead, God *counts* righteousness, itself, to us, and that is how we are reconciled. God and we who are in Christ are already reconciled, not because we have no sin now, but because as Judge he does not judicially count our sins anymore. This makes sense of our message as "ambassadors" of reconciliation. The "word of reconciliation" (5:19) that we announce to the world is not, "Reconcile yourselves with God!" but, "Be reconciled to God!" No-one should be in any doubt about God, as three Persons, having one mind here: as we, on behalf of Christ, "implore" people with this message, God, himself, is calling people "through us" (5:20). But the question remains, how can a just Judge treat offenders (non-X) as righteous (X)? God is a just Judge and a God of righteous wrath. For God not to count our sins against us, something had to happen to reconcile *him* with not counting our sins.

The answer comes in the message we are to announce as ambassadors (or, at least, this is the appeal and its explanation): "Be reconciled to God. The Person not knowing sin, for us he made sin, so that, in him, we might become the righteousness of God" (vv20b-21, literally).

"The Person who had no sin" is clearly the Christ, "in" whom, God, in v19, was reconciling the world to himself, and we need to be "in" him, the same Christ, in order that we might become the righteousness of God. Note the contrasts:

Sin	Righteousness
For us … him	in him, we
For us, God made him sin	in him, we become righteousness
For us [sin-knowing]", God *made* him who knew no sin [*become*] sin	in him [not sin-knowing but *made* sin] we [sin-knowing] *become* righteousness.
The concrete "him" becomes (God makes him) the abstract "sin"	The concrete "we" becomes the abstract "righteousness"

"Sin", as an abstract, which God "made him" (Christ), is parallel to the abstract, "righteousness" (or the whole phrase, "the righteousness of God"), that we become in him.

"For us … he" appears to be in parallel with "in him, we".

Thus, "for us [knowing sin (implied)], he who knew no sin" is parallel to "in him [knowing no sin but "made" sin] we [knowing sin (implied)] become righteousness".

"For us, God made him sin" is parallel to "In him we become righteousness".

God *making* the not-knowing-sin Christ to be sin "for us", the sin-knowing, is parallel to the sin-knowing "we" becoming righteousness "in him", the not-having-known-sin Christ.

Jesus did not know sin.

Notice how different we are from Jesus in his relationship to the law prior to our becoming "the righteousness of God" in him. Romans 3:20 reminds us that as we tried to obey God's good (3:31) commandments, all we achieved was not justification, but "knowledge of sin". That "knowledge"[13] of sin is set opposite to "justified" (*dikaiōthēsetai*), or being guiltless. If Paul has the same forensic "knowledge" (*gnosis*) in mind here in 2 Corinthians 5:21 (which the forensic *counting* of v19 would suggest), then Jesus, by contrast, had never previously experienced that "knowledge of sin"[14] that so crushed Saul of Tarsus. Jesus so obeyed that he was (lit.) "the not-knowing-sin one"[15]. Now, in *that* one made to know guilt (legal filth) for us, we are the legal cleanness of God himself.

What is the "what" what we became?

The abstract, in each case, is the outcome of the knowing or the *making*, on the one hand, and of the *becoming*, on the other. Thus, Christ, who knew no *sin*, has been made *sin*

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[13] "*epignōsis*" is the particular knowledge, or recognition, of something, with the *epi* intensifying it or possibly adding focus.

[14] Which also means, of course, that he must never have known sin experientially—personal rebelliousness—or he would have had his own guilt; he would have known sin forensically also.

[15] *tēn mē gnonta* (from *ginōskō*) *hamartian*—"Sin" is "*harmatia*" both here and in Romans 3:20.

(abstract)—he was made what he was not, or did not know—so that we, in him, might become what we are not, *righteousness* (abstract). The effect of God making Christ "sin", of course, is that Christ *became* sin, and that runs parallel to "we *become* righteousness" (the very "righteousness of God", no less). The concrete "him" becomes the abstract "sin", so that the concrete "we" might become the abstract "righteousness". There is a pattern here: God made Christ *what*, in the abstract, we *knew* and he *did not*, so that we might become *what*, in the abstract, he *knew*. For us, Christ was made (and so became) *what* he did not know, the *hamartia*, so that in him we might become the *dikaiosynē theou*, which, by implication, is *what* he knew and we did not know. What is the "what" that we became? It is not *everything* that he knew or was—divinity, for example. In the context, in Christ, it is *what we needed to know in order to be reconciled with the righteous God*. Outside of Christ, a person knows sin and that is why he needs to be reconciled to God. He presents before God's judgment throne as absolute guilt. He knows guilt. Christ knew no defiance or disobedience, and hence no guilt derived from that. But God on his throne of judgment judicially made him absolute guilt for us, so that we in him might become absolute innocence.[16]

If Paul was talking about a long process of reconciliation through the transformation of our character, none of us would already be a new creation (note, here, too, we have an abstract noun, creation, rather than an adjective, "created"). This verse is not about a believer's character or attributes,

[16] cf. the parade of abstracts in 1 Cor.1:30: "And because of [from] him [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us *wisdom* from God, *righteousness* and *sanctification* and *redemption*, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

but his *standing*, even now, before the "bema" of Christ. "If anyone is in Christ, he" presents before the throne of judgment as absolute righteousness.

Hence, the issue of how God could make Christ a sinful person should not even arise. The text does not say that God transformed Christ, making him *sinful* (adjective); it says that God made Christ *sin* (abstract noun). Nor, for that matter, should we lose any sleep over how the concrete can be made or can become abstract.

It makes sense, however, if God made him *sin* forensically—i.e., if he imputed to him the legal standing of guilt. Just look at the opposite number, or counterpart, to "God made him *sin*": "we become *righteousness*". The counterpart of sin (abstract) is righteousness (abstract). There is no reason to think of our becoming righteousness in Christ as a lengthy, even life-long, process any more than we should see Christ's being made sin for us as being a lengthy process—or a process at all, or even a transformation. Rather, the implication is that simply by being "in" him-made-sin-for-us, by our identification with him, we have already become the righteousness of God. Clearly, none of us has already been morally transformed so that our characters are as righteous as God's. And neither should we imagine that Christ's being made sin was a moral transformation. Verse 21 is not about anyone's change of character. In Christ we have not become *righteous*; we have become *righteousness*. When the Judge sees us in the punished Christ, he sees righteousness. This is the righteousness that in 2 Cor. 3:9 is the opposite of condemnation. In the contrast of 5:21, one thing, expressed in the abstract, is set opposite another thing, expressed in the abstract. God made Christ *what* Christ (cf. his "righteous

servant"[17] of Isaiah 53) did *not* know—sin—and so Christ became *what* he did not know—sin—and it was "for us", in order that "we … in him" (the One who became "sin") might become *what* he was, "righteousness".

Pastoral Implications.

Pastorally, these abstracts are pure gold. Where the Christian struggles with the enemy's attempts to impute crushing guilt to him, the ultimate question is, "Was it sin?" If it was, denial is to bank that sin in a compound interest account. God's reality therapy is confession. The issue is not, "How sinful was it?", or "What degree or class of sin was it?" but simply, "Was it sin?" If it came into the category, "sin", then, no matter how evil it was, Christ became "sin" *for us*. Christ became sin for you who are in him, so that whatever charges are ever brought against you, *even if your accusers are telling the truth*, in him your innocence is the *very innocence* of God himself.

Effects of Reconciliation.

We have noted that when, by grace, we entered Christ and became the righteousness of God, it was no more a moral *transformation* of us than Christ's being made sin for us was a moral transformation of him. It was not in itself a change of character; it was a change of legal standing. But this changed status is *transformative*. With reconciliation, transformation invariably ensues, with liberation from being under the

[17] Isaiah 53:2-4. He was the very opposite of how "we" viewed him: "we did not consider him" (v3) in a positive way; we considered him beaten by God (v4)—i.e., punished for his *own* offenses!

control (a) of *enslaving* guilt, and (b) of "the flesh", our innate defiance, by the working in us of the Spirit of sonship (v5). When you are found in him-made-sin-for-you, with immediate effect you are in the Christ *who died for you,* of v14, and that is immediately transformative, as you come under the new *control* of the love of Christ (14), in order to live not for yourself but *for* him who died *for* you and was raised (15), and since we, in Christ, have all died (14), we regard one another differently now, as passed away and a new creation[18] (16-17). Given the transformative effects of reconciliation, when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, no-one should be greatly surprized at what has happened to our works. Having said that, until the day of wrath itself, we will never cease to need the Judge to count the punishing of Christ to our case, and so not to count our sin. That judgment would still leave us guilty, were it not for our being found "in Christ".

Anyone in Christ has not merely *begun* to be remade but is already a new creation (17)—i.e., he *is* reconciled to God (18), because, not having his sin counted against him (19), he *is* the righteousness of God (21). But in addition to that, *now*, "our inner self is being renewed day by day" (4:16). As we learn elsewhere (Romans 12:2), we still need to be (lit.)

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[18] Verses 17-18a are especially interesting: "if anyone in Christ, a new creation; the old things [*what* is old—the neuter plural gathers it all up] *have* passed by [gone to the side]. Look [i.e., "Hey, look!"], the new things [neuter plural again] *have* come!" In the first part of the verse, we don't find a verb, which may indicate that it should be read with the perfect verb, *oidamen*, of v16, in mind (we know—cf. "*ginōskomen*" in the same verse, speaking of how we now "know" Christ). In reconciliation, former enemies have come to know each other as friends.

"metamorphised by the complete make-over of our minds" (the *anakainōsis* of the *nous*!).

In terms of our friendly standing with God, however—our new judicial relationship with him—we are a new creation. In the propitiatory sacrifice that *God* himself ("*God* was in Christ, reconciling …") "set up" (*protisthēmi—set in place*), the righteous God, who *must* act with his controlled wrath to punish all sin, was rendered propitious to us. Once we are "in" Christ, with immediate effect, God sees us judicially as the "righteousness of God". In becoming judicially clean, we have now become sons, heirs, and the holy habitation of the Holy Spirit, himself (v5), and thus we are under new management, "led" by him (Romans 8:14). In fact, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Romans 8:9). In short, the reconciliation of 2 Corinthians 5, though not a moral transformation, is necessarily transformative:

> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

This completeness *now* of our reconciliation accords with …

1. Romans 5:9, lit.: "justified *now* in his blood we *will be* saved from his wrath",

2. Romans 5:10, where clearly, we stand as *former* enemies, currently "reconciled to God through the death of his Son", *looking forward* to our future safety, and …

3. Romans 5:11, where, through Christ, (literally) "*now* the reconciliation we received (*nyn tēn katallagēn elabomen*)".

Note that, in "the reconciliation we received", in Romans 5:11, we are as passive in our reconciliation as we are in the imperative, "be reconciled to God", of 2 Corinthians 5:20.

We know from Philippians 2:8 that Christ was obedient "right up to death"; he was obedient in his extreme rejection. God did not change Jesus's pure heart, there on the cross, and the reconciled believer is not already pure in heart upon believing and being found in Christ. When God made Christ to be "sin", he did not pollute him with sin, but *judged* him as sin—as our utter filth. He did this so that we, found by the court "in" the condemned Christ, might thereby be judged to be the very cleanness of God himself.

2 Corinthians 5:21 should be understood in the blazing light of 5:17-19. In Christ we who know sin (abstract) are the very innocence (abstract) of God *because our sins* (*paraptōmata*—concrete) *are not counted against us*. Located "in him", we *are*, or have already become, the innocence (abstract) of God, since "in Christ" we *are* a new creation (abstract). Verse 21 simply gives the corollary of v19. Our sins (concrete) are not counted against us who are in him—not counted in the awarding of our status of righteousness, *because God counted them against him, instead*. The "making" and "becoming" of v21 are figurative expressions of counting or judging (or imputing a judicial standing). The abstract in the main clause highlights *what*, as a *status*, Christ as Reconciler became, to bring about (*hina*) the abstract *what*, the new status, that "we" in him become, in the subordinate clause.

This is the compelling, controlling, *love* of Christ, in v14 (and no less of God, the initiator, who was "in Christ", in v18).

This reconciliation, in turn, through the non-counting of sins, should be seen against the background of the judgment of v10, which should be a matter of fear (*phobon*) for the enemies of the Lord (v11). That is what makes Paul and us, as ministers of the word of reconciliation, persuaders (v11); and this is what makes our plea to people imperative (v20).

Besides the close affinity of the terminology in v10 to that in Romans 2, the plea of v20, "Be reconciled to God!" suggests that this reconciliation has the judgment of v10 in view, and that this is the final judgment of the "day of wrath" of Romans 2. It is not a special judgment exclusively for those in Christ; it is the universal judgment, and it is vital for anyone that he be found in Christ, and thus reconciled to the Judge—i.e., judged innocent in advance—*before* the event. Hence the plea. It is an inescapable judgment, and the role of *merit* is inescapably central.

It is inescapable that we will all be "revealed" (exposed by the light—*phaneroō* is from *phōs*, light) before the "bema", or tribunal (court), of Christ. There is a clear note of merit in "carry" (*komizō*) as used here:

> "… that each [*hekastos*] *may receive back* (*komisētai*) the things [*ta*] in/through the body in view of [*pros*] which things [*ha*] he *did* (*prassō*—used four times in Romans 1:32-2:2), whether a good thing [*agathon*, neuter singular] or an evil thing [*phaulon*—neuter singular]."

As noted, this is remarkably similar to Romans 2:5-13 (apart from the word for evil—Romans 2:10 has "*to kakon*"). There, on "the day of wrath and revelation (*apokalypsis*) of the righteous judgment of God", God …

> will give to *each* [*hekastō*] according to his works … to those with endurance in good work [*hypomonēn ergou agathou*] … eternal life; but … wrath … upon every soul of man working evil...

There, judgment is handed down to "each". It is awarded according to "works", whether good or evil, whereas in 2 Corinthians 5:10, it is according to what he *did*. In Romans also, there is no escaping the plain language of merit. In Romans 1:32, those who practise evil are "*aksioi thanatou*" (*worthy* of death); *aksios* is from *aksō* (*I weigh*). Literally, the *aksioi thanatou* are those whose works would weigh in as measure-for-measure with death; on a balance scale, their works would balance death. In 2:2, the judgment on the day of wrath is according to truth (2:2 *kata alētheian*), with condemnation decreed in 2:8 for those defying the truth (*apeithousi tē alētheia*). In 2:5, God's judgment is not merely "judgment", *krisis*, but "righteous judgment", *dikaiokrisia.* God's judgment is not arbitrary; the outcome is merited—though not at all by us, ourselves.

Although acquittal at the judgment must be earned, Paul is certain of the outcome in his own case. He is reconciled in advance, this side of the day. Notice his confidence:

> knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence (4:14).

> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison… (4:16).

Note, this is *not* a meritorious preparation; compare 5:1, below, where already "we have" a building prepared for us:

> For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (5:1).

> …so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (5:4b-5).

In Christ, we are reconciled to God, but not because by faith we have immediately become sinless like him. Of course, we are not sinless, but in Christ the judicial standing that sinlessness would qualify us for—i.e., innocence—is counted to us. We are judicially *counted* as such. But where is the due justice for our defiance? Where has our punishment gone?

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. God treated Christ as our sin-bearer. We know from elsewhere that "the Lord laid on him" (Christ) our iniquity, that he bore our sin, that he was made a curse for us. This could only mean that the court of heaven counted the sin of the unrighteous to the righteous. He was made sin *judicially*. The court *judged* him guilty of all charges against us and treated him accordingly. That is how the court of heaven can justify "the ungodly" (Romans 4:5); that is how their faith can be counted to them *to* (*eis*) their innocence. That is how their sins are not counted (Romans 4:7-8). The context of 2 Corinthians 5:21 is reconciliation. If you have become the righteousness of God,

you are judged to be as righteous as God himself, and so you and he are fully reconciled. There is peace between you and the Judge. You, who know sin, the unrighteous (the non-X), are given the forensic standing due to the X, because the forensic standing of the non-X was given to Christ (X), whom God substituted for you who are "in him". You are justified "in his blood" (Romans 5:9) "In" his treatment as non-X, you are treated as X, and thus between the Judge (whose standing has always been X) and you (with your new standing of X) there is no enmity. You and God stand X and X, and so, at peace.

Is this not victimization? Yes: the Offended has victimized the Offended, so that the offender who is "in" the substituted Victim might no longer stand offensive. In the end, even all sinner-to-sinner forgiveness requires the victimization of the forgiver, where the forgiver "wears" the offence.

God was in *Christ*, seeing to the punishment for our sins, so that God could count us, who are in him, righteous. By taking God's just demands upon himself, God the Son turned away from us God's just demand for punishment. In Christ, God as Love reconciled God as Judge to us offenders by securing our just acquittal, thereby reconciling us to himself. By gratuitously not counting our sins (that would have made us non-X) in the judgment, he *gratuitously imputed* to us, in Christ, the standing of the righteous (X). Where do we stand? "The court finds the accused righteous!" How could this happen? God sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. God, in his Son, Jesus Christ, reconciled us and him by reconciling his just demand for wrath against us with his love and forgiveness. How did he do it? How could he not impute my sin to me as guilt? How could he impute to me, who

knows sin, the judgment due to the non-knowing-sin person? How did he do it *justly*? He did it …

> as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:24b-26).

Let's face it, the key issue with *imputation* is not language. *Logizomai*, for example, can be translated in the Latin Vulgate by quite a range of '-put-' words, from "*putare*", to think, consider, reckon, etc. The real issue is how the imputation of righteousness *contrary to the merit* of the beneficiary can be *just* imputation. Or how can the imputation to Christ of guilt and condemnation *contrary to the merit* of the righteous Christ be *just* imputation? Is God treating our sin justly when he totally forgives us? If he does so through abandoning due punishment altogether, that is mercy, but not justice. However, when he imputes to himself, unilaterally, in his Son, the guilt for offences that are not his, is he being "fair" to *himself*? Of course not. But who are we to tell God what he can and cannot do to himself? Is forgiveness ever "fair"? We should read passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, take a step backwards, and simply gasp in wonder at God's righteousness, love, and grace: we should not patronize him, by trying to sanitize his holy words with our more enlightened moral sensibility.

If making Christ to be sin, in 5:21, is not transforming him into a wicked person—the only alternative is that he is speaking of judicial treatment, exactly as in 5:19. But if Christ is judicially treated as "sin", whose sin is it? His own? No. He knew no sin. God made him sin for *us*. How was it for *us* if God did not make him *our* sin? He judicially treated Christ as guilty of *our* sin—he condemned him as guilty and punished him accordingly. What is the outcome? The second part of v21 explains that God did this "so that" we, in the punished Christ, might become (might be judicially treated as) sin-duly-punished—i.e., absolute righteousness.

We should be no more offended (1) by the imputation of our sin to Christ, with God making him our sin, or (2) by God's imputation to *us*—to our favourable standing—of that treating him as sin, than we should be by vicarious guilt-bearing anywhere in the Scriptures (Lev.5:17; 10:17).

13. Romans 6—Justified already: now living.

In Romans 5:20 and 21 the Apostle had explained how the coming of the law caused the offense of Adam to *abound* (cf. 3:20). But then, where sin abounded, grace *over-abounded*; so that just as sin had reigned in death, grace might now reign through freely granting innocence, by means of Jesus, which means eternal life. In response to this super-abounding grace, Paul now foresees an objection to free justification: "So should we remain in this state of sin in order to highlight God's grace in freely giving us justification and life?" (cf. v15). This objection is not uncommon today. Romans 6:1 is often raised as proof that justification by faith alone is wrong. In fact, it is raised here by Paul in response to his own unequivocal presentation of justification by grace as a fact. If our presentation of the gospel is as clear as Paul's, we, too, should not be surprised to find ourselves facing the same question from people. It is essentially a variation on the same charge of antinomianism (Now we're free to flout God's law!) that is behind 3:31. Note, it is a raised only to be shot down, and he does so without lessening even one word of his shocking gospel of grace. In fact, he reinforces it.

In Paul's reply, the believer's justification, as his own punitive death in Christ, is presented as a past event—it has already happened—and this has inescapable consequences for his subsequent lifestyle. I would suggest that this is true in two ways: (1) here, in chapter 6, the believer is no longer obsessed with having to excuse his sin to avoid its punishment, and (2), in chapter 8, having eternal life, he is

now indwelt by 'the Spirit of life' (8:2), by whom he will now begin to kill off the remaining evil in him (8:13).

As the old English town crier used to announce the execution of a murderer by, "He is justified" (i.e., the formerly guilty one is now clean in the eyes of the laws of England), so the one who has died with Christ is now justified in the eyes of God. In what follows, in each case, note the tense of the words in italics (Where necessary, the ESVUK is replaced with my more literal translation). The guilty sinner, that I used to be, has now died because of his sin, and so, he is justified.

The old, guilty me is dead:

v2: "We who *died* [*apethanomen,* aorist] to sin …"
v3: "…as many as *were baptised* [*ebaptisthēmen*, aorist] in Christ Jesus *were baptised* into his death."
v4: "We *were buried with* [*synetaphēmen,* aorist] him therefore through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised up out of the dead by the glory of God, the Father, so also we should walk in newness of life."
v5: "For since *we have become* (or "have been caused to be", *gegonamen*, a perfect) united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly *we will also be* (*esometha*, future indicative) of the resurrection." Note that this is not confined to the future but is as present as our walking in newness of life, in v4. The same goes for "we will also live with him" in v8.
v6: "… our old man *was crucified with* [*synestaurōthē*, aorist] him …"
v7: "For one who has died has been judged innocent [*dedikaiōtai*] of sin [i.e., justified]."

v8: "Since *we died* [*apethanomen*, aorist] with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."

The new, innocent *me* is alive:

v11: "… consider yourselves *to be* [*einai,* present] *dead* indeed to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."
V13: "Don't yield your members to sin as weapons of unrighteousness, but yield yourselves to God as those *alive from the dead*" [*hōsei ek nekrōn zōntas*] and your members as weapons of righteousness."
v14: "… sin will not rule over you for *you are not under law* [i.e., your sin no longer means you are judged guilty] *but under grace."* In spite of your sin, by grace you are innocent.

Two types of slavery:

v17: "…*you used to be* [*ēte,* imperfect] slaves of sin, but *you became* obedient [*hupēkousate,* aorist] from the heart …"
v18: "*Set free* [*eleutherōthentes*, aorist] from sin, *you were enslaved* [*edoulōthēte*, aorist] to righteousness."
v20: "When *you used to be* (*ēte,* imperfect) slaves of sin (cf. v6b), *you used to be* (*ēte*) free from righteousness ."

The fruit of your old slavery vs the fruit you now enjoy:

v21: "What fruit *did you use to have* [*eichete*, imperfect] *then* [*tote*] in the things of which *now* (*nyn*) *you are ashamed*?"
v22: "*Now however* [*nyni de*] *set free* [*eleutherōthentes*, aorist] from sin, and *enslaved* [*doulōthentes,* aorist] to God, *you have* [*echete*, present] fruit to [*eis*] sanctification [i.e., setting you apart]."

Two "ends" or outcomes (vv21-23):

Your first slavery, to sin, bore no good fruit, only uncleanness and lawlessness. The outcome (*telos*, in both Romans 6:21 and 6:23) for those who remain slaves to sin-personified, those for whom sin remains "Lord Sin", is a *payment* (*ta opsōnia*) from "him" that they merit, "death" (v23a).
Your new enslavement is "to righteousness" (v19)—or "to obedience" (vv16-18). You "were enslaved". The "sanctification" of v19 which comes with *good yielding* is no doubt that of v22. Its clean "fruit", that now "you have" (*echete*), sets you apart already from your former "uncleanness" and "lawlessness". The outcome is what you already have if you are "in Christ"—"eternal life" (although in that gift is future glorification, as in Romans 8:30).

Eternal life is not wages paid for this sanctification.

The *outcome* (*telos*) of your death and resurrection with Christ is not *ta opsonia*—a payment you have worked for—but *charisma*—a gift (v23b). *Eternal life,* the outcome (*telos*) of being freed from slavery to Lord Sin in justification, is the resurrection life you are already enjoying (see above, vv4, 5, 8, 11,13), and you will go on to enjoy it in your glorification. It is the ongoing-into-eternity life you have now. It has been yours since you died and were raised with Christ. You are alive *now* to your good Master: "So you also, consider yourselves to be dead, indeed, to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v11). Our being put to death with Christ, our being "justified from sin" (6:7), freed us from *sin* to belong to a new slave master (righteousness). This is the gift received

by everyone who by faith is “in Christ” (3:24). It is “the gift” (*charisma*) of 5:15, in contrast to “the trespass”, or “the gift (*dōrea*) in grace of the one man, Jesus Christ”, also of 5:15, or the gift “to justification” of 5:16 (that Paul contrasts to the judgment “to condemnation”), or “the gift of righteousness” of 5:17; those who receive it “will reign in life” (cf.5:21).

Therefore, we should not read “the end is eternal life” (v22) as implying a future-only *start* for eternal life, as if our sanctification must still *procure* it as wages. Christ alone procured our justification/life by his death. Hence, there is no condemnation for those “in Christ” (Romans 8:1); here, in v23, eternal life is the gift of God to those “in Christ”. The justification and life, the liberation and re-enslavement issuing in the sanctifying fruit of v22, and our glorious “end”, *is* the gift (hence the “for”, introducing v23). Having died in his death, we stand duly punished for *all* our sin, in the clear, and alive. The law has nothing on us. But those who have not died with Christ remain unredeemed, powerfully enslaved to sin by their unrelieved guilt, or debt of punishment. The justified have no reason to fear punishment, and, as we saw, this has released them from the oppressive need to deny their sin to avoid condemnation—and so stay its slaves. The outcome of our justification/liberation is life issuing in sanctifying fruit now, and an undeserved glorious future, corresponding to the deserved “death” of 6:21 and 23 (which is the future prospect for all who continue to be ruled by the “death” of 5:14,17 and 21). The gift of eternal life is not contingent upon our sanctification; sanctification is the product of the gift.

14. Romans 7
—Justification is a new marriage after a death

As we saw in Romans 6, the believer is released from the condemnation that was due to him, the death penalty for disobedience. “Death”, there, is eternal death (=hell), corresponding to “eternal life” in 6:23. He is released by *his own* “death”, which took place in the vicarious death of the One he is now united to by faith. Being, by faith, represented in law by his Redeemer’s death, he himself has been crucified, has died in law, and is now as alive with eternal life, as Christ is risen.

In Romans 7, this is depicted as the death of a husband releasing a woman from the bonds of marriage. But firstly, Paul begins with this general statement:

Romans 7:1
[1] Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person [lit. the law has jurisdiction over the man] only as long as he lives?

He then illustrates this with the marriage or adultery law that had jurisdiction over the man and his marriage, binding his wife to him, but only until he dies. The point is clear: with his death she is “cleared”, and “free” to be “to another” (to remarry), without being condemned as an adulteress (7:2-3). Note that it is the law itself that permits the new marriage; this is no abrogation of the marriage or adultery law, but a

question of the law's application. The adultery charge simply does not apply—it never applied and never condemned—*where* one party to the first marriage had died. Reading on, also note the words in italics (with dative endings in Greek):

Romans 7:2-3:
[2] For a married woman is bound by law *to the living husband* [*tō <u>zōnti</u> andri*], but if the husband should die she is released from the law of marriage [lit. from the law of the husband—i.e., *that* husband]. [3] Accordingly, she will be called [lit. charged as] an adulteress if she lives with another man [lit. if she should be *to another man* (*andri <u>heterō</u>*)] while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man [lit. and having been *to another man* (*andri <u>heterō</u>*)] she is not an adulteress.

She is free from the "or else", the threat, of being condemned as an adulteress by "the law of the husband". Reading on, note again the italicised words:

Romans 7:4
[4] Likewise [in the same way—i.e., in the same way as the woman was cleared "from the law of the husband" by his death], my brothers, you also have died [lit. were put to death] *to the law* [*tō nomō*] through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another [lit. *be to another* (*<u>heterō</u>*), *to the One having been raised* (*tō <u>egerthenti</u>*)] who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

In 7:4ff, not the marriage law, *per se*, or the law in general, but the law demanding the death of the law-breaker, appears to be satisfied by the death not of the husband, but of the woman herself (Paul's believing readers), who "were put to death to the [death-demanding] law through the body of Christ". Being put to death through the body of Christ is to be put to death through the death of Christ. This death released them from the bonds of the law, as the husband's death would have released the wife from her marriage bonds, leaving them free to legally belong now to their Saviour, "the One raised from the dead, so that [they] should bear fruit *to God*" (*tō Theō*, which replaces bearing fruit *to death*, *tō thanatō,* v5).

In the death of Christ, their Redeemer, those who, by faith, are "in Christ" have died. "There is therefore now no condemnation" from the "adultery" law when "she" remarries. The highlighted words below indicate that the life-demanding law, the law still armed with its deadly sting, its "or else", is the law that bound the wife to her living husband. She died to this life-demanding law when the penalty demanded for disobedience was fully paid.

Romans 7:5-6
5 For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by *the law*, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we are released from *the law*, having died to *that which held us captive*, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in *the old way of the written code [lit. the letter]*.

Now that the law is disarmed, we serve (*douleuein*—cf. *doulos*, slave) in a new and free way, that of the Spirit, who indwells every slave of Christ, empowering us to bear fruit for God. What we have been released from in Christ is the law *armed*. In the following verses, esp. vv7-12, Paul speaks of the law as "holy", "… and the commandment is holy and just and good". Highlighting the tenth commandment, he shows that the problem is not with the law, not at all, but with our sin. In this case, it is the voracious appetite for what belongs to others, the covetousness that pounces to life when brought to the light of God's good law. While that good law is still armed, its guns are on us, and we are on death row. But executed with Christ, we can view God's law as unarmed and taking our hand, leading us with a smile.

I take 7:14-25 to be speaking of the remaining struggle with sin in the life of the believer whose mind now delights in this "spiritual" law of God (vv14, 21-23), as against the person with the hostile (to God) mind of the next chapter (8:7-8). In 7:14, his sin clearly distresses him, so much so that he can even describe himself as "of the flesh, sold" under sin, "captive", "wretched" and needing to be delivered. But, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord", this is not the end of the story. There are two levels of deliverance from "this body of death", as we will see in chapter 8: one has already begun with Paul's instant justification (8:1), ushering in the ongoing life in the Spirit (but it does not spare him from groaning now—8:23); the second, his glorification, is bound to follow for all the justified—for all God's sons (8:23,30).

15. Ephesians 2:8-10—Saved already for works.

The two sets of contrasts in Romans 4:1-6, (1) between works and grace, and (2) between works and faith, are found again in Ephesians 2:8-10, where salvation by grace and through faith is set opposite to salvation "from you" or "from works".

Ephesians 2:8-10:
[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The salvation that Paul has in mind here certainly includes justification, since it is salvation from condemnation—from being "children of wrath"—and it conveys life, where before there was only death: we were "dead in our trespasses" (2:1-5). To be saved "by grace" (*chariti*) and "through faith" (*dia pisteōs*) is gathered together in the neuter word, "this" (*touto*), and described as "the gift (*dōron*) of God" (2:9). Salvation "by grace" (*chariti*) has to be an undeserved gift. As a "gift", it is not "from you", and neither is it "from works", which anyone might appeal to or boast in (2:9—from *kauchaomai*, as in Romans 3:27 and 4:2). And set opposite to (1) "of you" and (2) "of works", is "*his doing*", in 2:10. It is because this salvation is entirely *his doing* that it comes to us

as a gift, and not from us OR from works. After all, what could we do to be made alive? We were dead (2:1,5). Dead people cannot make themselves alive. Having been saved (2:8), the recipients of "the gift" are now spoken of as "created in Christ Jesus" (v10). These are two expressions of the same reality. Their "works" had no role in their salvation from condemnation. The Creator needed the help of his creatures no more in their spiritual creation than he did in their physical creation.

By saying that the salvation was not "from you", could Paul simply mean that it was not from our good works originating with us, but from those good works that are "his doing" in us? Are we saved by good works, but we cannot boast over those works, since they are God's doing? Building on what we have already noted in response to this teaching (See chapters 8 and 9), Ephesians gives three reasons why this is not the case. We will put these in summary form now but revisit them in detail after first reviewing the background.

1. Not from works

The gift is contrasted not only with "from you" but also "from works". *Regardless of who is doing* the works in us or through us, our salvation is not "from works".

2. Already saved.

Paul is addressing his readers as "having been saved" already. Literally, he says, "by grace (*chariti*) you are having been saved (*este sesōsmenoi*) through faith…" This is the gift that is "his doing" and not of them nor "of works". His

"doing" in v10 is his *creating* of those he is addressing, and in Christ it is already done: they are already "created".

3. On the basis of (*epi*) the good works he has for them. Paul now explains, in v10, not only that they have already been created in Christ Jesus, but why. He has made it clear that that their salvation is by grace, but what did he save them to do? Was it just to be a vacant lot? No. They have been refashioned *on the basis of* the good works he intends them to do (*epi* with the dative—see p128 below); he has recreated them with these good works in mind.

But, as promised, before we look in more detail at these verses, let's consider the Apostle's teaching up to this point.

The Context of Ephesians 2:8-10.

From Ephesians 1:1, leading up to 2:7, what most stands out about God's grace, is its total disregard for positive merit in those saved. It begins with God's unmerited love in choosing them (1:4), "dead" people (2:1,5), to make them alive (2:5).

This unmerited delivery from death is the context of Paul's first outburst of "By grace you have been saved!" All that is bound up in "dead" is what they have been saved *from*. And the first result of their salvation is that they are alive. In 2:8, he adds "through faith", but, as v5 shows, "By grace you have been saved" can stand alone. It is God in Christ who saves, since it is he who redeems. It is not their faith that has saved them; God has saved them, through their faith in the redeeming death of his Son. God made them alive: they did

not make themselves alive! They were "dead in [their] trespasses and sins". They could be described as dead in two ways:

(a) they were judicially dead (meriting eternal death—compare 1 Corinthians 15:17, where "in your sins" means guilty, liable for punishment),

(b) they were helpless and lifeless.

Either way, their merit is 100% negative. There could be no-one less deserving of God's blessing than those of 2:1-5, the dead in sin, who are (a) children of disobedience and so children of wrath (i.e., God's wrath), and (b) walking in the desires of their sinful nature. God's wrath is all they merit. It is dead people whom God has made alive by sheer mercy.

Not only could there be none less deserving than the saints; there could be no greater blessing than what God has purposed for his chosen. To begin with, these dead people have been "made alive" (2:1,5). "In Christ", their Redeemer, they already stand redeemed (1:7). They are already "saints", with "every spiritual blessing" (1:3). They are already heirs, "sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise" (1:13, lit.), marking them off as God's adopted sons and heirs with a glorious inheritance (1:14). The sealing guarantees their future glorification. In 2:4-7, Paul explains that God has raised them up and seated them with Christ in the heavenly places to prove the richness of his grace to not just *generations*, but *ages* to come—i.e., into eternity. Therefore, this is no temporary seating, giving short-lived testimony to his grace (Note, this is SO far from the 'safe for now' seating

of many—e.g., those in the grip of the popular East African heresy referred to in the introduction).

But we should not miss the *cost* of this grace to God, himself. He does all this for us "through Jesus Christ" (1:5). It is ours "in him" (1:4), "in the Beloved" (1:6), "in whom" (1:7), and "through his blood" (1:7). The saints in Ephesus are redeemed through the blood of God-the-Son-made-man, when it is God, himself, who is the object of all their gross offence. The One who least deserves wrath, since he deserves *no* wrath whatsoever, willingly wears the demerits, or ill-desert, of their offence, to redeem them from the wrath they deserve.

Notice the terms Paul uses for God's grace in our salvation: "in love he predestined us for adoption as sons" (1:4-5), "the good pleasure (or kindness) of his will" (1:5), "the glory of his grace which he has freely given us in the Beloved"(1:6), "according to the riches of his grace which he lavished on us" (1:7-8), "being rich in mercy, because of his great love which he loved us [with]" (2:4), and "the [lit.] surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us" (2:7). The key thought in all this is not power or empowering, but God's utter disdain for our merit in the way he saves.

Consistently, throughout the Old and New Testaments, eternal life is merited only by wholehearted obedience. It is reserved solely for those judged innocent. That makes all of us deserve hell. By grace, sheer unbought love, God sends his Son, who, while fully obedient himself, willingly wears the merits of our disobedience, taking its full punishment. His redeeming death fully covers the sin of all who fall onto him

for redemption from hell. By grace, God himself casts them onto Christ for their redemption. In him, they are represented by him; their salvation rests exclusively on the merits of his redemption payment for them.

For sure, the Spirit of God now gets those in Christ working, but he does not get them working to merit their salvation. When believers, by the Spirit, are killing off the evil in them (Romans 8:13), God is not getting them to pay off the price of their ransom. That payment was made in full at the cross. Our disobedience was punished in full to God's satisfaction ("It is finished!"), as he proved by raising Jesus. In Christ, we stand "Innocent" before the Judge—i.e., "righteous", "justified in his blood".

Grace vs Merit in Football.

Grace and merit, in Ephesians 1-2, are opposites. God, by his grace, is not shooting the ball to his team so they can score. He is not backing them with performance-enhancing drugs so they can kick the goal of eternal life. He is not just directing the players' legs to the ball since they are all blind. He is not lifting their feet to kick the ball, since they all have broken legs. The truth, according to Ephesians 2:1-5, is that the players do not merely have broken legs; they are dead! They don't need to be enabled to kick the goal of obedience to win life. They need to be given life, by grace. Grace brings Jesus Beckham onto the field to kick the goal for them, and without their help.

(1) The absolute deadness that the Ephesian believers have been redeemed from, (2) the extreme heights to which they

have been freely lifted, and (3) the extreme cost of that redemption—all this—explains the praise that erupts from Paul for God and his grace.

This is the context of 2:8-10, which we will now look at in detail.

Ephesians 2:8-9.

1. "For by grace …"

That salvation is "by grace" is later reinforced by "it is the gift of God" and stands in stark contrast to "by works", which would imply merit. To the extent that salvation is "by grace", it is not "by works". The two are mutually exclusive, as in Romans 11:4-6. To the extent that a blessing is merited, it is not a gift; it is not of grace or of mercy. What is merited is not granted mercifully. Eternal life merited by our works would be neither mercy nor salvation. That is, the only thing that would merit it would be a lifetime of perfect obedience, in which case, it would not be granted by mercy but would be truly merited. Even if a totally good heart were mercifully granted to the undeserving, would his remaining years of total good-heartedness cover his past sin and make him deserving of life?

Secondly, Paul's setting opposite to one another, "by grace" and "by works", shows that "by grace you have been saved" cannot mean, "by grace you are enabled to work for your salvation". "Grace", here, is not "God's enabling power". But there is another reason why he is not saying this:

2. "… you have been saved …"

As we noted, when he writes to them, they are already saved: in Eph.2:8 he says, literally, "For by grace you are having-been-saved (*este sesōsmenoi*) …" He writes to them as already saved at the time of writing.

3. "… through faith …"

It is not "through faith *and* good works", because "works" are excluded in v9.

4. "And this …"

The pronoun, "this" (*touto*) is neuter ("this thing"), which, in Greek, can serve to gather up into one what has just gone before. Not only "faith", but "by grace you have been saved through faith" ("this thing") …

5a. is **"… not from/of yourselves …"** (*ex hymōn)*,

5b. is **"… the gift (*dōron*) of God …"**

But, noting a and b, could our good works be God's gifts to us, so that we are saved by the good works he does in us or through us? No. Not only is salvation given to them, and so *not of themselves*; it is a salvation that …

5c. is **"…not from works …"** (*ex ergon*).
Note, Paul does not say that it is "the gift of God *through works*".

5d. "lest anyone should boast." This infers that if it were from works, you would have something to boast of. However, all three, a, b, and c, together remove any grounds for boasting in "this thing"—i.e., for boasting in your salvation, or even in your faith, which is included in "*touto*".

So far, from vv8-9, we can conclude the following.

Your faith is given to you.

Even your faith is not from you, yourself, so that you can take the credit for it: it is the gift of God (cf., Philippians 1:29). If someone saw your faith as a good work that merited your salvation, they would be mistaken, since the whole of your salvation, here, is *not from you* (8b). Faith is not a meritorious character trait that somehow convinces God to look on you with favour. It is *not from you*. True faith comes empty-handed to receive a gift: it is only too aware that God's mercy is never merited by us. But even then, even when it comes conscious of its empty hand, it IS empty-handed. It is not only that no merit is *offered*; it is not even that nothing meriting salvation is *recognized*. This salvation is not of you and not of works. And this leaves us, the saved, with no grounds for boasting.

The faith and the salvation, the whole thing (*touto*), is not only (1) the gift of God and (2) not from us, but (3) it is not from works, and, in any case, (4) there is nothing in it for us to boast of. All that is contained in "this" (*touto*)—that is, salvation by grace through faith—is opposed not only to "of yourselves", but, as a "gift", it stands opposed to "of works" ("*ex ergon"*). Paul does not merely contrast "this", salvation

as a gift, with salvation by either, (1) “works done in your own strength”, or (2) “works done merely to get yourself out of trouble or to give you a claim on God”. He contrasts (1) the gift of salvation by grace through faith with (2) salvation “from works”. He says nothing to limit “from works” to, “from works done by you on your own, and not by God in his grace working in you”.

The gift (*dōron*) is opposed to *both* “of yourselves” (*ex hymōn*) *and* “of works” (*ex ergōn*). These verses are remarkably similar to Romans 3:24, where the related adverb, *dōrean* (as a gift), is used in regard to justification “by his grace (*tē autou chariti*) … through faith (*dia pisteōs*)”. In Romans 5:17, Paul speaks of the “*dorea*” of “righteousness”. But what is this gift? Is it God’s creation of good works in a person by grace so that he might be saved by these God-enabled works? No. On the contrary, the believer is already justified by grace through faith before he does these works—i.e., he is justified as a gift that is not merited by works.

The contrast between “gift” and “works” excludes merit in the recipient. Even if God himself *had* put 100% heaven-meriting goodness into my heart (which he hasn’t), it would be altogether irrelevant to this salvation, since not only is this salvation (a) not from me, and (b) entirely a gift, but (c) *it is not of works*. The contrast between (a) and (b), on the one hand, and (c), on the other, is not merely the contrast between good works and evil works, or good works and legalistic (or nationalistic) “works” but is the contrast between “gift” and “works”. What is unmerited is set over against what is considered meritorious.

Salvation by faith AND works is ruled out.

Salvation by faith AND works is ruled out, since the concept of salvation as a "gift" is set opposite to the concept of salvation by "works" which would provide grounds for boasting. It rules out any role for works in meriting our salvation, not only (1) works done "to put God in debt to us" but also (2) "grace-oriented or grace-blessed works"[19].

"I thank you that I ..."

The false notion that we are saved through God, in his grace, working in us, or through us, or getting us to do the works needed to qualify for eternal life, did not start with Roman Catholicism. Is it not the thinking of the Pharisee in the temple in Jesus' parable, when he said, "Lord, I *thank you* that I (x5) …" (Luke 18:9-14)? Who is it that the Pharisee gives the credit to for his (supposed) moral superiority to others? He thanks *God* for it. He gives God the credit for his supposed goodness or good works, or lack of evil, while still effectively appealing to that work. Jesus "told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt …" (18:9). However, if this Pharisee had thought that his good works might bring him righteousness, he was wrong: Jesus explains that it is the tax-collector, not him, who was "justified".

[19] Sungenis, R, sees such "grace-blessed" works as meriting salvation. *Not by Faith Alone*, p.673.

Paul's words, "lest anyone should boast", rule this out altogether. When Paul says, "not of works", in Ephesians 2, or "apart from works", in Romans 3:28 or 4:6, he rules out any grounds for appeal to us ourselves. He rules out all back-patting on our part for any goodness we might fancy we have, regardless of who is ultimately responsible for our having it or doing it.

We are commanded in 2 Peter 5:8 to add virtue to faith, but faith itself is not one sort of meritorious virtue that substitutes for another. It does not make our salvation our workmanship, thus giving us grounds for boasting, as v10 makes clear.

Ephesians 2:10.

1. "For" (*gar*), at the beginning of v10, makes this abundantly clear. It introduces an explanation for the fact that God's having saved them was no thanks to them—not "of yourselves" or "of works"—which might then have given them something to boast in. When he saved them, he saved "dead" people, with nothing to boast in. He did it "by grace … through [*dia*] faith"; it was "the gift of God". Is he now going to turn around and say that their works are his way of saving them? Have they, after all, been created (saved) on the basis of the foreseen merit of those works, which are "his workmanship" in them? No: "his workmanship", or his creation, is *contrasted* with the two items, not only "of yourselves" but also "of works".

2) "… we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Instead, any "grace-oriented or grace-blessed works" in our lives are the *fruit* of our "creation", which cannot be our mere physical creation, since "WE ARE his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus", runs parallel with, "YOU ARE having been saved"—i.e., this is not our physical creation, since not all physically created people are saved.

On account of (*epi*) the good works he purposed for us.

In fact, we have been saved/created "on account of" (*epi*) these good works he prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. That is, we have been saved on account of his purpose. This creation corresponds to the "new creation" of people in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, through "not counting their sins against them", by making "him who knew no sin" to be sin instead of them. Here, in Ephesians 2, "We are his workmanship, created" (*autou gar esmen poiēma ktisthentes*), is parallel to, "…you are having been saved" (*este sesōsmenoi*). By salvation, we have been created in Christ "on account of good works".

Ephesians 2:10 is clear: walking in good works is the outcome of being "created" or saved. Being saved is not the outcome of *works* done in faith. The saving is the creating and is a past event: his workmanship—his saving us—is prior to our working, equipping us for it. We have been created in Christ

on account of (*epi*[20]) the good works he had purposed for us to do. We have been remade with a view to specific good works he had in mind for us to walk in (cf. Romans 9:23). It is not that by grace we are still being worked by him so that we might eventually be saved; rather, by grace we have already been created by him on account of the *good works* that lay ahead. Does *epi* with *good works*, here, mean "on account of *the [foreseen] merits* of these good works"? If that were so, he would be directly contradicting what he has just said—that our being saved is "not of works". No, he is explaining that we are already saved—already created—when we are doing these good works. Without this new creation, or salvation, we could not do them.

In short, what makes the question of any supposed merits (gifted or not) in our good works irrelevant to the causation of salvation is that *we are already saved when we are doing them*.

[20] On this metaphorical use of *epi* with the dative, see Thayers (under Strongs 1909: ἐπί, B,2, a, d and e).

16. A Legal Fiction?

As we have seen, Romans 3:28 and 4:5 teach that justification is by faith alone (apart from your moral obedience). By trusting Christ's death to save you, you are *judged* to be totally innocent, and your *actual* obedience is not a factor in that judgment.

This is sometimes dismissed on the grounds that it would be a "legal fiction". In law (with plea bargaining, for example) something that is not true may be treated by the court as true, simply as a way of getting *some* measure of justice done. Romans 3:28 read by itself could read like that—as if the Judge just treats disobedient people as obedient, with no regard for truth or real justice.

This is the question that Romans 3:24-26 addresses head on. The answer is simple: my sin does not go unpunished. It is not just *treated* as punished; it is *really* punished. The Judge has counted my sin against a willing Substitute, Someone other than me, the uniquely qualified Someone. Romans 3:28 needs to be read in the light of 3:24-26. There is nothing fictitious about (1) the divinity of Christ, (2) his perfect humanity, (3) his perfect and willing obedience, (4) the punishment that was inflicted on him, or (5) his being raised from death. In fact, to say that Christ's redemption payment was insufficient, and needed to have my obedience or "faithfulness" or loving lifestyle added to it—to imagine that anything about me could be a factor in a good judgment—*that* would be fiction.

How can our sins *not* be counted against us (2 Corinthians 5:19)? It is because *real* reconciliation (5:18-19) has been done, not fictitious. It is a reconciliation whereby the offended party, the one God, has counted our sin against himself, in the person of Christ (5:21—see chapter 12, above):

> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The punishment that we justly deserve was *really* meted out to Christ. Therefore, righteousness is imputed to us, or, to put it another way, our unrighteousness is not counted, or imputed, to us (Romans 4: 6-8). Why not? It is not counted to us because it has been imputed, or counted, to Christ instead. He has been judged guilty of our unrighteousness.

We have seen that this does not mean Christ was actually made evil, so that there on the cross he had a disobedient heart. Clearly not, since Philippians 2:8 tells us that he was "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." It can only mean that he was *judged* or *counted* to have our sin—i.e., as the Servant of Isaiah 53:9-12, who had no deceit or violence, "poured out his soul to death", was "numbered with the transgressors" and "bore the sin of many". That is, he was counted to have the sin of us who, by believing, are "in him"; that sin is therefore not counted against *us*.

The second half of 2 Corinthians 5:21 must likewise mean *not* that we are now totally obedient, but, as we saw, that we are *judged* innocent of all disobedience. Again, the court's

decision *has* to be utterly undeserved on our part. *Who* among men is morally pure? Christ alone.

Being a gift, it comes at no cost whatsoever to *us*. But, as we have seen, it comes to us at unspeakable cost to *him*: it comes "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Romans 3:25).

Some ask, "Is it *right* for my sin to be counted against an innocent third party?"

John 10:30 …
30 I and the Father are one."

Third party? What third party? It becomes immoral only if we crudely *anthropomorphize* the persons of the Godhead (i.e., if we think of them as three *human* persons) and separate them at the expense of the unity of the Trinity, as if the three persons were not one God, and not of one mind in regard to our salvation—e.g., seeing the Son as our soft, understanding and loving Saviour and friend, and the Father as our hard, merciless enemy with no great interest in our salvation. But note the Father's role in John 3:16 and 6:38, Ro.8:3-4, 2 Cor.5:18 and 1John 4:9-11. John 10, in particular, shows the remarkable oneness of purpose of Father and Son in our salvation. The Father gave "sheep" to the Son, who "must bring them" (14-16), and who therefore dies for them as their good Shepherd. Only those given by the Father to the Son (vv26-27, 29) hear his voice and are given eternal life:

they will never perish or be plucked from the Son's hand—the Father will see to that (John 10:14-16, 26-30). The Son and the Father are one.

Illustrating God's self-punishment.

In the Kaonde language of NW Zambia, if you accidentally hit your finger with a hammer, you would not say, "I hit my finger!" but "I hit myself on my finger!" At the cross, God struck himself on his Son. This illustration, as with some of Jesus' parables, should not be pressed in every detail, since Jesus is 100% God, and not *part* of God as a finger is part of a body. However, note also Paul's interesting words during his farewell to the elders in Ephesus, in Acts 20:28, where he speaks of God obtaining his church "with his own blood", referring to Christ's death.

Does God think it is immoral?

Romans 3:25-26, as we saw earlier, gives the ultimate answer to the charge that justification is immoral if it is on the grounds of the punishing of the sinless Substitute. There, Paul holds up the redemption payment that *God himself presented* as precisely what proves God to be just in judging law-*breakers* in Christ to be law-*keepers*—both in OT times and today (v26). If we think it is unjust, when God apparently does not, then we need to tread very cautiously, and perhaps review our understanding of the Trinity; perhaps we need to

take a step back and bow before God's hidden depths in the light of Job 38-41—especially 40:8 …

> Will you even put me in the wrong?
> Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?

If the Chief Justice of the High Court of heaven, by raising Jesus from the dead (Romans 4:25), vindicates his justifying work for us, declaring that justice has truly been done for our sins (note 1 Corinthians 15:17), and declares the same in his words through the Apostle here in Romans 3:25-26, who are we to talk of "legal fiction"? Besides, God is no human judge who thinks that he has to play along with the odd, expedient cover-up to get justice done. Abraham's question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" must apply to the atonement also.

In the end, it is God himself who has revealed the doctrine of "justification in [Christ's] blood" (Romans 5:9), speaking from his position as the ultimate offended party when it comes to all sin. Before we dare to take this Judge to task for what we might consider questionable justice in his treatment for our sin, let us remember what we observed earlier, that any injustice would certainly not be at *our* expense. It would not be any of *us* who would be facing unmerited retribution. If the offended, himself, should seek just retribution at his own expense for our offense, this is unmatched love. This, too, is the model for us when we are the offended party. As we noted earlier, all genuine forgiveness involves unmerited and unreturned pain. Forgiveness is costly to the forgiver.

17. The punishing of clean Jesus is counted to cleanness for dirty me.

How has the sacrifice "redeemed" me? How has it "paid" for me to be released from the "Guilty" judgment I deserve as an unclean rebel, and to be *given* the verdict, "Clean"?

1 Corinthians 15:4-5…
3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

1 Corinthians 1:17-18 …
17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:21-24 …
21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 …
And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

God in his love gave his sinless Son, and the Son loved me and gave himself for me, willingly submitting, in my place, to the "guilty" ("dirty") judgment I deserve—and to its full punishment—so that I might be judged to have a cleanness no less glorious than that which qualified him to be my perfect Priest and Substitute. The punishing of the one who was God and was SO clean, has SO fully met the just demands of God's law for payment for all my disobedience that I now stand clean in the eyes of the law. It is the *slaughtering* of the spotless Lamb that has qualified me to be judged "Spotless". It is the *punishing* of the perfectly obedient Son of God that has procured for me the judgment "Perfectly innocent". This is the payment that enabled the court of heaven to find in my favour, or to *count* or *impute* to me the judgment, "Innocent" (Romans 4:5b).

In what follows, we will consider six passages that link the believer's peace with the Judge with Christ's death on the cross.

It is the punishing of the perfectly obedient Son of God that has procured for me the judgment, "Perfectly innocent".

17.1 Justified by his blood—Isaiah 53:4-12

By his stripes we are healed of guilt.

Isaiah 53:4-12
Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
8 By oppression and judgement he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
9 And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.
10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

[11] Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
[12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Luke 22:37
[37] For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfilment."

1 Peter 2:18-23
[24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. [25] For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The immediate context of the Isaiah passage is the return and redemption of God's people from captivity, through God's Servant, who will be "high and lifted up" (52:13). In him, the arm of the Lord will be revealed (53:10), and "kings shall shut their mouths because of him" (53:15). But, before that, he is so "marred", he does not appear human (53:14).

Let me hesitantly offer this paraphrase of 53:2-3. Initially, he appears to have suffered at the hands of men. It seems he was not exactly a popular figure, nothing much to look at; "we" did not give him a second thought, and when we did, we just considered him as a sorrowful creature, "smitten by God", getting what was coming to him. We were partly right: smitten by God, he was, but not for anything that he, himself, had done wrong; he bore *our* griefs and sorrows.

The next section is very clear (vv5ff). He was wounded, crushed, and afflicted. But by whom, and for whom? There is an unmistakeable note of substitution: bearing *our* griefs and sorrows (v4) involved being "wounded" for *our* law-breaking, and "crushed" for *our* iniquities. On him, was imposed the punishment that brought us peace—i.e., peace with the Judge, in place of his hostility to us and the punishing of us that our law-breaking and iniquities had called for. With the wounds of his "stripes", *our* wounds are healed.

But what have we done? "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way" (v6a). And who put on him what was on us? "… and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v6b). Thus, the Lord, himself, has wounded, crushed and afflicted—i.e., punished—him, the clean Servant, instead of us who deserve it.

Note, from v7, that the victim willingly submits to his suffering. As for his contemporaries, who would have thought that, in being cut out of the land of the living, he was struck for the law-breaking of God's people (v8)? Verse 9 makes it clear that this Servant did not suffer for his own offences. In v10, we are plainly told that it was the will of

Yahweh himself to crush this Servant and put him to grief; his death was “an offering for guilt”.

Without excluding all thought of resurrection, the focus of the Servant’s sight, in 53:10-11, appears to be “his offspring”, as the fruit of his death as a guilt-offering—their justification and life. As he perseveres in executing the Lord’s will—cf. Luke 22:42b: “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done”—it appears that the fruit or spoils he sees are the “many” he “will cause to favourably stand [*tsadeq*—causative verb] righteous [*tsaddiq*]” by his “bearing their iniquities” (v11—cf. Romans 5:9,19). The key point to observe is that this justification of the “many” of v11 will be worked by his sin-bearing in v11, and his pouring out of his soul to death, his being counted a law-breaker, interceding for the law-breakers, and his bearing the sin of “many”, of v12.

In Luke 22:37, Jesus applies this prophesy to himself. Where there is law-breaking, there is guilt, a debt to the law that is only removed by due punishment. In the New Testament, the redemption “payment”, that has purchased my cleanness in the eyes of the Judge and his holy law, is the punishing of the perfect Jesus, the Messiah, for my sin. *His* punishment took care of *my* punishment and has brought peace between God and me. I have turned my back on God, going my own way. The Lord “has laid on him” my turning from him to go my own way (Isaiah 53:6). The sin-bearing—i.e., punishment-bearing—by the Sacrificial Victim has cleansed me of my guilt. Jesus was indeed “bruised” or “crushed” for my disobedience (v5), and it was God who actively and wilfully did the crushing (v10).

Peter (1 Peter 2:21-24) sees Isaiah's suffering Servant as Jesus Christ on the cross. His death is a sin-bearing sacrifice. Dr Garry Williams comments:

> No one can deny that the Father acts on the Son, provided we are clear that the Son also wills the action. More likely, then, the problem [that some have with substitutionary atonement] is thought to be specifically with the activity of the Father causing the Son to suffer. The difficulty here is that there is plain biblical testimony to the Father acting on the Son at the cross, in the suffering of the cross, and specifically in the penal suffering of the cross. Isaiah 53 speaks of the suffering of the "Servant of the Lord," which is understood in the NT as a description of the suffering of Christ (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:21–24). Verse 6 says that "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all," and verse 10, that "it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain." …
>
> It is of further significance that in the context of Isaiah 52–53 the suffering in question is specifically penal. This emerges at the end of chapter 53 with the use of two expressions: "and he shall bear their iniquities (v11), and "yet he bore the sin of many" … (v12). The verb-noun combinations in these phrases [in Hebrew] … are used widely in the OT to describe bearing sin, guilt, and punishment (e.g., *inter alia* Gen 4:13; Lev 5:17; Num 5:31; 14:34; Lam 5:7). … Thus, we find in verses 6 and 10 statements that the Lord willed the suffering of the Servant in a context where that suffering is defined as being penal, and indeed atoning (v. 5).[21]

[21] Garry J. Williams, Penal Substitution: a Response to Recent Criticisms, JETS 50/1 (March 2007), p78.

17.2 Justified by his blood—Galatians 3:10-13

It was the cursing of Christ that redeemed me.

Galatians 3:10-13
[10] For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." [11] Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." [12] But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." [13] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

Our disobedience to God's law makes us guilty—liable for the punishment or "curse" that the law of God pronounces on the disobedient (3:10). Christ "redeemed" us from this curse (3:13) by becoming a curse for us. Paul spells out what he means here by referring to the curse of Deuteronomy 21:22-23, where a man hanged on "wood" is cursed by God. In other words, at the cross, Jesus was actively cursed by God. Again, it is the punishing of Christ that, *given his deity and righteousness*, constitutes the sufficient ransom payment to free me from the punishment the law would otherwise have demanded of me. In Mark 10:45, Jesus himself said, "… the Son of Man [i.e., Jesus] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (We will return to Galatians later.)

17.3 Justified by his blood—John 6:35-54

To believe in Christ is to completely source your eternal life in his slaughter. It was his sacrificial death that obtained life for you.

John 6:35
35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; **whoever comes to me** shall not hunger, and **whoever believes in me** shall never thirst.

John 6:40:
40 For this is the will of my Father, **that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him** should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:47
47 Truly, truly, I say to you**, whoever believes** has eternal life.

I John 6:51
51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone **eats of this bread**, he will live for ever. And **the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh**."

I John 6:54
54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

In John 6:35, to believe in Christ is to come him as the bread of life and eat him, or to come to him as the drink of life and

to drink him. To believe in him is to source your eternal life in him—just as in Romans 3:22-25, "faith" is to source your justification (the judgment you need for eternal life) in Christ's blood. In v54, it is "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood" who has eternal life. In the light of v51, this has to do with his sacrificial death. If vv40 and 47 are read in parallel with this, then the *faith* through which you receive eternal life is *trusting* Christ's sacrificial death, the separation of his blood from his flesh, to have secured this life for you. Note, it is the *slaughter* of the Lamb that, given he was the Lamb *of God*, and *spotless*, has purchased my eternal life.

17.4 Justified by his blood—Hebrews 10

“Perfected” or “Sanctified” by his sacrificial death.

Hebrews (10:1) …
For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Hebrews (10:12-14) …
10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Sanctification, here, is justification viewed from the point of view of fellowship with God. If God is righteous and we, too, by his blood, are righteous, then the holy God will treat us as holy, and we are welcome to enjoy fellowship with him.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews urges his Jewish readers not to cast aside the very Sacrifice that the Old Covenant offerings pointed forward to. They were mere shadows of the real thing. Why would you want to go back there now—or remain there? Jesus is the only effective Sacrifice, who *really* covers sin, by that once-for-all offering: why would you cling to the shadows of Christ's atoning work, when the real thing has come? Why crucify the Son of God, joining hands with those Jews who believed they were right to put him to that shameful death? They saw him as a blasphemer, a pretender and not the Son of God or the Saviour. However, the truth is he was the only one fit to serve *on our behalf* as our perfectly human and perfectly clean high priest, and *in our place* as the Lamb of God, the sole divine victim. His sacrifice renders believers "perfect" or "holy" (10:12-14)—i.e., perfectly fitted for communion with the holy Judge. But back there, under the covenant that came through Moses, looking at the sacrifices for their own sake and not to the Sacrifice shadowed in that covenant, there is no effective sacrifice to cover your sin, and you would be left fully exposed to the condemnation of God (10:26ff). You would be back at Romans 3:20, without the "But now…" of 21ff.

Whereas the old sacrifices were never able to "perfect" anyone (10:1), the "single offering" of Christ "has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (10:14). Year after year, month after month, no doubt, more and more people all over the world are coming to Christ in repentance, trusting him as the Sacrifice for their sins, and instantly being sanctified—immediately, they are saints. But they are not

saints just for now; they are “perfected” (perfectly sanctified) “forever”! Note, this is all achieved by the one Sacrifice. No other holiness or righteousness is required. What they have by the blood of the Lamb of God is *absolute* righteousness and holiness. It cannot be added to.

Their holiness cannot be taken from them or made void when the saints think or do unholy things. Their righteousness, and thus their holiness, is sourced outside of them, in Christ’s blood.

17.5 Justified by his blood—Colossians 2:13-14

The "nailing" of my case to the cross obtained life for me.

According to God's law, eternal life required my full obedience. But my law-breaking set the law against me, leaving me a dead man. In the death of Christ for me, the debt incurred by my law-breaking was removed, "nailed to the cross", so that now I live. I am as alive as the risen Jesus after the punishing he took for me.

Colossians 2:10-16a (ESV with some literal touches).

[10] And you are in him complete, who is the head of all rule and authority, [11] in whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made by hands, in the removal of "the body of the flesh" in the circumcision of Christ, [12] buried with him in baptism in which also you were raised with [him] through the faith of [i.e., in] the working of God, the One who raised him from the dead ones [13] and you, being dead in your defections and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, forgiving all the defections in us, [14] obliterating all the handwriting in the laws against us, which was opposed to us, and he has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. [15] Disarming the rulers and authorities, he publicly exposed them, triumphing over them in it [the cross]. [16] Therefore no-one must condemn you in regard to ….

17.6 Justified by his blood—1 Peter 3:18

1 Peter 3:18

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit…" (1 Peter 3:18).

The penal suffering inflicted on *that* one is what the court of heaven has freely *imputed*, *counted,* or *judged* to my innocence (and that of Abraham, David, Paul and all believers', when they believed). When his punishment became mine, I was stood on my feet, clean in the eyes of God's law. I stand as one who has now made full satisfaction to the law for my life's offences, and offensiveness.

When Peter speaks of the righteous suffering for the unrighteous, what does he mean? God, as Father, was sure of his Son's eternal righteousness when he presented him (Romans 3:25), sent him (1John 4:9-10), and gave him (John 3:16), to be the sacrifice for our sins. The Son's absolute obedience at every point in his earthly humiliation as our fellow man was essential to our redemption. When God provided *him* to be the propitiation for our sinning, he knew that the sacrifice of *him* alone would be pleasing to him (God). He knew that the punishing of *him* alone, the righteous, spotless Lamb of God, could fully cover our debt of punishment.

18. Explaining Imputation Wrongly

In the six parts of the previous chapter, we have seen how Christ, by his death, won for the believer the judgment that he is perfectly innocent. However, there is a widely held view that this is not enough. It is argued that, having had the righteous Lamb of God take my punishment on the cross, having had that perfectly obedient life offered up for me to the death of the curse, having had the punishment of the perfectly obedient one counted to my innocence, I would still only be *partly* saved. The court of heaven then has to count Christ's obedience to me *on top of that*. Without that extra counting, they say, I could not have eternal life. In the words of Dr David vanDrunen,

> Through his suffering, the Lord Jesus Christ endured his Father's wrath against sin and thereby cleansed his people from all their guilt. This is good news—necessary good news. But it is still only half of the good news. Those looking to God for salvation also need to hear the other half.[22]

He contends that this "other half" is the news of the imputation of Christ's active righteousness. The first half is the news of cleansing from guilt, but even with this you would still not be found with the innocence needed for life. This view does help to highlight a vital truth, that the judgment, "Innocent", must be sourced totally outside of us. It also highlights the vital importance for our justification of

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[22] "To Obey is Better than Sacrifice", in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, Ed. Gary L.W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters, Crossway Books, 200, p139

Christ's utter and uninterrupted obedience—*all* of it. But is it biblical?

The hypothesis[23] (that the punishing of the righteous Lamb of God would only *partially* save me) does not take stock of the absolute righteousness of the Judge. *If, without some added righteousness, the righteous Judge could not find me morally up to the mark, then neither could he find me "Not guilty".*

Sometimes it is explained this way, that without "the imputation of Christ's active righteousness"—*supplementing* what Christ's sin-bearing achieved for us—we who believe would only be restored to the position of Adam prior to the fall. However, would we even be there? If the Judge did not find us morally upright, we would be nowhere near the pre-fall state of Adam, who *was* morally upright, and therefore had no guilt. If we were not judged morally upright, we would be both sinful and guilty.

There are numerous illustrations offered in support of the teaching. For example, a son is ordered to clean his room, (1) under threat of punishment if he doesn't, and (2) with the promise of ice-cream if he does. He doesn't! He is punished, but then claims his ice-cream—in vain, of course! The punishing is likened to the removal, by Christ's death, of our

[23] And it *is* a hypothesis. Dr vanDrunen explained to me in an email that the active obedience of Christ is not imputed *apart from* his atoning work on the cross; the gift of righteousness for life is not conveyed separately from the cleansing from guilt. However, there are still two items to be conveyed together, and this is where the problem lies. The hypothesis that one could be judged not guilty of disobedience and yet, at the same time, not be judged innocent, or righteous, remains false—even meaningless.

debt of punishment, but that, we are told, does not merit the ice-cream of eternal life.

Arguing from analogy is always perilous, especially where we try to argue from man to God. The punishment of our divine and spotless Substitute is the propitiatory act that God counts to us as *justly meriting our justification* (Romans 3:23-26; 5:9). Since all our demerits were counted to the righteous Substitute, they will not be counted against us ("...blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not count"—Romans 4:8, my translation). Can that be compared to a human parent who arbitrarily decides that a certain level of punishment removes the case for punishment of one type—pain—but not of another type—deprivation of delight? With God, the choice is not between ice cream and no ice cream, between an added blessing granted or withheld; it is the stark choice between eternal life and the full punishment due to the unrighteous—hell. There is no half-way point. The only alternative to the ice cream of eternal life is eternal death. In short, the punishing of my Redeemer purchased for me nothing less than the ice cream itself, the justification needed for eternal life (Romans 3:24-25).

The granting of eternal life is a judicial decision.

Eternal life is not merely some extra blessing or reward granted on top of reconciliation, and in response to being found with extra credits! Its withholding implies guilt for sin. The human parent is not the holy God. If a child has already been given a promised punishment (at a level set quite arbitrarily by a human parent, for reform and not necessarily full retribution) the subsequent withholding of some reward

or inducement cannot be compared to God as Judge withholding eternal life. That withholding is clearly just punishment for sin. If God as Father grants his now-reconciled children certain blessings as rewards or inducements, it is one thing: it is quite another thing for God as Judge to withhold eternal life and membership in his own family. *Eternal life is withheld where sin is still counted*, and reconciliation still awaits payment of outstanding debt. Its withholding means the offence has not been fully removed, negated, or neutralized by the punishment. Full satisfaction has not been made to the righteous demands of the law. God's wrath remains on you.

This is clear from John 3:36, where, if you believe, you have eternal life, and the alternative is to have the wrath of God remaining on you. There is no half-way state between life and condemnation (cf. John 5:24). Such a hypothesis would be *a false hypothesis*. If wrath is removed, you have life. If life is withheld, wrath has not been removed.

If you are not judged to have the moral uprightness required for eternal life, then the debt is still not cleared. You are still short of forgiveness. It is a far cry from what the righteous Christ accomplished by offering himself for us. All our debt was paid out. Nothing remains to disqualify me from life. As we have just noted, in Isaiah 53:5, to be healed "by his stripes", is to be healed of a debt of *punishment* and so to have *peace* with God as Judge. By his death we are reconciled to God (Romans 5:10). Reconciliation and peace

If I am found by the court of heaven to have no debt to the law, then I am found to be a perfect law-keeper.

with the upright, holy Judge requires that you be found innocent—no moral debt. It is totally wiped out.

Paul, in Colossians 2, does not appear to see the need for any supplementary counting to us of Christ's obedience in order for us to be given life. It is by the nailing of my debt to the cross that I am *alive* (2:13-14). I am judged clean on "all" charges of trespass. If I am found by the court of heaven to have no debt to the law, then I am found as righteous as a perfect law-keeper. No righteousness exceeds that righteousness! I have eternal life. Why is the punishing of Christ sufficient to totally cover my debt and so purchase my absolute righteousness? Because it was the punishing of *him*, the *righteous* One. This is not to deny the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Not at all. This *is* that doctrine.

The doctrine of alien, imputed righteousness is thoroughly Biblical though, as always, strongly under attack. It is sad that some of its prominent, well-meaning defenders have, in its defence, put centre-stage a variant of the doctrine that goes beyond Scripture—and some opponents of the gospel of imputed righteousness are not slow to point this out, thereby claiming for themselves the high moral ground.

All Christ's righteousness, not only his willing submission to punishment for my sin, qualified his sacrifice—that "one act" of Romans 5:19—to purchase my righteousness. In Christ, I am now judged righteous *as a result of* all his obedience, since that made him fit to be my Representative and Substitute, taking my punishment. But it was God's *cursing*, or *punishing*, of that righteous Lamb that purchased my righteousness. Let us not forget the role of the Father in

acting as Judge at Calvary. If GOD had not punished me in him, I would not be found righteous now. The wrath executed against the righteous One has removed his wrath from me. His wrath against my Redeemer has made him propitious to me.

The righteousness that we are found with in Christ (Phil.3:9) must not be treated as an *addition* to the freedom from guilt we enjoy through the imputation of our sin to the righteous Substitute. If your sin is not counted by God—if you are not found guilty for it—then you are judged, or counted, righteous. Some talk as if God, having judged the obedience of Christ as fitting his punishment on the cross to atone for our sins, then has to draw a second time upon Christ's obedience and impute that to us in addition to what his Sacrifice purchased for us. It is a kind of double-dipping into Christ's obedience. Your sin is not counted against you because it has all been counted against the righteous Lamb of God instead, and on top of that, Christ's righteousness is counted in your favour, to your righteousness. However, in Romans 4:6-8, the non-counting of a man's sin *is equated with* the counting of righteousness to him ("Just as David also declares …").

God's counting of our sin to the righteous Christ, and *his acting on that* in fully punishing him, procured our innocence or righteousness. The counting of our guilt to Christ would have done nothing for our salvation if the Father had not *acted* in wrath against the One to whom he counted our guilt. He not only passed judgment and found Christ guilty; he carried out that judgment in wrath. In terms of 2 Cor.5:21,

when he “made him to be sin who had no sin,” he not only judged or counted him as having our sin, but he punished him accordingly. If he had not carried out the sentence, then “the righteousness of God” would not have been ours “in him”. We would not be righteous now if we had not already been punished in him. What has caused me to be judged righteous is not the righteousness of Christ *per se* transferred directly to me, or my sin to him, but the *punishing* of the righteous Christ for my sin. What has been imputed to me, counted in my favour, reckoned to me to righteousness, is the *punished* status of the one who agreed to stand in for me and be found with my guilt. Given who my Substitute was, and *given his righteousness*, the punishment fitted all my crimes. That is how Christ is my righteousness. That is how I am “found in him with a righteousness not my own”. I, a sinner, will never be judged guilty in the court of heaven, but only righteous. “The great exchange” is not my sin for the Son of God’s righteousness as such, but my sin for the righteousness that God has bestowed on me through the *punishment* of his *righteous* Son.

An illustration that does not reflect the truth.

I have heard preachers speak of “the great exchange” that takes place when we believe, whereby our guilt, in the palm of the left hand, is moved by God over onto Christ, our punishment bearer (represented by the palm of the right hand). Up to this point, we are on solid ground. But then the righteousness of Christ (in the right palm) is placed into the first hand, which had already been left empty and clean of

guilt. However, if the debt, dirt, or stench of guilt has, in God's judgment, been removed from the first hand, that hand is already absolutely clean—i.e., absolutely righteous. This righteousness cannot be, and does not need to be, *augmented* or *supplemented* by more righteousness. If the weight of a person's guilt has been taken away, he is guiltless, blameless, or righteous. If he is still unrighteous, he is not guiltless; his guilt has not been removed.

19. Illustrating Imputation Rightly

No illustration is perfect, and we need to make that clear at the start. Getting the details right is a real challenge. However, let me suggest two illustrations that might be a little less misleading than some.

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1. A clean coat.

The first is very simple. When I was justified, I was clothed, or dressed, in a coat not my own. (To explain this, you might have someone put a clean shirt or coat on you—a lab coat is ideal.) That clean coat is a pure gift, the judgment that I am absolutely righteous. This is my entry ticket into life and glory. This is why I always have a seat with Christ in glory—"we are seated with him"—regardless of the level of my obedience.

Like Isaiah, in chapter 6, I know that my heart is dirty when compared to the Lord's. No matter whether I die in the middle of loving my neighbour or offending him, I will certainly die with a dirty heart, but the clean coat given to me when I believed will take me to glory.

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2. The Exam

Let me now give you my favourite illustration.
We saw earlier, from Luke 10:25-28, that the pass mark in the "exam" of God's commandments is 100%.

Someone who has truly *repented* is like a student who has read his exam paper and given up in despair: “Ah, because I have not studied, I find these questions are far too hard! It’s hopeless! I’ve failed!” Imagine you are that student. You screw up your paper and toss it onto the floor in despair. In a flood of tears, you stand to leave the exam hall.

“Wait! Sit down!” A kind hand rests on your shoulder. It is the maths professor himself.

“I see you have given up.”

“Yes, Sir, I have no hope of passing!”

The professor calls out to all the students:

“Please, may I have your attention, everyone. I can see you are all struggling.”

There is a general moan.

“Here’s what we’ll do. You all know who I am; you know that I wrote every question and know how to answer each question perfectly”?

“Yes, Professor.”

“I have in my hand a pile of papers with every question answered by me. Each paper has no name on it. If any of you would like me to do this, I will write your name at the top of the paper and it’s yours. If you agree, just surrender your old paper, and I will give you the paper I’ve written for you.”

Some refuse the offer, but you, turning to him, say, “Yes, please!”

He gives you your new paper, and you hand it in. It comes back to the professor himself for marking. What is your mark? 100%!

Professor Jesus, our perfect high priest, by offering himself, the perfectly obedient Lamb of God, to be punished instead of us, wrote our exam paper for us. The believer says, "Yes please. Put my name on the paper you wrote for me."

Now, in the exam of God's commandments, your final mark is 100%. When Romans 4:6 says that "righteousness" is counted to the believer, this is the meaning. A perfect score is "counted" to you as yours— "reckoned", "credited" or "imputed" to you. And so now you have eternal life. And then …

… now that you have already passed, the Professor says, "I know exactly why you're struggling with maths, and I'm going to give you personal tuition. I'm going to give you a passion for maths and make you a fine mathematician! While I have already *imputed* to you a perfect score, I am going to *impart* to you my love for maths. But your final mark—100%—will not change.

This is very important: your final perfect score is what your Redeemer earned for you. It cannot possibly change.

But now you yourself will begin to change. We will see this later as we come to consider the fruit that the Spirit of Christ brings about in the heart and life of the justified. The danger here, as we shall see, is that some can be tempted to see this fruit of justification as somehow deciding their future destiny. But no: our future destiny was decided when we

believed; our eschatological standing is a gift we received then. It was paid for by an atoning offering we could never hope to match, even with the Holy Spirit leading and empowering us! Our Redeemer alone paid fully for us to have that gift, and it was given to us for free when by faith we came to be “in him”—in him fully punished.

20. Imputation and Suicide

Once righteous, I remain righteous, regardless of the level of my inward cleansing at any point on my journey, and regardless of how I will die. But what about suicide? The only relevant question is, was I a believer? If the answer is "Yes", then even if I shoot myself in the head, that evil act will not take me to condemnation. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). If I die that way, then that murder will have been punished when God punished Christ on the cross. It is not going to be punished again in hell. The court looks at me through the Sacrifice. It clearly sees the gun in my hand and yet it says, "Already punished in Christ's death! Already dead with the obedient Christ. No case. Righteous. Clean in the eyes of him who said, 'You shall do no murder.' He lives with Christ."

Of course, such a gross sin as suicide seriously raises the question of whether the person was truly "in Christ" to begin with. Indeed, gross sin, habitually practised, is a sure sign of unbelief. But why should I consign every suicide case to unbelief? What is clear is that every sin in a true believer's life today is already punished before the act.

21. Justified till when? Romans 8.

Romans 8:1-3
There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

In Romans 8:1, condemnation for those who are "in Christ Jesus" is ruled out. It is *not* ruled out BY our walking in the Spirit (as if that obedience could possibly atone for our sin!); it is ruled out BY the condemnation of Christ instead of us who believe (8:3). But the outcome of this condemnation is not only our justification; it is also our "walking" in the Spirit, and no longer in the flesh. As we shall see[24], justification is very fruitful.

As we saw in Romans 6, since we who believe are already freed from condemnation, we don't have to carry around a load of guilt that makes us hide from our evil and not deal with it. Why will we not be condemned? The guilty me was punished when Jesus was punished (6.6-7):

[24] See pp210-212.

> ˝We know that our old *man* [literally] was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been justified from sin."

In short, God condemned Jesus for my sin instead of condemning me (8:3). Our present justification means our lasting favour (v1), our being sons and heirs, and, with that, our *suffering* here (v17), with the Spirit in us (v9) and leading us (14-17), so that we now "walk" or "live" in him (or "according to him") and have now embarked on a journey of killing off "the flesh" 12-13). It also means one day having glorious resurrection bodies (8:30) and living with the Lord in glory on the new earth. That is what Paul, in 8:23, calls the "redemption" of the bodies of God's sons, or, in 8:18-19, the glorious "revealing of the sons of God". That day will bring to light those who are really God's children.

But suffering with Christ, does not make me God's child. I am God's child for one reason only: by his grace, I was enabled to leave it to his death to purchase my justification, and by his grace I did so leave it to him. He alone has made me his child—I am born of God—and nothing except the condemnation of my spotless Redeemer paid for my justification and eternal life.

Of course, any believer's standing, on the day of God's wrath, as God's child and not his enemy, should not come as a great surprize to those who knew that person, given the fruit of the Spirit in his life—the changes the Spirit brought about, following his once-for-all justification. The fruit, as well as his new body, will be setting him apart as God's son. However,

this fruit is the *fruit* of the past verdict, and not a contributing cause or even mitigating evidence influencing that verdict. It is not extra credit, or dollars in the believer's bank account. That does not need to be topped up! It was credited, in the past, with a massive gift from a foreign Donor—the gift of 100% of the righteousness needed for lasting justification and eternal life (Philippians 3:7-9).

It is all a gift that we don't deserve. It is not that we are somehow "in" with God now as a gift, but "staying in" is not a straight gift. It is not that to stay in we have to walk in the Spirit. No. But he will lead us to walk increasingly in him, freed forever from fear of condemnation. And those whom God has already judged forever innocent, his children, what is their destiny (*all* of them)? To be with him in glory, with glorious new bodies:

Romans 8:30
"… and those whom he justified he also glorified."
Translating literally, this reads, "…and whom he justified, these he also glorified."

Notice what this does *not* say: "… and *of* those whom he justified, *some of these* he also glorified."[25] In 8:30, Paul is saying the same as Jesus says in John's Gospel (e.g., John 6:54), where having eternal life *now* ensures that you will be raised to glory on the last day.

[25] We will consider this verse, and its surrounding context, in more detail below, in chapter 48.

22. Eternal Life

—Revelation 21:1-4; Luke 20:34-38; John 6:47-55; John 5:24-29; John 10:27-29; Romans 6:23; 1 John 5:11-13.

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

Jesus talked about "this age" and "that age", "the sons of this age" and "the sons of the resurrection" who "cannot die any more" (Luke 20:34-38). In John's writings, "eternal life" (*zōē aiōnios*) is literally the life of those in "the age" ("aiōn"). That is the life of "the new Jerusalem" of Revelation 21, the life of those who dwell on the new earth, where God will dwell with his people. There will be no mourning among them because there will be no death.

In John 6, Jesus speaks of those who will live “to the age” (vv51,58)—i.e., to the age with no death. Clearly, those who receive this eternal life will never die—i.e., spiritually.

John 6:47-54

47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live for ever.”

As we noted above in chapter 17.3, John 6 shows us just who paid for the believer to have eternal life as a gift. It was earned for the believer only by the flesh and blood of Christ-sacrificed. To "come", for life, to Christ, the "bread" of life (v33-35), IS to believe in him; to "eat" his "flesh" and "drink" his "blood" IS to believe in him for eternal life (6:47); it is to source your eternal life in his sacrificial death on the cross (v51). That is real bread. In other words, this is the redemption payment that bought justification and eternal life for believers.

Some read too much into the use of the present participles for *eating* (*trōgōn*) and drinking (*pinōn*) in vv54-58, and insist not only that Jesus must be speaking of an ongoing activity (which I do not deny), but that this implies that one's faith and eternal life could one day end. Thus, ultimate glorification is not made certain by one's current eating today. You may not be eating in ten years' time. And if you are not still eating when the Lord returns, or death finds you, you will not live eternally. And so, what Jesus really meant to say was, "He who eats me now, *provided that he keeps on eating me*, will live forever."

But no, Jesus did not add that proviso. If it turns out that in ten years' time, you are here but not eating, then neither are you eating today, and you do not have eternal life today. Why not? Because of his promise in vv51 and 58, which, literally, reads …

> 51. I am the living (present participle) bread, the *come-down* (aorist participle)-from-heaven bread. If anyone *should eat* (*phagē*, aorist) of this bread he *will live* to the age …

> 58. This is the bread *come down* (aorist) from heaven, not in the same way as the fathers ate (aorist) and died. Whoever *is eating* [*trōgōn,* present participle] *this* bread *will live* (future indicative) to the age.

Their fathers ate and died. That is, the Israelites in the wilderness ate the manna but died. If Jesus' hearers, now, like their fathers, ate (or were eating) and drank for a time, but then died, there would in principle be no difference between their fathers' eating and theirs. But no; Jesus is simply not proposing the sort of eating or drinking which does not issue in living "to [*eis*] the age". Whoever *is eating* "this bread" *will live* to the age.

Or is it that the fathers "ate" (*ephagon*), but did not "eat" (*trōgō*)? Is there a subtle difference in meaning between *phagō* and *trōgō* that explains why the fathers died? No; in v51, *phagō* is used for the eating that conveys eternal life. In vv53-54, the two Greek terms appear to be used quite interchangeably. Besides, for "drink" or "drinking", the same verb is used (*pinō*). It is not that one verb is used here for one type of drinking but not for another.

The key difference between the fathers' eating/drinking and the believer's is not in the eating or drinking activity, but in the food or drink. Jesus' sacrificial death is food that gets you living to the age. There is no suggestion that one might eat and drink Jesus' death for many years (just as the fathers ate manna), and then die for some reason; the person who eats Jesus' sacrificial death (an entirely *different* sort of food to manna) *will* live (future indicative) to the age—i.e., not "*might*" live.

This is clear from v54, where the one eating and drinking *has* (present) eternal life, and Jesus "*will* raise him up on the last day." There was no need to add "if he should keep eating and drinking till then", not only because that posits the temporary eating the fathers knew, but because eternal life is here the present possession of the person eating and drinking—i.e., now, *prior to* his resurrection on the last day. That must mean that even if you are a new believer—i.e., you have begun eating and drinking Jesus-crucified today—you now have eternal life. The notion of temporary "belief" in Jesus is not entertained here. Such 'belief' is clearly ruled out as genuine belief by v54, which rules out the notion of temporarily experiencing eternal life.

Notice that v54 is the positive of v53. Someone who has not eaten and drunk the crucified Christ does not have eternal life; the only alternative Jesus offers to that is positively coming to the Bread of life for your life, and such a person immediately *has* eternal life (vv47,54). He does not *potentially have* eternal life. And he does not have *potentially* eternal life. Jesus does not merely say in v54, "He who perseveres to the end in eating my flesh and drinking my blood has eternal life", or "He who is *found* eating my flesh and drinking my blood *when I return* has eternal life", but "the one eating my flesh and drinking my blood has eternal life …" Of course, this current eating and drinking is a *lasting* state of resting in the cross-work of Christ, but it necessarily means living "to the age". This is Jesus' promise to everyone eating, including the one-day-old Christian: "The one eating this bread will live to the age" (58).

Grammatically, the person who has just come to Jesus and eaten him is no less the person "eating" him than Jesus, the one who came down from heaven once, is the one "coming down" from heaven. The present participles (eating, drinking), in themselves, say nothing about the enduring (vs short-lived) nature of the eating or drinking, just as the present participle used in v50 for "the bread coming down from heaven" (or "the bread that comes down from heaven") implies that Jesus repeatedly or regularly descended from heaven to give his flesh for the life of the world. Persistence in believing, important as that is, is not directly addressed here, although it is implied. The point is that the person who has now come to believe can know that Jesus "will raise" him up on the last day. He "will live to the age" (and of course anyone with such enduring *life* will continue *believing*).

If v53 says that one who does not eat and drink Jesus-crucified does not have eternal life, when does one begin to have eternal life? If I have been eating and drinking Christ for one day, does v54 not mean that I already have eternal life and will be raised up in the end? Or is it saying that I have entered upon an uncertain journey of getting eternal life, a journey that could be interrupted somewhere, so that I may not be raised up on the last day? And what does it mean, to be on such a journey? Is there an interim period between being dead and being alive? While I am on that journey, am I increasingly alive? Coming back to v53, Jesus, there, would have to mean, "On the day you meet the Lord face to face, unless you are then eating/drinking Jesus, you will not have eternal life." Now that is true, so far as it goes, but is that *all* that verses 53 and 54 together tell us? In v54, the one eating

and drinking Jesus-crucified "*has*" eternal life, and Jesus "will raise" him up at the last day (cf v40), and in v47, the one believing in Jesus already "*has*" eternal life—i.e., even if he has to wait 50 years before he meets the Lord face to face.

John 5:24

Compare this with Jesus' words in John 5:24:

> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into condemnation but has passed from death to life.

Note that he is not still passing; having heard and believed, he *has* passed. Having *eternal life* is the opposite of coming into condemnation, or *death*.[26] The believer is now alive, and not merely on a journey to life. There is no midway state between death and life here. Also note John 5:41, where he implies that those Jews who did not believe in him were lifeless (which he states plainly in John 6:53):

> You are unwilling to come to me that you might have life.

The one who *has passed* from unbelief to belief *has passed* from death to life.

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[26] As, indeed, it is in Matthew 25:46, where "eternal life" (*zoen aiōnion*) is set opposite to "eternal punishment" (*kolasin aiōion*). On a separate issue—the usage of the adjective, *aiōnios,* to convey a lasting state—compare Paul's placement of "the things eternal" (*ta … aiōnia*), in 2Corinthians 4:18, opposite to "the things transient" (*ta … proskaira*).

Why did he say that the believer already *has* eternal life? Did he think we would never sin again? No, of course he knew we would still have sin in us after believing. But he also knew that we who believe are justified "by his blood" (Romans 5:9), and those whom he justifies (Aorist), these he also glorifies (Aorist—Romans 8:29-31; a closer look at these verses is coming up). According to Hebrews, Christ's sacrifice would cover even our future sin, since it is a sacrifice that (1) endures *forever* (*eis to diēnekes*, Hebrews 10:12) and (2) perfectly sanctifies *forever* (*eis to diēnekes,* v14). In his death, it is not only our past sin that is punished; our future sin is punished in advance. With God as Judge, you cannot have "life" if you are guilty—if you have a case to answer in his court. To have eternal life, you have to be found "Innocent" into eternity. So what Jesus is saying in John 5:24 is that he who believes in him will always be judged "Innocent", even though he is not obedient. On the day of resurrection and judgment, the believer will not be found among the guilty, the evildoers of John 5:29, who face a resurrection of condemnation. Instead, in the judgment of God, he will be found among those who have done what is good (*hoi ta agatha poiēsantes*). But it is not that he deserves to be found there; he is there purely by grace. He "has passed" (*metabebēken*) from death to life, and will not now come into an unfavourable judgment, meaning that prior to believing he was headed for such a deadly judgment; the favourable judgment on him now, where he is found among the sheep and not the goats, is a gift he does not deserve.

Following 5:24, if you are a believer in Jesus, what is it that you have *now*? You don't have an everlasting body yet; this

old body of yours is going to die (unless you are still here on earth when Jesus returns, and then your body will suddenly "be changed"—1 Corinthians 15:52)? But what is it that you have *spiritually?* Do you have that very life of the coming "*aiōn*" or "age", in which the living will never die, or do you have a "life" that could possibly turn out to be eternal? Notice here that the believer, living in this present age but with eternal life, has already entered the coming age. For us, the kingdom of God is here, even while we still pray, "Your kingdom come." Believers live in an overlap of the ages.

Since lasting justification is a free gift to the believer, so is eternal life. In view of what God requires, if eternal life is to be merited (Luke 10:25-28— "Do this and you will live"), how *could* it possibly come to any sinner except as totally merited *for* him *by his Redeemer*—i.e., as a *gift* bought for him?

John 10:27-29

We will later see, in John 10, that the Good Shepherd *"gives"* his sheep eternal life (10:27-29), "… and they shall never perish." This gift of life appears to come prior to what would otherwise have been a time of hopeless danger. They follow him. It is not simply that they are out of danger *while* they follow him, and so they must follow him, or else …; it is not that if they don't, they *could* perish. They *do* follow him, and they *will not* perish. No enemy or wolf can snatch them out of his hand. The Father, who gave them to him (v29), will see to that (See below, p347-353).

Romans 6:23

We saw in Romans 6:23 that eternal life is gifted (pp107-111). Sin is an evil slave master who pays his servants terrible wages, eternal death. Of course, this is picture language; sin is not a person, and it is only God who sends unbelievers to hell, but it is because of their devotion to their evil "slave-master" that he sends them there. By contrast, the good Master, God (6:11,13,22-23), or "innocence" (righteousness —vv16,19,20), does not *pay* his slaves; instead, he *gives* them, "in Christ Jesus", eternal life (6:23; cf. 5:9,15-17). The outcome of having died with Christ already, and thus now being dead to guilt (justified) and raised spiritually, enjoying newness of life now, is the future of that eternal life the believer now enjoys, its full blessings, including bodily resurrection on the last day. It is all a gift from our new Slave Master. He is so different from our old one who leads his slaves to eternal death (v21)—the *wages* he pays them! The good slave master hands his slaves eternal life as a *gift* (v23).

1 John 5:11-13

In 1John, also, the believer's present possession of eternal life is beyond dispute.

1 John 5:11-13
[11] And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. [13] I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

John is writing about God's "testimony" concerning his Son, which is that, in his Son, he "gave us eternal life". Now look at the verb tenses. Whoever believes the Son "has" (*echei*, present) the testimony in himself; the one "having" (*echōn*, present participle) the Son, "has" (*echei*, present) eternal life. Why? Because eternal life is in the Son. The one "not having" (*mē echōn*) the Son "does not have" (*ouk echei*) eternal life. "These things I wrote to you so that you might know [have known] that you *have* [*echete*, present] eternal life." Who is it he has written this to? It is "to those believing [present] in the name of the Son of God."

Illustrating this.

1. Let me share with you an illustration I have found very effective in Africa. Hold two books in your hands: in your right hand, hold a very big book, such as a Bible, and in your left hand, a very small booklet.

2. Explain that the big book represents eternal life, but the small booklet is merely a *ticket* to eternal life.

3. Call up someone to help you, and give him the large book, eternal life. Ask everyone, "When you believed in Jesus, were you given eternal life itself? That would mean that you must now live forever."

4. While he is still standing there with his large book, call up a second helper, hand him the ticket, and ask everyone, "Or, when you believed in Jesus, did you receive a *ticket* to eternal life? You did not receive life itself, but a ticket promising you eternal life if you still have your ticket when

you meet the Lord. If you sin, you drop your ticket, and only have it again if you repent. Which is it?"

5. In other words, ask, "Is it better to say that the believer *has* eternal life already, or that he *will have* eternal life later, *if* God finds him with his ticket when he meets him?" But firstly, you may need to explain the two positions again.

6. Finally, show them how John answers in 1 John 5:11-13.

Justification is no more reversible than the granting of eternal life is revocable! If God could renege on the giving of eternal life—if it could be rescinded or withdrawn—then what was given at the point of believing could not have been the "*eternal* life" of John 6:40 and 54 where resurrection to glory is part of the gift (part of the package). *That* eternal life cannot be ungifted. If our "eternal life" could be cut short prior to our resurrection, then it is not eternal life as defined by Jesus. Or was Jesus mistaken? If some people believe and are justified but will not be found with us in glory, then, in saying that his gift upon our believing was eternal life, Jesus

Justification is no more reversible than the granting of eternal life is revocable!

was, at best, incautious or short-sighted! But if he was telling the truth, the gift of justification and eternal life is irreversible. (We will return to consider John 6 and 10 in more detail in Chapter 49.)

23. Born afresh into trusting him for my cleanness.

John 3:
Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [2] This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." [3] Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." [4] Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" [5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Note that the new birth discourse is placed by John just after Jesus' first "sign" in Cana, where he miraculously changed the water into wine. In 3:1-6, Jesus appears, from his words to Nicodemus, to see him as a Pharisee thinking he could qualify for the kingdom of God by a righteousness of his own creation. John records no response to Nicodemus' acknowledgement that Jesus is a teacher from God, and that it would be impossible for anyone to do the "signs" he does

unless God were with him. Rather, Jesus directly addresses another task that, like water becoming wine, must be a miracle of God's doing.

Without being "generated from above", it is impossible for anyone to "see" the kingdom of God. This regeneration, recreation or rebirth, must be related to one's fitness to enter the kingdom. It is not a question of being gradually equipped to qualify as a son of the kingdom; this is about being reborn as a son, fit to enter the kingdom.

In v5, Jesus probably refers to either (a) being born naturally and then born of the Holy Spirit (reading v5 in parallel with v6), or (b) being born spiritually, of cleansing and the Holy Spirit. Many see a reference to baptism, but this is probably an anachronistic reading-back into Jesus' words of later church practice. V5 is clearly parallel to v3, with both presenting the pre-requisite for entering the kingdom. In v3, it is being born from above; in v5, it is being born of "water and Spirit", which could mean two births, one of water, the other of Spirit (or spirit?), or one new spiritual birth of "water and Spirit", *possibly* reflecting Ezekiel 36:25-27:

> "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

I find option (a), above, preferable, however, being such a natural parallel to v6. In v5, "of water" (perhaps referring to

the "water" carrying the father's seed[27] or the mother's amniotic "waters" broken before delivery) could be in parallel with "of the flesh" in v6. Being born "of the flesh" also relates to Nicodemus' words in v4, making his reaction a little more understandable. Either way, whether being born naturally is mentioned in v5, it is not enough. A person needs to be born a second way, either (1) "of the Spirit", or (2) "of cleansing and the Spirit". Either way, the mere mention of water gives us no grounds to invoke baptism.

The Pharisees performed this task and that task in order to get into the kingdom of heaven. Without an altogether new birth, Jesus warns them, they will not even get to *see* the kingdom! The only way to enter the kingdom is simply to be given it, just as a helpless baby is delivered into the world. The Spirit (the same Greek word as "wind") brings this new birth as he chooses, just as the wind blows where it chooses to blow. This, again, is all grace. Can any of us take any of the credit for getting ourselves born? The mother, and the way the Lord has created the birth canal, does it all—the baby does absolutely nothing to help. In fact, he may hinder, by getting himself into the wrong position!

As we read on in chapter 3, since the fleshly, merit-based way will bring no-one into the kingdom, Jesus explains the only other way: by looking to the Son "lifted up" on the cross, entrance into the kingdom and the life of the new age,

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[27] Leon Morris cites a rabbinical reference to semen as "water". Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, pp215-219.

"eternal life", is yours freely. Being a new creation has a person turning in faith away from any imagined self-creating capacity and looking to the One "lifted up" for his rescue from condemnation and perishing (vv14-18)—i.e., his salvation *from* his judicial condemnation (vv17-18) and *for* his eternal life (15,16). This new creation is thus a judicial creation; he is judicially clean, fit for life. In Christ, he is legally righteous, cleaned of guilt, fitted for eternal life, fitted for the kingdom, and fitted to be a child in God's holy family. Now, as we shall see, being a child of God, he is inhabited by the Spirit of God. In short, he is born of God.

This is the new birth into an inheritance of 1 Peter 1:3-5:

1 Peter 1:3-5

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

This new birth is a miracle of God, the Holy Spirit. It corresponds to the miracle of the "new creation" of Gal. 6:15, brought about through the cross, making the circumcision question irrelevant. It is that which we have seen in 2 Corinthians 5:17, referring to those who, "in Christ", are a new judicial creation, having already been reconciled to God as Judge, in advance of the final judgment of 5:10. It is "the washing of regeneration" of Titus 3:5, which

we will consider below (pp188-193). Note how in Titus, those newly created through being brought by the Spirit to faith, and thereby to justification and sonship, are to be urged on through this teaching to good works (v8).

It corresponds, further, to the new creation of Ephesians 2:10, of those who are "created in Christ Jesus" with good works in mind. In short, the faith that receives the gift of justification and life is itself a gift. Of course, repentance and faith are the means of receiving the gift of justification, but the way we were from birth, we were unable to repent and believe. ("No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"—John 6:44). We were unable to understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor.2:14); we were dead in our sins and needed to be "made alive" (Eph.2:1-10); we were so enslaved and controlled by our hostility to God that we *could not* bow or submit to his authority (Romans 8:7-8); we had to be set free to repent and believe. I had to be born all over again, this time born a repentant, believing baby. This meant instant justification and, with that, instant authorization or recognition as a child of God (John 1:12-13).

Note here that John 1:12 does *not* say, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the new birth." It is important to be clear on this: it is not that you repent and believe and, following on from that, you *will be* born again. No. Rather, if you have come to repentance and faith, then you *have been* born again. Also, it is not that you were born again first and then believed. No, again. When the word, the gospel, in the power of the Spirit, has brought you to faith, *then* you have been born. If we come back to Peter, he makes this clear. He tells his readers that those who

preached the good news to them did so by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:12). And the result? "You have been born again … through the living and abiding word of God … And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:23-25). You have been born into a new life and a new family. The Father has caused us to be born again (1 Peter 3:3-4) into a living expectation of a glorious inheritance. We are heirs.

Once you have been born into believing, instantly you are judged innocent, you have eternal life, and you are God's child. As we are told in John 1:12-13, it is those who have been born of God who are the children of God (cf., 1 John 3:1-2, 4-9, etc.). We will come back to 1 John later (pp242-261). Looking more into Romans 8, we will also see that with the gift of sonship comes the gift of the Holy Spirit to live and to stay in the new son, to "lead" him. This means the believer is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), created new to do the good works God has prepared for him to do (Ephesians 2:8-10). By God's supernatural working, he has been brought low in repentance and has cast himself on Christ crucified. Now he stands justified through this faith, and since he is freed from the "dirt" of guilt, he is welcomed into the Father's clean house as his child (More on this later—p198). I am his child solely because of him—by grace alone. Paul sums it up:

Colossians 1:11-14

"[11] May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, [12] giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. [13] He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

"… he has caused us to be born again … to *an inheritance* that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, *kept in heaven for you*, who by God's power *are being guarded through faith for a salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time."

Firstly, he says, God has caused us to be born again to (*eis*) an inheritance. There is no mention of any other class of born-again person, who may not inherit. Secondly, *our inheritance* is being kept for us. Thirdly, *we* are being kept, or guarded, for *it*. It is not being kept for me *just in case I make it*. If you are born of God, (1) the all-knowing Lord, seeing your future, is keeping *your inheritance* for you, and (2) he is keeping *you*

Your inheritance is being kept for you,
and you are being kept for it.

in the meantime, so that you will enter into your inheritance. In fact, so *kept* is the true believer that his perseverance is a test (one test among others) of the genuineness of his faith in Christ.

Notice, in the following passages, how your present state is conditional upon a future outcome: the "if" clauses relate to your future. However, it is not a condition of *cause* (it is not that your perseverance *merits* your place in God's household!); rather, it could be described as a condition of *consequence.*

Hebrews 3:5-6
[5] Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, [6] but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And **we are his house if** indeed **we hold fast our confidence** and our boasting in our hope.

Hebrews 3:12-14
[12] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today", that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For **we have come to share in Christ**, **if** indeed **we hold our original confidence** firm to the end.

In these two texts from Hebrews 3, the readers *are* of the house of God *now* (3:6), or, they *have come* to share in Christ (3:14—i.e., this is their state *now*), **if**, in the future, they *persevere* in their faith.

John 8:31-32
[31] So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "**If you abide** in my word, **you are truly my disciples**, [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Likewise, in John 8:31-32, the followers Jesus is addressing *are* truly his disciples **if** they *abide* in his word.

Colossians 1:21-23
21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind,
doing evil deeds, **22 he has now reconciled** in his body of
flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and
blameless and above reproach before him, **23 if indeed you
continue in the faith**, stable and steadfast, not shifting from
the hope of the gospel that you heard, …

In Colossians 1:21-23, the Colossians are *now reconciled* to God, **if** they *continue* in the faith.

1 Corinthians 15:1-2
Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached
to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by
which **you are being saved**, **if you hold fast** to the word I
preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Paul's readers *are being saved*—i.e., they are justified and are now being inwardly cleansed—**if** they *hold fast* to the word preached to them.

Illustrating the condition of consequence.

Imagine that your child has come out in spots, and the doctor tells you he has the measles**.** He answers, "You *have* measles now, *if*, in the next two or three weeks*, you come out in spots*. What these passages are teaching is this: if you think

of genuine faith in Christ as being measles, then you have the measles of true faith now **if** you come out in spots—i.e., if you persevere in your faith till the end. If you don't come out in spots, if you don't persevere to the end, you never had the measles of true faith. It is all saying the same as 1 John 2:19: "… If they had been of us, they would have remained with us…"

Note: these passages do not say that you are justified *because of* your perseverance. That would take you back under the law, to justification on the grounds of your endurance. It is saying quite the opposite, that if you have true faith, you are justified now, and you will persevere to the end in this faith. You have true faith and are justified today if you persevere in faith till the end.

25. Titus 3:4-7: the washing of regeneration.

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent

Note here that "works done *by us*" cannot be restricted to works done by us *looking to our own strength rather than to grace,* or to works done *to give us a claim on God*. Why not? Such works would not then be "works done by us *in righteousness*". Works done by us in righteousness must be works done as they were commanded to be done or intended to be done by God's righteous commands. There is no suggestion of anything negative about these works; or that they are different from the "every good work" of v1, or the good works of v8, which, having believed, he urges them to devote themselves to. What is negated is that we (the saved) were active—or actively involved—in our salvation through doing good works; on the contrary, "*He* saved us", and it was "according to his own mercy". That is, "God our Saviour" saved us, and he did so "through Jesus Christ our Saviour". If it is according to his mercy, and if this (in the "not … but" construction of v5) is antithetical to these works,

then it cannot possibly be according to the merit of these works, even if the credit for our doing them goes to him. It does not help to say, “The merits of our good works are gifts of the divine goodness”, or, with Augustine, "Grace has gone before us; now we are given what is due…Our merits are God's gifts".[28] He did not save us through, or because of, “works of righteousness” that he got us to do; we were saved “not by works of righteousness” (lit., “not from the works that we did in righteousness”).

However, does Titus 3:5 perhaps mean that *we are being* saved by him “by the washing of regeneration … so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”? No. It states that he saved us. The verb is an aorist indicative, which is commonly translated as the simple past tense. And it is the same use of the aorist indicative as we meet in “appeared” in v4, and “did” in v5. Notice that this saving has already taken them from where they *were* in v3.

The renewing activity of the Holy Spirit that is in focus in the early part of Titus 3 is not the post-conversion, ongoing work of the indwelling Spirit present in the hearts of God’s sons and heirs (contrast our ongoing transformation by the renewing of our minds, in Romans 12:2), but the activity of the Spirit in taking them out of the pre-conversion state of v3 and bringing them to the point where they are now justified and heirs. The ongoing work of the (now) *indwelling* Spirit is not the beginning of his work in a person. In Titus 3:5, Paul is not speaking about the Spirit working in God’s sons getting them growing and developing moral virtues, and he is

[28] See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2009

certainly not saying that by these virtues *they might be justified*. It is the opposite: those the Spirit grows are already God's sons. By their justification they were cleansed for adoption as sons (See p192, on Galatians 3:24 - 4:7).

Note that he says, "When God's goodness and loving-kindness appeared [*epephanē*, aorist indicative], he saved us [*esōsen*, aorist indicative]…" It is done.

> "According to [*kata*] his mercy *he saved* us [*esōsen*] through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, so that, having been justified by that grace, we should become [should come to be, should begin to be] heirs according to [*kat'*] the hope of life eternal."

To be saved because of works done by us in righteousness" (v5) is set over against salvation according to "mercy" (v5) and "by that grace" (v7, lit.). Salvation *by works* is set over against justification *by grace*. To be heirs "according to the hope of eternal life" is ours "according to his mercy".

As Paul writes, he, Titus and all believers, are already "saved", but from what? "He saved us", from foolishness and disobedience, from slavery to passions, and from malice, envy and hatred (v3). We were saved not by works done in righteousness (Just look at our works in v3; we needed mercy, not payment for services we had rendered!) but by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out (*execheen*, aorist indicative) on us … so that (*hina*), *justified* (aorist participle), we should now be heirs. "He saved us" corresponds to "justified".

In verses 5ff, he is speaking of the work of the Spirit that brings a person to faith in the first place. We should not be misled by the ESV's "being justified" in Titus 3:7, as if justification could still be an ongoing process. It is an aorist participle in a string of aorist indicative verbs. It says, literally, "…so that, justified by that grace, we should *begin to be* (*ginomai*) heirs …" We are not still being justified so that we might *eventually* become sons and heirs. We are heirs now, anticipating the future, "not yet" dimension of the life we have in Christ. We are heirs looking forward confidently ("hope" in current English has too much uncertainty to serve as a translation of "*elpis*") to entering the fullness of our inheritance. As he writes, he is already an heir. We know this from Ephesians 1:14, Galatians 3 and 4, and Romans 8.

From beginning to end, Titus is jam-packed with teaching on morals. But good morals are not part of our rescue-from-condemnation package. What follows 3:3, with its dismal account of our past immorality, is presented as its remedy. God's rescue package is *his* doing, out of *his* loving kindness, and not because of our obedient works. On the contrary, out of *mercy*, he "richly" poured out the Holy Spirit on us, just washing us into a new birth and new life, through Jesus buying us the rich gift of justification/cleanness. And with justification comes eternal life and, being God's children now, an inheritance. It is all totally undeserved by us.

However, now that he has made us his sons, he looks ahead. Note v8: why does Paul want Timothy to insist on "these things" (this trustworthy "saying")? He wants this message, of justification by grace and not by *good works*, to be driven home, "… so that those who have believed in God may be

careful to devote themselves to *good works*." Note: there is no attempt here to redefine "good works". Good works are the *fruit* of justification that is by grace and not by good works: "And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be *unfruitful*" (Titus 3:14).

In **Ephesians 1:14**, the Spirit within God's sons is the Guarantee that they are heirs who will enter the fullness of their inheritance. There, too, by faith, one is not still becoming justified, or becoming a son or an heir.

In **Gal.3:24-26**, there are two opposite states, (a) being under the guardianship of the law, effectively in bondage, and (b) being freed, justified, sons of God. He considers his readers to be justified and sons:

[24] So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. [25] But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, [26] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

In **Galatians 4:4-7**, he considers them to be redeemed, adopted sons and heirs already.

[4] But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

In **Romans 8**, all who belong to Christ have the Spirit of Christ in them (9-10), their spirit is "life on account of righteousness" (vv9-10), and it is those who are led by the Spirit who are the sons of God (v14). The sons are heirs, and if truly sons and heirs (v17) they can expect to suffer with Christ, but, being already justified, they will also be glorified (8:29-30). We should carefully note the link between justification, sonship, and the gift of the Spirit. Justification is no long process, but a decision of the Judge, with eternal, life-changing effect. It is what makes you, male or female, a "son". Being adopted is as decisive an event as entering into Christ.

Judicial Regeneration.

Coming back to **Titus 3**, the Spirit has been active bringing them to that faith so that they are justified, qualifying them to be sons and heirs. Thus, their sonship is entirely God's doing. They are born anew into their justification and sonship. This is "the washing of regeneration". Their "regeneration" (the word used in Matthew 19:28 of the future new physical creation) is their new creation or new birth. In terms of Jesus' teaching in John's Gospel, it is to be born of God; it is their new birth as believing, living children, alive with eternal life through faith that, figuratively, "looks to" the cross for that life (3:14-16) or, literally, believes in Christ (6:47), or, figuratively again, "comes to" the living Bread for life (6:35) and "eats" and "drinks" Christ-sacrificed (6:51-54). Born of God (cf. John 1:11-13) to faith, they are God's children now, with eternal life, and that involves being inhabited by His Spirit (cf. John 7:37-39).

26. Foreign righteousness—sourced totally from "abroad", totally from outside of you.

Romans 10:1ff
Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. [2] For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. [3] For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Here, Paul agonizes for fellow Israelites who are zealous for God, but for all that, they remain unsaved—he prays for their salvation! What is their problem? Instead of giving in and accepting a favourable judgment from God as a gift that they do not deserve, these people are trying to "establish" their own righteousness (v3)—i.e., trying to build up a case for the Judge to smile on them on the basis of their obedience. They remain unsaved because they are pleading their obedience to qualify them for eternal life when, sadly, their obedience does not come up to the mark—no-one's does (Romans 3:23).

This is very sobering. We may have precious family members, or dear friends who are in this very position, even church friends who have a zeal for God. If they are still looking into themselves to source their righteousness (their cleanness before the Judge), they remain unsaved. It is certainly not

uncharitable of us to be praying for their salvation and seeking to help them grasp the gospel. Faith is not mere intellectual assent to the atonement; even the demons have that. Faith is the *repose* of the penitent heart *rested* on Christ-crucified. It is the collapsed-onto-Christ state of the one "who does not work but trusts" of Romans 4:5, the one who "trusts him who justifies the ungodly"—i.e., the ungodly such as himself. The faith-line is here. Whatever flavour of church you belong to, above this line you are saved; below it you are still lost.

The stabilizing peace with God that is enjoyed by those above the line has a wide range of therapeutic applications here and now, but in terms of eternity, the consequences of leaving this world on the wrong side of the line are unimaginably horrendous, and irreversible. Without being justified you remain unreconciled, and offensive, to your Creator.

27. Foreign "holiness"—so clean I can be embraced by the holy Foreigner.

Ephesians 1:1 …[1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, …

Ephesians 4:29-31 … [29] Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

In the world of sin, where God is a total foreigner, we are still natives. Notice how Paul has to confront his readers over their sin—a wide range of sinning—and yet he still calls them "saints" or "holy ones" (1:1), who are inhabited by the Holy Spirit (4:30). Why? Because, since they are believers (1:1), all their sin, including everything listed in 4:31, was punished on the cross. To say that believers are justified by Christ's blood (Romans 5:9), is precisely the same as to say they are washed or 'sanctified' by his blood, as in Hebrews 10:10-14. The court of heaven does not count their sin against them, because Christ agreed to wear it. Paul is not addressing fake "Christians" who do not have the Spirit, but saints whose evil grieves the Holy Spirit who is in them (4:31).

Since they are justified by Christ's blood, they are judged to be clean and therefore holy, even while the cleaning-away of

the evil in them is still a work in progress. This is not justification based on merit.

Illustrating “holy”.

Think of a mango tree laden with fruit. If you pluck a mango from the tree and wash it so it can be fit for eating, that is a “holy” mango. It has been separated from all the mangos remaining on the tree and washed ready for a good use. In the washing of new birth, I was granted repentance, faith, justification, sonship, and eternal life (with the Spirit of life, or “the Spirit of holiness”, living in me). Once “justified by his blood”, I was instantly clean before the Judge, and hence one of God’s “holy ones”, or “saints”, and a child in his holy family. I was thereby separated from all those other “mangos” still belonging to “the world”—those who are not God’s children. Cleansed by justification I am fit for holy use—set-apart for God. And, indwelt now by the Holy Spirit, I am fully empowered for holy use.

28. Adopted into a foreign family.

Once justified, we qualify to be sons in the clean family.

Without a court clearance you don't qualify to be a child of the clean King. Once clean in court (God's law court) you are welcome to enter the royal court (His holy family).

Galatians 4:4-7
4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

With the gift of sonship comes the gift of God, the Holy Spirit. Being redeemed from guilt, and thus found clean or righteous by the Judge, you are now fit for adoption as a child in God's clean family. From the point of entry, you also have the Holy Spirit in you, who invariably and increasingly produces holy fruit. Although the sin in you still rears its ugly head, it can't *control* you now.

B. … while *being* cleaned.

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29. You are already running on full power.

If you are justified and therefore holy, you are God's son, with the Holy Spirit in you, and you are fully empowered for holy use. It is important to take this to heart, and not to fall prey to those who tell you,

> "So, you are born again? That's good, but you still need the *power* of God. You are *merely* born again. You have the Spirit in you, but he needs to be *released* in you. You are not quite there yet. There is still a vital step for you to take. I was like you once, exactly like you. I was born again in 2007, and when I prayed for the power of God to come on me, nothing happened. I did not speak in tongues; I did not prophesy … until very late one night in 2011, my friends prayed for the Lord to take away that barrier of stubbornness in me, and then it happened. Believe me, I know just where you are coming from. You are a Christian, yes, a member of the body of Christ, but you still need *the baptism of the Holy Spirit.*"

Of course, this overlooks one thing: if Christ had not already baptised me into his body, using not water but the Holy Spirit, I would not even be in his body (Mark 1:8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). It is quite wrong to suggest that the

Spirit enters you and must now sit tight, dormant, waiting on you to do something before he acts powerfully. Even if he should choose to withhold from me some gift or blessing I read about in the Bible, I should have no doubt about …

> … the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might … (Ephesians 1:19).

Pentecost and "Pentecosts"

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5).

Galatians 3:13-14 refers to the promised Holy Spirit. The promise to Abraham of blessing to his future descendants is here seen as the granting of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles.

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit [the promise of the Spirit—Greek] through faith.

John had explained (John 7:37-39) that, after Jesus was glorified, the Spirit would be received by "the ones believing into him". He would be given, that is, to do his new covenant ministry of glorifying the glorified Christ:

> **37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

However, the sovereign Lord waited, not only until Jesus was glorified, in the sense of ascended and seated at the Father's right hand in glory, but (1) ten more days, until thousands of Jews were gathered together at Pentecost. Then (2) before the new believers in Samaria received the Spirit, he waited even longer until Peter and John had arrived there, and identified this new community as one with all believing Jews—and similarly with (3) the Ephesian believers, who were Gentiles (Acts 10-11). In Samaria, Peter and John did this through laying hands on them. After the Pentecost of Jerusalem (Jews), the "Pentecost" of Samaria (Samaritans), and the "Pentecost" of Ephesus (Gentiles), whenever the gospel is explained and people believe, whoever they are, they immediately receive the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul can even say, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Romans 8:9b).

There is one new covenant community comprising Jews and Gentiles. All believers are Abraham's children. This side of the "Pentecost" of the Ephesians, any Jew or Gentile who believes in Christ is instantly indwelt by the same Holy Spirit promised to our Father, Abraham.

[13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

It is wrong to deduce from Acts 8, therefore, that the laying-on-of-hands is not simply a matter of teaching in that context but is the means God uses—even the means he normally uses—for conveying the gift of the Spirit himself (or, likewise, his gifts[29]). Even without any hands being laid on you, if you are a believer in Christ, you are now indwelt by the Spirit. He is *God*, and his power cannot be added to—least of all by some sinner's hands! Even God himself cannot increase God's power.

[29] For example, Anglican readers may be interested to know that the Book of Common Prayer of 1928, which was not found acceptable by the British Parliament, stated, "The scripture here teacheth us that a special gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed through laying on of hands with prayer." There was no such teaching in the 1662 BCP. The 1928 alternative heavily reflected the Catholic teaching of the Tractarian movement. http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/CofE1928/CofE1928_Confirmation&Marriage.htm

30. Two places to be cleaned

Philippians 3:7-12 …
7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

It is important not to confuse being cleaned in God's court (once-for-all justification) with being cleaned in your heart, which is an ongoing process (2 Corinthians 3:18; 7:1; 1Thessalonians 4:1-9; 5:23).

The dirt of *guilt*, where Paul had an impossible debt of punishment looming over him, is well-and-truly gone; sadly, as he writes, the dirt of his *rebelliousness* is still only on the way out. But it *is* on the way out. While he is still being perfected *in his character* (Phil.3:12), in terms of *his cleanness in court* (3:9), he is already perfectly clean.

In terms of his holiness, his fitness for fellowship with God, he is already "perfected forever" by the perfect Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:14). Once you are righteous, you are "holy". Once you are judged innocent, as innocent as God is, you are holy, meaning that you are fitted for fellowship with him.

THE KEY QUESTION: Do you expect to enter glory because of how clean you are in your heart when you die, or because of how clean you are in God's court? In other words, are you Saul or Paul?

Illustrating this:

Imagine you steal a car and are brought before the court. The evidence is overwhelming, and the judge finds you "Guilty!" That means, "You have disobeyed the law, and so you are in debt to the law." The only way for you to pay that debt is for you to suffer the punishment the law sets for that law-breaking. Having guilt means you are liable for punishment—you are supposed to be punished. In this case the punishment is, "Two years' jail! Take him away!"

At this point, we might say, you are DIRTY in the eyes of the law—the dirt is your guilt, your debt of punishment. But after the two years have finished, you have suffered the full punishment demanded by the law, and the prison doors are opened wide for you to go out. You are set free. There is no more debt of punishment remaining because you have paid your debt in full. So now you are CLEAN in the eyes of the law—as clean as the judge himself. As you go out through those doors you no longer stand guilty—since there is no debt of punishment remaining.

However, in some countries, prisoners get the opportunity to study, to improve their chances of living a better life after release and not returning to crime. You study hard and earn a degree—a masters, in fact. You graduate with an MAS (a Master of Arts in Stealing). There are many "professors" inside prison with you, and they are only too happy to give you free tuition. Even as you finish your time in jail, you already have a robbery planned.

And so, as you walk out of prison, although you are perfectly CLEAN IN THE EYES OF THE COURT (or of the law), you are DIRTY IN YOUR HEART. The dirt of guilt is removed by your punishment, but there is another type of dirt in your heart, evil. Your legal standing is "CLEAN", but in your heart there is the DIRT of rebellion that presses you to defy the law.

As you teach this in church, you might tell the people, "Before I believed in Jesus, I was dirty in two places:

1. In God's court (*Hold your right hand up high*), and …
2. In my heart (*Place your left hand on your chest*).

Your dirt IN COURT (*Hold up your right hand again*) is called "GUILT". The dirt you have IN YOUR HEART is called "REBELLION".

When I trusted Jesus to have paid my debt of punishment for me, instantly I was free from debt—there was no debt of punishment hanging over my head anymore—no guilt. I was CLEAN in the eyes of God's law. The punishing of Jesus was like soapy water that washed away the dirt of my guilt.

BUT I was still dirty in my heart—even now, there is still evil in my heart. Now ask the people you are teaching, "Don't say anything with your mouth. Just answer with your hands, where am I clean,

- in God's court (*Put your right hand up high*), OR …
- in my heart (*Put your left hand on your chest*)?

Before you go to the next stage, you may need to put a plastic sheet on the floor!

Hold a bottle of water in front of you, and say, "When I trusted Jesus—i.e., when I trusted the punishing he got—to save me from being punished in hell, immediately [*Now pour the water all over your chest!*], God the Holy Spirit came into me. Since that time, he has been cleaning me and cleaning me in my heart (*take hold of your wet shirt-front, and scrub it repeatedly*)."

Ask them again to answer with their hands, and not their voices: "Show me with your hands, where is the Holy Spirit still cleaning me?

- "In God's court [*Put your right hand up*]? or …
- in my heart [*Put your left hand on your chest*?]"

Again, you may need to rehearse this a few times with them, before you ask them two vital questions, and they should answer with their hands again:

- "Where am I already 100% clean?"
- "Where am I still being cleaned?"

Now move a small distance towards the door of the room or hall you are teaching in, and ask: “Let’s say that after ten years of having the Spirit in me and busy cleaning me [Be scrubbing your wet shirt-front], 30% of my heart is clean; how much of my heart is still dirty and rebellious (what percentage)?

“Let’s say that after 30 years of cleaning, my heart is 40% clean. How much of my heart is still dirty?”

“What if I die here?” [*Collapse on the ground.*]

“Where am I now?”

[*Stand just inside a doorway.*] “One minute before I die, if I am 100% clean in God’s court, but 60% of my heart is dirty, where will I go? Will I go to paradise, to be with the Lord in glory?

[*Stand outside the door*]. “One minute after I have died, where am I clean now? This time, you will need two hands to answer.”

31. After we die?

No more scrubbing, no more sin to fight—

Revelation 14:11-13; Galatians 6:16-17; 1Corinthians 15:50ff.

What happens to the evil that is in us just before we die? It is clear from Revelation that the dead in Christ are blessed and rest from their labours (Rev.14:11-13). Their labours while on earth follow them as proof of their faith, but that does not mean they died morally perfect. Even so, they rest. So, do you think the battle with sin that Paul describes in Galatians 5:16-17 will continue after death? Or when we leave our old bodies, do we also leave behind whatever was left of our natural rebelliousness (what Paul calls "the flesh")? Note, also, 1 Corinthians 15:50ff. At the Lord's return, those in Christ who are alive on earth at the time are suddenly ("in the twinkling of an eye"—v52) clothed in new bodies, in a condition utterly incompatible with sin. In principle we would expect that what applies at the Lord's return will apply also to those in Christ who die before that day. None of us will have to pass through some place of suffering and purging on the way to Paradise.

32. Two gifts—the Umbrella and the Spirit

There are many gifts in the overall gift of salvation, but there are two gifts in particular: (1) the Umbrella and (2) the Holy Spirit.

(1) Christ as an Umbrella.

The rain is God's punishment for your sin. A day of heavy rain is coming, the Day of Anger. Outside the Umbrella you will get very wet. But if you have come under the Umbrella of Christ-crucified, you will stay dry. *You* will not get wet, because the Umbrella got very wet *instead of* you.

We have looked at justification, which is our lasting state of innocence. It is where we stand judicially, once we are "in Christ". Once under the Umbrella of Christ and his death, we are always clean in his court.

(2) The Holy Spirit.

However, no-one who enters in under the Umbrella will be left the way they are when they come in. We have seen that the Holy Spirit is received by faith. The moment you *enter*, you are *entered-into*. When the Father has pulled you right in under the cover of his Son (John 6:44), *that moment* you are entered-into by God the Holy Spirit. And he brings fruit.

Let's move now to the *fruit* of being where we are.

33. The fruit of Justification and Sonship

A true child of God will not be too impressed with his growth in holiness: his perception of his own progress will be coloured by his growing sensitivity to his sin. However, once a person is born into God's family, there is fruit you *won't* see, and fruit you *will* see more and more.

A. Fruit you *won't* see in the children of God.

A1. Apostasy.

What if, in ten years' time, you don't have faith? Are you still justified OR did you never truly have faith and so were never justified?

1 John 2:18-19
18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

"They went out from us, but they were not of us …" Who is it that "us" is referring to? A major theme of 1 John is God's children, who they are, the fellowship and eternal life they

enjoy, the light they walk in, and where they abide (and do *not* abide). In 2:18, we meet some people who had totally rejected Jesus. But reading v19, note where they used to be found. They "went out from us": they used to be "with us". However, when they were "with us" they were not "of us". How do we know? It is simple: "… if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." It is as though there are concentric circles here, a big circle with a smaller circle inside it. The big circle ("us") is all those who claim to be God's children: the smaller circle inside it is those who really *are* God's children. We should not be surprized: those who are not God's children but are of the world (2:15-17), can be found with us in our churches.

What does this say about children of God? They remain "with us"; they remain children of God. What does it say about the choirmaster or bishop or T.V. evangelist who renounces his "faith" and now lives as public enemy no.1 of Jesus? He was in the bigger circle (he professed to be "Christian") but he was never in the smaller circle of those who had been born of God. So, if he was not a child of God, it can only mean one thing: he had not been justified.

Incidentally, this rules out the idea that one becomes a child of God mechanically in baptism (whether you are Presbyterian or Baptist). Those who hold that baptism of believers' children was practised in the early church cannot also claim that this washing automatically made the children *God's* children. If the group who are "of us" (the small circle) includes everyone who has been baptized, what do we say of the Stalins and Hitlers who were baptized but were most

certainly not with us later? With some folk, the sacramentalist 'tail' may wag the loss-of-salvation 'dog'. Of course, not all such folk necessarily do so, but is it possible that some are so sure that the washing of new birth is mechanically tied to the washing with water, that they paint themselves into a corner, where apostasy among the baptized must mean that salvation can be lost?

1 John 2:19 does not appear to agree.

A2 Fruit you *won't* see—Chronic sinning.

1 John 3:6
6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

1 John 3:9
9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

We will look more closely at 1 John later[30]. For now, it is sufficient to say that people born of God "have" sin (1 John 1:8) but are not *chronic* sinners (3:6b, 9). If you are a *chronic* sinner, you have not yet become God's child: you have neither seen him nor known him. Such people have not genuinely believed and been justified and adopted as God's children. God's children "walk in the light"; they chronically turn from their sin and confess it. It is increasingly revolting to them.

That is the big message of Romans 6, too, where Paul, as we saw, for the sake of teaching us, speaks of sin as a person, a lord or master to those who are his living slaves. He is a lord who pays his servants disastrous wages, eternal death (Romans 6:23). The justified sinner has sin in him, but his sin is no longer "Lord Sin". Why not?

[30] See pp242-261.

1. God's child is free from the tyranny of guilt.

How is guilt tyrannical? We noted this earlier. If you see an action of yours as sin, that means facing your liability for punishment for it, for this time and for the (perhaps countless?) times you've done the same thing in the past. It can be far easier to excuse yourself. Then when you are tempted to do it again, since you still refuse to see it for what it is, sin, what is there to stop you? That makes guilt a tyrant.

But, of course, if it is already fully punished, in Christ, then you are set free to confess it and leave it behind. After all, there is "no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." (We will consider this more later, on pp258-259).

2. God's child has the Holy Spirit in him.

From Romans 8:13 we can add that since the believer has the Holy Spirit in him now, "by the Spirit", he can "put to death the deeds of the flesh".

A3. Fruit you *won't* see—dead branches: in the Vine, yes, but not In Christ—John 15.

Who are the real disciples of Jesus?

1. The first thing to note about Jesus' vine picture in John 15 is that it is a picture. We should not try to mix it with other New Testament pictures, such as Paul's "body" of Christ. And we should not jump to the conclusion that to be in Jesus, the vine, is to be a true believer, justified "in Christ", simply because Jesus says, "in me". We need to ask, what does it mean to be in the vine, if it is possible to be in the vine and yet not abiding in it?

2. Speaking to the eleven remaining after Judas' departure, Jesus addresses them as "clean", and as branches in him, the vine. However, he nowhere says that all the branches in him are his disciples (i.e., real learners vs hangers-on—v8).

3. He nowhere says that any disciples "will be taken away and burned."

4. Then who are the branches that will be taken away? Why are they removed? They are fruitless branches.

5. Why don't they bear fruit?
   Because they don't "abide" in the vine.

6. Who are those who abide in the vine and bear fruit?
   His disciples.

7. Therefore, the fruitless branches, the branches that are removed, cannot be his disciples, since they don't abide in him and so *learn* from him (compare the vine picture of discipleship with the yoke picture in Matthew 11:27-30).

The disciples, the fruitful branches, have (1) Jesus himself, and (2) his words, abiding in them. They are entirely dependent on the vine for the fruit they bear: "apart from" him they could do nothing—they could bear no fruit. That means they are not merely followers, moving around with Jesus and the disciples, hearing his teaching; they are *disciples,* vitally connected to him for life and sustenance—for everything. They are not just hearers, but *learners,* and that means they are not only exposed to his teaching but are *effectively* taught by him, so taught that they learn and know, and so bear fruit. It is the fruit that proves they are disciples (v8), learning from him.

Jesus' message here is similar to that of John 8:30-32, where outwardly identifying as believers or disciples (or being exposed to his teachings) does not necessarily mean being true disciples, learners of the truth, who will be set free from slavery to sin:

> "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you (should/were to) *abide* in my word, you *are* truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

So, in John 15:8, disciples *abide* in the vine and bear fruit: the fruit-bearing proves them to be disciples.

We should note the context of these words: Judas has just departed from them and will betray Jesus (Compare John 13:10-11 with 15:3). As with the OT vine of Israel, so in the Jesus vine of John 15 ("in me"), there are fruitless branches, hangers on, outwardly "in", but not "in" in the sense of "abiding" in the vine. Notice that *this was their condition before being removed*, which means while still "in me" (Jesus, the vine).

The branches cannot all be Jesus' disciples, or else they would all be abiding and therefore fruit-bearing: it is the fruit-bearing that proves disciples to be disciples. The fact that any branches are fruitless and therefore removed from the vine means that there are branches that are not abiding and therefore not disciples. Jesus speaks of them as "in me" before they are removed. Therefore, not all those who he says are "in me" are really his disciples, even while they are in the vine!

B. The fruit you *will* see in God's children.

B1. Living "according to the Spirit"—Romans 8.

Now let's return to Paul. Even the Apostle, himself, does not use the figure of "the body" in the same way every time, but the "body" of Christ of 1 Corinthians 12, for example, into which all the body parts have been "baptized" by Christ using the "water" of the Holy Spirit, cannot be the same as Jesus' "vine", or else there could be unbelievers like Judas (John 6:64, 70-71) in the body of Christ—washed into it in this way, but still unbelievers. But no. Those in the body of Christ have been "baptised" in the Holy Spirit. They are all real disciples, unlike some of those in the vine. (Note: we've not finished with "the vine" yet!)

Would Paul speak of someone as "in Christ" if he were staying fruitless? From Romans 8 alone, we learn *not only* that …

a) there is no condemnation (hence no final removal) for those in Christ (8:1),
b) they are justified, sons of God and heirs who will certainly inherit a glorified body, and hence they will not be found among the branches cut off, gathered up and burned,

but also that …

a) They are "walking" not "according to the flesh" (their sin nature), but "according to the Spirit" (4b),

c) And that means they let their minds dwell on (lit., they "mind") not the things of the flesh, but the things of the Spirit (5),
d) The mind they have is not "the mind of the flesh", which is death, but "the mind of the Spirit", which is life (6),
e) The mind they have, the mind of the Spirit, is also peace (6): they do not have the mind of the flesh which is hostility to God—in fact, that mind is so hostile to God that it does not, and *cannot*, submit to his law (7); it cannot please him (8).
f) They are not "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit", having the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them (If they did not, they would not be Christ's—9),
g) They are not "living" according to the flesh but "are putting to death", by the Spirit, their evil deeds (12-13),
h) They are being led by the Spirit (14).

(It is helpful, here, to look across to Galatians 5, where being led by the Spirit means being characterised by "the fruit of the Spirit", and not by "the work of the flesh".)

If this is what it means to be "in Christ", then what does it correspond to in the Jesus "vine"? Clearly, these good things cannot be said of ALL those ever found in the vine. Consider Judas, again: John, with hindsight, says of him, "… he was a thief" (John 12:6), and this was before he went off to betray Jesus. In fact, he was still the "church" treasurer! He was with Jesus and the disciples, but he was a fake "disciple", and not

one of those whom Jesus describes in John 8:31-32 as "truly my disciples". Paul's "in Christ" can only correspond to the branches that, in Jesus' picture, *abide* in the vine, with *Jesus' words abiding in them,* so that they *bear fruit*. That is, it is only real disciples who are "in Christ". And so, to be "in the vine" in Jesus' word-picture is not the same as to be "in Christ". Being in the vine, as real disciples were in the vine with Judas, must mean being in the group of Jesus followers, *privileged to hear his teaching*—his words—as branches are supplied with sap from the stem. But hearing does not make them disciples, in the sense of *learners*, who "will know the truth" (John 8:32).

In that case, this passage does not teach that a disciple could be taken away to be burned. Disciples (real disciples) of Jesus "abide" (or stay) in their teacher, with his word abiding in them, and that is what makes them fruit-bearing. On the other hand, as we noted, the non-abiding, and hence fruitless branches that were removed were in the vine ("in me") before being removed. Being fruitless, they did not "prove to be [Jesus'] disciples" (15:8), and yet they were in Jesus, the vine. If there can be fruitless branches in the vine, it must mean that the vine is a broader community including more than just disciples.

"In Christ", as that expression is used in Romans 8, there are no people corresponding to those branches in the vine that are fruitless and so not disciples. Of course, there are young shoots who are yet to bear much fruit, but no-one who is "in Christ" *stays* that way, fruitless. Those "in Christ" are truly his

disciples; they "abide" in the vine, bear fruit, are pruned, and bear more fruit—even "much fruit".
Romans 8 is clear:

- Once "Saved", but not killing off your evil deeds, you've Never been Saved (O"S"NS).
- Once Saved from condemnation, you are Forever Saved (OSFS).
- Once you are forever safe, the evil in you is no longer safe.

The genuine sons of God are *led* by the Spirit (v14). They are not "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit", if in fact they have the Spirit in them. A professing 'Christian' who does not have the Spirit, is no Christian. He does not belong to Christ (9). If someone is 'in the flesh', he does not have the Spirit, he is not the Lord's, and he is not the child of God. If he is not a child in God's condemnation-free family—God's clean, guiltless house—it can only mean one thing: he is not redeemed from his guilt yet—not justified yet. If someone is not "in the Spirit", he is not yet "in Christ" and so, in terms of Romans 8:1, he still stands condemned. The child of God still has evil in him, but he is putting it down—killing it off—it does not rule him. His new Lord is seeing to that. Notice especially 8:13: it is "by the Spirit" that we are to "put to death the deeds of the body."

The word for "put to death" here is present tense (as in, "Every time I go out, I *wear* my coat."). If you have the Holy Spirit in you—if, that is, you have been justified and adopted as a child of God—you will now be someone who is "led" by the Spirit, and you "walk not according to the flesh but

according to the Spirit" (v4). You are not "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit" (v9). Right now, you will be someone who goes on putting to death "the deeds of the body", killing off the rebelliousness in you. You are doing it, but you are doing it "by the Spirit" (v13).

Also, since you are an heir, there is an inheritance waiting for you in the future: you will be living with the Lord in glory, and you, yourself, will be glorified (vv28-30—we will come back to this below). But the immediate, here-on-earth product or fruit of justification is that the Spirit produces more and more fruit in you.

B2. The fruit you *will* see— the fruit of the Spirit—Galatians 5:22-23.

Galatians 3:1-2 … O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 3:13-14 … 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Galatians 5:22-23… 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

True faith, trusting the curse-bearer for redemption from the curse, receives the Spirit promised to Abraham (3:14). From your point of entry into God's family, you have the Holy Spirit in you, who invariably and increasingly produces holy *fruit* (Galatians 5:22-23). That fruit begins with *love* which God's moral law is based on. God puts his laws into our minds and writes them on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10). Although the sin in you still rears its ugly head, it cannot *control* you now.

B3. The fruit you *will* see—
faith and good works in James 2.

Recalling our study above on Ephesians 2:8-10, which comes first here, salvation or good works? Just as a chair *is made* by a craftsman (it did not make itself!) *to be safely sat on*, in the same way, the believer *has been made new*, saved as a gift, by grace alone as a gift and not by works, but saved *to do what? Good works*!

Good works are the *consequence* of my salvation,
not the *cause* of my salvation.

In our Titus 3 study, we saw Paul make the same point. Now we hear it again from James.

James 2:18-26
18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as [sic] righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

If we follow the ESVUK translation, is there a not a conflict between …

- James 2:23 ("Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as[31] [sic] righteousness"), and …
- James 2:24 ("You see that a person is justified by works [i.e., works in line with the law of love—2:8-14] and not by faith alone")?

How can both be true? Or should we smile, sigh, and look condescendingly upon lesser mortals who want to see apparent contradictions in Scripture reconciled? Should we resign ourselves to dialectical thinking: "You know, could it be that both are true? Sometimes we have to hold opposites in *tension*."? (Which means, "The hidden solution will agree with what I want it to think.")

The same Greek word, *dikaioun,* is used in vv21, 24 and 25. In its passive form, it can mean "to be *judged* (by someone) to be righteous", as it does in Romans 3:28, where someone is judged innocent by God, but it can also mean "to be *shown*" (to someone) to be authentic—for example, where "wisdom is *vindicated* by her works", in Mtt.11:19 (or Luke 7:35, "*vindicated* by all her children), or where God, himself, is spoken of as being *vindicated* in his words, in Romans 3:4. The NIV has "proved right", in Mtt.11:19. In a court situation, an accused may be *judged* favourably, or *shown* (or made known) to be worthy of such a judgment.

[31] Recalling pp.59-61, the Greek does not say, "as" (an adverb), but, "to" (*eis*), a preposition.

Literally, v23 says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him *to* righteousness.” The thinking/counting term, *logizomai,* used in v23, is absent from vv21, 24 and 25. It gives us, in Greek, the LXX translation of Genesis 15:6, where Abraham trusted God to do the utterly impossible. Paul, in Romans 4:2-3, speaks of Abraham being “judged innocent” (v2) and of his faith being “counted to him to innocence” (v3) as another way of describing the same favourable judgment.

But it is a long jump from this to conclude that James, too, uses the terms interchangeably as two ways of describing the same action of God. The context in James is different and the subject of the counting action is not necessarily the subject of the action referred to by *dikaioō*. Verse 21 does not say that Abraham was justified *by God* by his works, and v24 does not say that a man is justified *by God* by works. And neither does v25 say that Rahab was justified *by God* by works. Then who or what were they justified by?

The problem is resolved where *dikaioō* is translated as it is in Matthew 11:19, as not the act of God *judging* someone to be *righteous*, but the action of a person’s works *showing* him to be *authentic*. True believers are *shown to others to be genuine* believers by what they *do*; they are *vindicated*, not merely by their claim to faith, but by their works (vv21, 24 & 25). The works testify.

The quotation in v23 however has a different verb, and clearly refers to God’s action in befriending Abraham. But, following on from vv21-22, the faith that God “counted” to Abraham’s righteousness is the same faith that was *brought*

to its goal, as that Scripture was *fulfilled*, in the working of v21, which led him to be called (i.e., by later Jews[32]) "the friend of God". Righteousness was "counted" to him by God, but his works vindicated him in the eyes of people as a man of real faith. The "counting" (v23) by *God* and the later "vindicating" of him before people by *his offering* of Isaac are different events separated by many years. In regard to the first, the counting, no reference is made in the quotation to authenticating works. The s*howing* of someone to be innocent is relevant only to human judgment: God does not need to see wisdom's works (or "all her children") to judge her as wise. Incidentally, it is the same in Romans 4:3: *God* is not judging God there; people are.

Show me.

This reading of *edikaiōthē* in James 2:21, 24 and 25 as "vindicated", instead of "justified", fits the context of the law-breaking (of "the royal law"—vv8-13) practised in church meetings (of all places), where the rich were being given favoured treatment (vv1-7). In vv14-17, James addresses the supposed "faith" of such church members who were devoid of practical love for the needy among them and calls it dead "faith". Their practice put a huge question mark over the reality of their faith.

Then comes v18: "But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' This could be an imagined response from a

[32] See 2 Chronicles 20:7.

practical-minded person to someone who excuses his inaction, piously protesting that he has faith. James has a different response: “Show me your ‘faith’ apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” He objects to someone pitting faith against works, as in 18a. If your supposed faith is invisible in terms of your works, it is not real faith.

He offers a teasing challenge here. To say, “Show me your faith without works”, is effectively to say, “Show me your invisible “faith”. That is, “You cannot! Your faith doesn’t show! Mine shows: it is made visible by my works.” Verse 18b literally reads, “I, by my works, will show you faith”. But notice that the two are not the same item. One item is made visible by the other; it is made visible by something it produces.

In 2:22, also, true faith and works are related, but they are not identical. One (faith) “works with” the other (works). James is saying, “Show me your faith by your faithfulness.” In v16, it is pious “faith” that is set in contrast to the faithfulness of real compassion for the needy. In v19, the demons’ believing that “God is one” is an example of “faith” that left them with no confidence in God, only fear.

But not Abraham. Coming to vv21-23, what did Abraham do in Gen. 15? He *believed* God’s promise. Long after that, what was so astonishing about offering up the very child of the promise? If the promised child had died, what would have become of the promise? Abraham left that with the God who had made both the promise and the command. What is so

striking about this? Was it *his* faithfulness, or was it the incredible confidence in the faithfulness of God that his actions expressed? Abraham's faith was alive already, before the working that James appeals to in v21, *and that is why he worked as he did*.

We should note that he says, "Show *me*" and "Show *you*"; he does not say, "Show *God* your faith by your works—and still less, "Show *God* your faith by your works *so that* you will be judged righteous *by Him*!" What James says here is, "Show *me* your faith (*vindicate* or demonstrate your faith before my human eyes, which you cannot do because where are your works?), and I will show *you* (vindicate before your human eyes) my faith by my works—that is, by my works I will be *vindicated* in *your* eyes as a man of faith (not in *God's* eyes, note).

The faith that was working with Abraham's works, and that was "brought to its end (or goal)" by his works (v22), was the faith that was already there before Isaac was conceived. Abraham back then was judged by God to be righteous in response to his faith. This faith was later to be *vindicated* repeatedly before other eyes. It is not that *God* repeatedly *judged* Abraham to be innocent.

The "faith" of a person showing no care for the poor, unclothed and hungry is as dead or barren as that of demons. The genuine believer, on the other hand, shows up as such by what he does—his practical compassion.

In vv21-25, James speaks in positive terms of people whose genuine faith makes them industrious for good. He does this

so that the "foolish man" he is addressing might "come to know" how true faith is not "idle"—i.e., the person with such faith is not idle, but works (v20). Abraham, for example, was prepared to offer up his son (v21). This work *demonstrated* his faith. *He, himself*, was displayed as a genuine believer by his actions. Genuine faith *reaches its goal* (rather than "is completed") in works, AND we have the testimony of the Scriptures that, in response to such faith, God counted righteousness to Abraham (v23).

His faith was not like …

- the *fake* "faith" of v14.
- the *lifeless* "faith" of vv17 and 26.
- the *invisible* "faith" of v18,
- the mere intellectual *assent* to monotheism, of v19, and that leaves the demons terrified of God,
- the *bone idle* "faith" of v20, or …
- the *alone* "faith" of v24.

Abraham's faith did not stay private between God and him, as their secret. His faith got him working, and that *showed* – i.e., to *others*.

In spite of ESVUK's "faith *was completed* by his works", in v22, *eteleiōthē* does not imply that, prior to this point, Abraham's faith was incomplete. In John 19:28, the same word is used where a *word* from God is "brought to its promised end", its fulfilment. Applying this to James 2:22, James would be saying that Abraham's faith "was brought to its end-result", or its *goal*, by his works. This would certainly fit the context. Abraham's works showed his faith to be what

it was already, rather than completing it in the sense of adding to it what was lacking in it. His faith in Gen.15:6 was not the "faith" without works of James 2:26, a dead body. That "faith", being unaccompanied by the fruit of works, is as dead as a body without a spirit. It is not that his faith was completed over and over again with every act of obedience, and yet still needed to be completed at Mt Moriah! Why would it need to be completed repeatedly after it was completed the first time? Did Abraham keep on doubting, perhaps, and every obedient act completely removed his doubt, but only for a time? James seems to be speaking, rather, of Abraham's works in general as being the outworking of his faith, or its fruition. The issue was not the level of Abraham's credence—how perfect or complete it was—but rather what the believing Abraham was now *doing*, given his credence.

James is not saying that righteousness was counted to Abraham *by God* only once his faith had grown to perfection, or to the point where he could offer his own son. Long before, the faith that rested on such an unheard-of promise had been counted to him to righteousness. The point is that his works since that time were evidence that his faith, not least when he first believed the promise, was *true* faith. His faith was not somehow *relatively dead* when it was counted to him to righteousness.

What v23 shows.

If, in James 2:23, the subjects of the counting were human observers, it is not easy to see how it would assist the argument. The focus here is genuine *faith*. The loveless

behaviour James is targeting, the crass discrimination in favour of the well-off, can that be the fruit of genuine faith?

The point of vv21-24 then becomes this: the sort of faith that God responds to—and you can see how he responded in Gen.15:6—is the sort of faith that will surely go on to reveal itself to people in love and good deeds.

In recognizing Abraham's faith, did the Judge need to wait on (or look ahead to) the fruit as evidence?

To *whom* does true faith show? To whom does fake "faith" *not* show? Who or what is it who judges here? And who is it who must be shown a person's faith by his works before they can judge in his favour? *Does God need to see what a person does before he can know whom that person is trusting?*

God, who sees in secret, in counting Abraham's faith to him to his innocence, knew his authentic faith for what it was, before any works authenticated it publicly. But this faith in Abraham's heart needed to be shown by works before his fellow creatures could judge him to be a true believer.

Putting aside the issue of his foresight, did *God* need the external evidence human observers needed? Of course not. Abraham was judged righteous by God back when he believed, well before Isaac came on the scene. He was justified by God in response to the authentic faith he already had, and that would later, when tested, authenticate itself before human eyes by his works, notably at Mt Moriah.

Consider these two sentences:

> (1) The accused was *made known* (i.e., shown to the court) as innocent by the testimony of the witnesses —i.e., he was *vindicated* by their testimony.
>
> (2) After the witnesses had testified, his innocence was *acknowledged* (or recognized) by the court—i.e., he was *judged innocent* by the court.

"Made known as" is not the same as "acknowledged as". "Shown" to be authentic is not the same as "considered" or "judged" to be authentic. In terms of our court illustration, whatever *shows* someone to be innocent has to do with the grounds or case presented, leading the court to *decide* in favour. Vindication gives the grounds for a favourable judgment; it gives a defence to show why a guilty verdict is not called for, but it is not the act of judgment itself.

God's recognition of faith as live faith does not hang on authenticating works. Although someone is authenticated or vindicated as a genuine believer by what he does, a true believer is *justified by God* by faith alone.

To summarize

A person is judged innocent by God solely through true faith. However, that person is authenticated to people (i.e., as a genuine believer) by works and not by "faith" that stays home alone and does not go out with works:

"You see that a person is *authenticated* by works,
and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).

Although he is authenticated or vindicated before others as a genuine believer by what he does, a true believer is justified by God by faith alone.

B4. The fruit you *will* see—
growing fruitfulness in Philippians 2.

Bring it on! Show us the fruit!

Philippians 2:12-13
[9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[12] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

What does Paul mean by "work out your own salvation" in v12? Sometimes it is understood as if Paul were telling his readers to work for their actual *justification*. But that would mean he directly contradicts himself in the very next chapter (3:9), where the "righteousness" he now has is *not his own*; it is *not* based on his own work of obeying God's commandments. The Greek word for "work out" in 2:12 is sometimes translated as "produce" or "bring"—for example, in Romans 5:3-5, where suffering *produces* endurance. In fact, it is helpful to compare that Romans passage with

Philippians 3:12-14. It is also useful to put the two "12's" side-by-side – Phil. 2:12 and 3:12. It is more likely that Paul is thinking of the wider aspect of our salvation that is the *fruit* of justification. Seen this way, he is urging them …

- to *bring on* the fruit—i.e., the current realization and expression of their salvation—in lives of radical, shining resemblance to the humble and now glorious Jesus (2:1-4,14-15),
- to do so for God's good pleasure, and in utter awe, given who Christ is and where he has been placed (2:9-11),
- conscious that not only their doing it (or *working* it) but even their *will* to do it, is God's doing or working —the God who so exalted Christ. Growing in holiness is yours solely through the faith you placed in Christ when you first let the work of your justification fall exclusively onto him.

He is saying the same as he says in 3:12-16. Notice there that Paul, in v12, does not "press on" (to be like Christ) *in order* to be owned by Christ. No, it is the opposite of that: "I press on to make it my own, *because* Christ Jesus has made me his own" (lit., that I may lay hold of—*katalabō*—that for which I was laid hold of—*katelēmphthēn,* aorist indicative—by Christ Jesus). He has not attained to resurrection or perfection, but he already belongs to Christ.

He is not pressing on to perfect Christlikeness *in order* to secure his justification. Christ has already secured his justification. Paul is not even *engaged* in that task. Faith is

simply giving up on that task and leaving it to Jesus on the cross. But note, he is also not pressing on *in order* to get more merit, credits or marks in a "sanctification" exam that will impress the Judge into (1) upholding his good verdict—or (2) giving him more progress in his sanctification! No. Your sanctification, in every sense, is already fully paid for by Another—and is yours by faith alone. Having already been justified forever, Paul is pressing on because *God is making him more holy* (i.e., closer to holy). Out of sheer love for Christ, he is simply pressing on to be more like Christ. He is growing towards holiness because God is growing him. God is fixing Paul's gaze and adoration more and more onto Christ–i.e., where his mind is set.

… with this inward growth in holiness, I am activated or brought into the action; God *engages* me in killing off the evil in me, which was NOT the case with my justification; there I needed to be decidedly disengaged!

My ongoing inward sanctification is entirely God's doing, as is justification, but with this inward growth in holiness, or killing off (Romans 8:13) the evil in me, I am activated and brought into the action; God *engages* me in cleaning up my act, which was NOT the case with my justification; there, I needed to be decidedly disengaged! Note that Paul does not say, "work out your own *justification*".

In terms of the strict meaning of the word "synergism", where one party is "working with" another, if we obey the imperative of v12 and "work", then since God, too, is working (v13), of course we have synergism. But we merely have it in the sense that the two parties are working—neither is passive. As a result of the ongoing work of God in me I am labouring, making every effort, pressing on, putting to death, putting off, putting on, putting away, and fighting. The effect is my transformation in the direction of holiness. However, our working does not give us *merit*. God's working in us is solely to his own merit: it does not even merit for us his further working in us. We are working together with him, yes, but there is no synergism of meritorious work. That work is monergistic; it is the work of God alone.

Even when we read in the Scriptures about rewards for our work, that is grace upon grace. We could never merit any entitlement to God's blessing. As God's children, we are now both …

> (1) definitively sanctified (i.e., justified, or accorded the favourable judgment of holy ones, and thus totally set apart from the guilty) and …
>
> (2) being inwardly and progressively sanctified …

by grace alone through faith alone—not through faith *plus* our God-worked works, which gather no merit for us.

According to Philippians 3:11-12, in our inward sanctification, God grants us both …

a) the will to work, and …
b) to work,

and so, he certainly has *us working*. This is not the case with justification, since "… a man is justified by faith *apart from works* of the law"; "to the one who *does not work* but trusts …" With justification, it is not even that we and God are together working for it, although all the praise for our work goes to the Lord since, as Roman Catholics claim, "our merits are God's gifts"[33]. *No*, *we are simply not working for it*. Coming back to Philippians 3:9, the righteousness that Paul had by faith was not his own—not from his own obedience or working (never mind who is credited with that working!).

Whereas sanctification gets me working, that working in no way merits either (1) my justification, which precedes it anyway[34] or (2) my further ongoing growth in sanctification. Both get us working, but neither is *meritoriously synergistic*! Even my justification has me working, but it is unmerited by that working—though feebly, imperfectly exhibited by it. If I choose to misread in a synergistic way the working that my justification *produces*, I am still inside the gates of Rome.[35]

It is helpful to place two "13's" side by side, Philippians 3:13 and Romans 8:13. I am killing off the evil in me, but I am

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[33] Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2009.
Note these words from the preceding section, #2008: "Man's merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit." However, the obvious question remains: insofar as it is due to God, how is it "man's merit"?

[34] I am now judged innocent of all my failure to work, or to have worked, as required!

[35] Roman Catholicism has a person working, in the power of God, for his justification. To Paul, the justified work in the power of God.

doing so “by the Spirit”. All the credit goes solely to him. I cannot claim “merit” for it, as Roman Catholics do. Of course, this killing is actively working, but we do not have the synergism of joint work for merit.

Consider Peter’s exhortation in 2Peter 1:5-8:

> **5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

If you have these qualities, "virtue, knowledge, self-control, … love”, and if they “are increasing”—we are growing more holy—your knowledge of Jesus will not be ineffective or fruitless. As we saw, learning from Jesus, you will bear much fruit, and this will prove that you are his disciple (John 15:8).

Note the words, “…make every effort ….” We saw that with justification, I am *disengaged*—no effort on my part is required. However, in producing my growth in holiness—i.e., in producing the *fruit* of justification—the Lord actively *engages* me. He does not engage me in the business of *earning* any growth in holiness, but his sanctifying work in me does get *me* moving and working and growing: “… it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good

pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Justified (Righteous), we can now please the Lord by our work. That is our new goal; that is enough. Our goal is not to please him *so that* …! Even God's rewards do not imply merit. The prospect of rewards simply reassures us we can please him; they are his gracious encouragements to the justified but always unworthy.

In short, justification is about becoming God's child. Ongoing sanctification is about God's child growing. What shows that you are already judged clean is that your character is *being* cleaned. If you like,

the fruit of 'alien' holiness
is growing 'local' holiness.

The proof that you are already judged clean is that you are being cleaned.

34. Two families and two places to stay, in 1 John.

God's children do not STAY in sin.

I John 3:6-9… [6] No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. [7] Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practises righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. [8] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

There are two families in 1 John, (1) the children of God, and (2) "the world", who are not born of God but are under the control of the evil one (5:18-19). And there are two places to stay. The children of God *stay* in Christ (2:19, 3:6a). Those in the other family *stay* in sin. Children of God 'have … sin' (1:8), but they do not *live*, *abide, or stay* in sin. Those who have been born of God (3:9) do not "make a practice" of sinning (ESV); those who do so "have neither seen [Christ] nor known him" (3:6b). Even without acknowledging the present tense of the verb which allows for the ESV's (and NIV's) understanding, if it were translated as "The one born of God *does not sin*"—i.e., sin simply does not happen in his case—then 3:6b would condemn all of us to "the world", including John himself. John in 3:1 would be directly contradicting

what he had just stated in 1:8—or should we take it that when John wrote 1:8 he was not yet born again, but he was by the time he wrote 3:1? Surely not. The mistranslation, "does not sin", has proved most unhelpful in East Africa, for example, where "sinless perfection" teaching flourishes in some quarters, and sows the seeds of despair (We'll return to the East African problem shortly). It appears that John is speaking about not just people who "have" sin in them, which is all of us (including himself, 1:8), but *chronic* sinners.

John's big concern is, who are the real children of God? Clearly it is not these people. He has in mind, it seems, a class of chronically sinful people, perhaps influenced, some suggest, by an early form of Gnosticism, which could happily treat chronic sinners as God's children—i.e., when they cannot be. His point is that those who *abide* in sin are not part of God's holy house, *and never have been* (3:6b).

What does this mean for their justification? In terms of 1:7 – 2:2, such people have never been cleansed from their guilt (unrighteousness): God's just anger against them has not been turned away (*propitiated*). Once, when our three-year-old daughter, Rebecca, was tasting her mother's anger, she leaned forward, touched her on the forehead and asked, "You a little bit hot, Mummy?" Needless to say, it propitiated her mother's wrath. In 1 John, Justification is not spelt out quite as clearly as in Romans or Galatians, but the concept is there. John sees himself and fellow believers as (1) having sin (1:8) and, at the same time, (2) being children of God (3:1) and having eternal life (5:13). Clearly, God's anger has been turned away from John's sin. If a person is found clean

enough to be in God's clean house and to have eternal life, that person has been justified. Because that person is a sinner and yet has eternal life, it is justification by grace alone. However, a person's sonship, and hence his justification, necessarily bears good fruit. The one who *abides* in sin cannot possibly be God's child, and never has been (3:6b), and so has never been justified.

The pig and the duck.

In short, God's children sin, but they do not *live* in sin. A pig, if it finds itself in mud, is quite content to stay there; a sheep, though, can't stay there for long and remain at peace: it is quick to get out of the mud and shake it off him. Likewise, if a duck is thrown into water, it will feel quite at home, but not a chicken! The child of God in the mud of sin is not at home there. Why not? One obvious reason is that he has the Holy Spirit living in him, the great Troubler. But, in terms of 1 John, the reason is that those of us who are God's children "walk in the light". And that marvellous truth we will look at now.

35. Justification and fellowship with God, in 1 John.

1 John 1:1-3
That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— [2] the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— [3] that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

1John 2:1-2 …
My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 5:11-13 …
[11] And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. [13] I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

If two or more people have Biblical fellowship, *koinonia*, it is more than mateship: they have something eternal in common. John here and his fellow apostles share with the Father and the son the "life" made manifest in the Son as they saw him and heard "the word of life". In 1:1-4, we have fellowship with the Father in *life* (1:2). This eternal life is now proclaimed to John's readers, "so that you too might have fellowship with us"—with us who, in turn, have fellowship with the Father and the Son. What is shared, or experienced in common, is what John proclaims, the eternal life that is in Christ. In 5:11-13, he who "has" the Son "has" this life, and that is everyone who truly believes in him. If we "have" his Son, we have this life, and since it is *eternal* life, we will *always* be sharing it with the Father and with one another.

It is important to note that the fellowship comes from each party having the life. As long as each party has this life, found in Christ, they have fellowship with one another. The fellowship is as lasting as the life. And since this life is eternal life, the fellowship is eternal.

If believing the word of life proclaimed to us means being granted eternal life, and we participate together (have fellowship) in what is eternal, then there can be no moment when we do not have it, and hence, no time when we are not sharing in it, or enjoying fellowship, *koinōnia*, in it. If a champions' shield has been given to a football team for one year, then all team members jointly share that shield all the time, and at every moment, throughout that year. The life we have through having Christ is not just for one year but for ever. Contrary to some popular theology, this fellowship is not something that ceases when we sin and starts up again

when we repent and confess. This "*koinōnia*" is as lasting as our eternal life.

Dr William Combs explains (*the highlighting is mine*):

> The major emphasis in these beginning verses of chapter one is eternal life, which was manifested in the historical person of Jesus. It is the climax of v1: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning **the Word of Life**." It is the emphasis of v. 2: "and the **life** was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the **eternal life**, which was with the Father and was manifested to us." It is picked up again in v. 3 with the repetition of the phrase "we proclaim" from v. 2: "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ …
>
> From the context what believers share with God and other believers is eternal life, the very life of Christ. The *New English Bible* translates v. 3: "What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ."
>
> … All believers are, so to speak, "in fellowship" because all believers share in eternal life. To have fellowship with God and other believers is to share in eternal life with them. [36]

Combs quotes Dr Daniel Akin:

> "Fellowship with the Father and his Son, then, is essentially

[36] Combs, William W, 'The Meaning Of Fellowship In 1 John', *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 13:1 (Fall 2008), p3.

the same thing as having eternal life."[37]

In 1:5 to 2:11, besides *life*, *what* we also share with the Father is *light* and *truth*. This, too, is something we share with fellow children of God. Notice what John has to say about what he and his fellow apostles proclaimed to us—which, remember, is what we have fellowship (*koinōnia*) in, or jointly participate in:

1 John 1:5-7
This is the message we [John and his fellow proclaimers] have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we *walk* in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. 7 But if we *walk* in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son *cleanses* us from all sin.

Also note the highlighted present-tense verbs in 1 John 1:6-7. If we *walk* (i.e., *go on walking*) in the darkness, we do not have fellowship with him; if we *walk* in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and Jesus' blood *cleanses* us from all sin. The walking here, whether in the light or the darkness, must describe a steady state. It is not that any wrong step takes us out of the light any more than it takes us

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37 Akin, Daniel, *1, 2, 3 John, An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (The New American Commentary), Broadman & Holman, 2001, p57.

out of fellowship in eternal life. Rather, if we are chronically walking in the darkness then it is a lie to claim that we are in fellowship either with God or with one another. It means we do not, in fact, have eternal life.

We remain in fellowship with God *when we sin* because the blood of Jesus cleanses us from that sin. And if our fellowship is as steady and lasting as our eternal life, then we must stand clean of that sin at every moment—judicially clean—*even before we have confessed it*. Our fellowship with God is no more intermittent than our eternal life: it does not take a break every time we sin. The person with eternal life does not live and die, live and die.

In fact, reading on into v9, "confess" is also a present tense verb. Those who have fellowship with God in life, light and truth *go on confessing*. If we "should be confessing" our sin, we can be assured that the guilt for our sin, all of it, *was* indeed cleansed away, once-and-for-all. That means he really and completely forgives me now—and not just for my general sinfulness, but for "all" my specific offences. We will always find him forgiving, and it is not a begrudging forgiveness: it was thoroughly paid for, and in forgiving us he is being faithful to the Son's redeeming work (We will return in a moment to this comforting thought).

Since those who walk in darkness are not enjoying this fellowship in eternal life and light, then they have *never* known it, since it is unceasing. And when John speaks of walking in the light, he is speaking of a state that is no less steady and lasting than this fellowship. Again, being in the light is not a temporary state. You do not return to the darkness with every dark, sinful thought and enjoy the light

again only when you confess that sin. On the contrary, because you are in fellowship with God, and walking in the light, you go on confessing. You do not confess in order to resume walking in the light; you confess because you *are walking* in the light and have never ceased to do so. Those who are walking in the darkness will not want to see their sin for what it is and confess it. They are *chronically committing sin*, regularly denying or excusing their sin, while those who walk in the light are *chronically confessing* their sin. Which group will stay with their sin?

Those who walk in the darkness are no more in fellowship with God than those in 1 John 3 who abide in their sin are the children of God, born of God. The ESVUK here faithfully gives us the full impact of the present tense of "sins":

1John 3:6
No one who abides in him *keeps on sinning*; no one who *keeps on sinning* has either seen him or known him.

(Lit., "Anyone abiding in him *is not sinning* [*or does not go on sinning—does not abide in sin*]. Anyone who *goes on sinning* has not seen him, neither has he known him.") John is not saying that if someone sins once, it proves that he "has neither seen him [the Lord] nor known him"—i.e., that he is not born of God. Rather, he is saying that the one who abides in Christ will not also *abide* in sin. Likewise, if it is understood simply as "does not sin", then it would mean that none of us is born of God. Note the comments in the last chapter on the two places to stay in 1 John and the two families. One family walks in the light, the other walks in the darkness.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the “saints”, or “holy ones”, are no less saints because they are still killing off (Romans 8:13), throwing off (Romans 13:12), putting off (Eph.4:22), putting away (Ephesians 4:31), getting rid of (1 Peter 2:1) their sin, through the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13-14), and still putting on love (Col.3:12-14). It is precisely because they are saints, God’s true sons, that they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit and cannot be under the control of the sin in them (Ephesians 5 and Romans 8). It is saints who grow towards holiness—who are increasingly being separated or set apart from sin. In 1 John, the fact that God’s children still see the need to confess their sins does not mean that they are not walking in the light; rather, it is because they walk in the light that they keep seeing sin to confess.

Fellowship with God, who is light, is not dependent on being sinless (1:8). It is a matter of openness to the light and the truth, or “walking” in it. It is a steady state of freedom to confess, as against the darkness of denial. And that, in turn, will bear fruit in practice—in how we live. Whenever we face our sin, we are not facing the threat of being expelled from fellowship with God. We are not facing guilt again, as if we had ceased to be clean from all unrighteousness. The imputation of our unrighteousness (*all* of it) to Christ in his wrath-diverting sacrifice (1:7, 2:2), does not take place again and again, every time we confess. Rather, it is *knowing that we are always clean that frees us to confess.* Walking in the light is a culture of continuing to confess. The confessing comes from the light shining on the sin. People who commonly deny their sin are in darkness and do not have this word of life in them (1:10).

When John says, in 1:9 (Lit.), “If we should be confessing our sins, God *is faithful* and *just* to forgive the sins”, he does not mean that God is acknowledging our confession to be such a humble gesture on our part that it would be unjust not to forgive us! No, thankfully, God does not owe *us* any mercy (in fact, you cannot *owe* anyone mercy!); he is being faithful to Christ who paid our ransom. And with that, he bought our lasting sonship and the assurance of his unrestrained, uninterrupted forgiveness when we are distressed by our sin. We confess, not as prisoners in the dock trembling before the Judge, but with the heavy heart of children who know the steady love of their Father.

As we just saw earlier, in 1 John there are two families and two places to *stay*. God’s children, although they have sin in them, do not *stay* or *abide* in sin. Here, we get the reason for that: they walk in the light, and when you are “walking” in the light, you cannot *stay* in sin. The light won’t let it hide!

This too, is not a condition that comes and goes. It is a steady state. Our fellowship with the Father in *light* is as steady and lasting as our fellowship with him in *life*. “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1:6). In 1 John 3:6, someone who abides in sin, has not been born of God. He is not God’s child. Here, someone who “walks in darkness” does not have fellowship with God. The one who cannot see his sin, because he is in the darkness, does not have “his word” in him.

Being in the light does not mean you never sin; it’s just that

you don't *abide* in sin (See how walking and abiding are linked in 2:6-11). What it does mean is being open to have the light shine on you, showing you what you need to *confess,* and then confessing.

When you know the Lord, there is absolutely no reason not to confess. Whenever we do it, we are never going to find him hostile. He is just, and therefore, since he always knows that our sin has been justly punished in his Son, he is always going to be faithful to his Son and to his own justice and not

If my sin were not always covered, in this way, how could I already have eternal life?

hold us liable for a debt of punishment that has already been paid in full—he will never withhold or withdraw his forgiveness. We are always found "righteous"—or clean of "all unrighteousness"—i.e., justified. ("All", incidentally, must mean that offences of all levels of intentionality are included!)

The umbrella of Christ's sacrifice is not removed whenever I sin and then restored again when I confess, as is so commonly believed in East African churches. African pastors constantly tell me that when I sin, I take myself out from under the umbrella of the cross. But, no, all the time, wherever I go, the umbrella is held for me, firmly over my head. If my sin were not always covered, in this way, how could I already have eternal life? 1 John 5:11-13 makes it very

clear that believers "have" (5:13) eternal life. I have eternal life because I have an eternal covering—I am always covered. That has to mean I will never be found guilty and will never need to be justified again. As we saw earlier (pp145-147), "By one sacrifice he has perfected [i.e., perfectly sanctified] *for ever* those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14—note, this is the *positional* sanctification whereby, justified, you are clean enough for God to have fellowship with you).

Another African illustration.

As I once heard a local pastor explain to a conference of Tanzanian secondary school students, the security of the believer in Christ is not like that of a baby monkey, who clings on for grim death as his mother climbs high up a tree. It is more like the security of a kitten who *is held* by his mother's mouth. The umbrella of Christ-crucified is held firmly, safely, over my evil head all the time.

We *have* a good lawyer, who defended us and then sat down (1 John 2:1-2).

All the time, at any moment, even before we have confessed our last sin, those of us who are children of God have fellowship together in Christ's sacrifice—his "blood". At any time, we have in common a Barrister in the court of heaven, the only man with the righteousness to qualify him to be "called to the bar". This clean, ever-obedient lawyer delivered his defence for us by being punished for us, and, that done, he is now raised but sitting down. He is seated

eside the propitiated (won over) Judge. Notice that John says that if we sin, "we *have*" (*echomen*—present tense) an advocate with the Father. Jesus is constantly at the Father's right hand in glory. But, as my old teacher, Leon Morris, used to stress, when the writer to the Hebrews says (7:25) that Christ, our great High Priest, "always lives to make intercession" for us, it does not mean that Jesus is lying prostrate before the Father. Instead, he is *seated*, his

It is not that every time I sin I go back to being found guilty again, and then when I confess that sin I am justified again.

justifying work already done. His very presence there as our priest—our always-alive priest—shouts to all accusers that his sacrifice was pleasing to the Father—and still is! The great "speech" from my Lawyer at the cross is always in the ears of the Judge. It does not cleanse me in God's court over and over again. It is not that every time I sin I go back to being found guilty again, and then when I confess that sin I am justified again. No, it *cleanses* me in the sense that it always *covers* my sin. In the blood of Christ, I am justified not just *for-now*, but *once-for-all*. It is vitally important to understand that we do not confess in order to be justified again, or to maintain our justified standing.

My current driver's license only permits me to drive for a few more years, until I reach a certain age and need to be tested again. By contrast, justification is lasting. Also, since I am

justified, I will now have the Spirit of God in me, and it is unthinkable that I should treat my once-for-all cleansing in God's court as an invitation to sin! For these two reasons, the following analogy is not perfect. However, bearing this in mind, it is helpful to compare my covering (by the "umbrella" of Christ and his death) with my driving license. His sacrifice "propitiated" God. It has completely turned away from me God's disfavour, so that he is "propitious" (favourable) towards me always and wherever I go. This is like the driver's license issued to me by my home state. I did my test and *passed*. That is *past* history, but it is very important for *now*—it is powerfully present—just like the certificate I received when I became a citizen of this country. However, when I go interstate, I do not need to do another driving test. If the police ask me to produce my license, they do not complain that it was issued by another state some years back. It *keeps on covering me* here, too, and all over the country. It is not that I was unlicensed for a time, when I left my home state, and had to be polished up to make me fit for the roads in this new state!

The blood of Christ (his propitiatory sacrifice—i.e., his punishing) does not keep me clean in the sense that it keeps on removing more dirt, more guilt that I have incurred since I

The blood of Christ keeps me clean in the sense that it *always licenses* me to be treated as clean.

last confessed. No; I will never be guilty ever again. Instead, the blood of Christ keeps me clean in the sense that it *always licenses* me to be treated as clean, as holy, as a saint, and hence as God's child whenever I speak to my Father. So, when I confess my sinning, I come to him as one already cleaned in court—already punished on the cross—for the sinning I am about to confess. When I come before him to confess, I am already clean. Whenever I "come clean" (confess), I come "clean" (justified) before I have opened my

Whenever I "come clean" (confess), I am "clean" (justified) before I come.

mouth. This is why, in the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father" precedes "Forgive us our sins".

What does this mean for my ongoing walk with the Lord?

Confession of sin is the natural past-time of those who are already justified for ever. We walk in the light. We are open to the light. We are not cleansed some more in God's court every time we confess; rather, the ones who walk in the light, and therefore confess their sin, will always find God forgiving and propitious since these are the ones from whom the wrath of God has been turned away by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Since, in regeneration (the new birth), the Holy Spirit applied the sacrifice of Christ to their hearts and brought them to trust Christ, these inwardly dirty people never cease to be judged clean. All of them always have

fellowship with God (and with one another) in eternal life, in light, and in truth since they all have fellowship in Christ and his saving death.

This is very important for our daily Christian experience, and for the ongoing, inward cleansing of our hearts. The finished, once-for-all, propitiatory work of Jesus on the cross is always there to cleanse my conscience when I wrongly perceive that my sin of today makes me guilty, or condemned, again—as if I had forfeited my justification. Of course, that very reminder also confronts me with the terrible price the Lord had to pay for my justification. That is good, hard therapy. But the objective fact of my peace with God remains undisturbed. That should not make me "cocky"; it is only by sheer mercy that he and I are at peace, but we *are* at peace, reconciled forever. The full price for that has been paid.

As the once-for-all cleansing of justification is placed ever before me and engraved into my conscience, it liberates me to face my sin and deal with it. Freed from excusing it, from self-justification or plain denial, I can face it as wrong. That is cleansing. I do not need to carry around a burden of guilt which could breed excuses for sin which would then bind me to committing that sin more. Not only is our walking in the light a culture of confessing, where we "should go on confessing our sins" (1:9, literally), but this freedom to confess our sin brings the freedom to forsake our sin. That is a very precious freedom: not everyone has it.

This is why 1:7 literally reads that the blood of God's Son

"keeps cleansing us from all sin". The very truth of the once-for-all cleansing of my justification in Christ's blood is itself cleansing in terms of my ongoing inward sanctification. Walking in the light is a matter of being open to the truth. Those who have fellowship with God, in the light and the truth, are the true children of God, who eternally have fellowship with him (and with one another) in his life.

Confessing is Filial.

My steady state of justification and fellowship does not preclude seeking forgiveness from my Father who, even as he disciplines me, is always embracing me as his son (Hebrews 12:4-11)—in spite of how I grieve him! Our confessing now is that of a child to his father—it is filial. As we noted earlier, it is not that of the prisoner on trial for his life. A guilty finding is ruled out, since all our crimes are already punished. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment …" (4.18). Our confessing now is the sheer grief of a son who has wronged the one who loves him more than all: "We love because he first loved us" (4:19).

Sons have freedom to confess that slaves don't.

Being justified means being increasingly free to face my self-

When people ask, "If fear of punishment is removed, then why repent?" what should we say? If they are "repenting" merely to avoid condemnation, they have not repented anyway.

centredness, my lack of love, and all the evil in me. My Father's "arm" is going to stay around me: "a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17b).

That is liberating. I don't have to rush off into denial of my sin. He's my holy Dad, and I'm his son, not his paid employee who could be tossed out any moment my bad secrets come out. He already knows the worst about me, and he still owns me as his son. Why pretend my evil is not there. I can get it off my chest quickly. I can even ask him to shine his torch deep inside me to bring out everything else that needs to be dealt with. This is all the result of being freely justified. Sometimes people say that teaching justification by grace is dangerous: it will encourage people to sin, and even to ask themselves, "Then why repent?" But if they are repenting merely to avoid condemnation, they have not repented anyway. The opposite is true. With the gift of justification comes the gift of the Holy Spirit (See above, pp188-193, 199-202). Slaves of the law will remain slaves of sin because they do not have the Spirit in them and because they are more like paid workers than sons. Sons are much more free to face up to their sin. Paid workers, slaves of the law, looking to their own righteousness to get them off, will not want to be open *with God* about their evil. And so, to the extent that they deny their evil they will remain with it (See above, p214). But justification by grace bears good fruit.

Robbed by your own son.

Think of a shop owner who is robbed by two people: one is his paid worker, but the other is his own son! After some

time, one of them confesses. The other is too afraid to open up, in case he is thrown out. Which one do you think is more free to confess?

If Christians see themselves as God's dearly loved children all the time, even when they sin, they are more likely to be open with God about their sin.

We confess, not as prisoners in the dock trembling before the Judge, but with the heavy heart of children who know the steady love of their Father.

36. Justification and prayer

As holy sons we can talk directly to our holy Father any time. I don't need anyone to be a bridge between me and God. Being holy, too, I am already on the same side of the river as God. I can just talk with him. We, the children of God here on earth, can pray for one another, but we don't require more mature Christians to stand in for us because their prayers are more likely to be heard than ours. No. My Father hears me because I'm his son, and I'm his son because he sees me in Christ. The most mature Christian does not compare with Christ. Christ is the one that God as my Judge looks at me through. It is his righteousness that made his sacrifice the colossal payment it was—well-and-truly enough to pay for the Judge to see me as holy all the time. Through Christ, I am the Father's always-loved son, and can chat with him anytime, anywhere and about anything, including my sin.

C. Vital questions.

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37. The table clean people sit around

—the symbolic community meal of those justified through faith in Christ's sacrifice.

1 Corinthians 10:16-18
16 The cup of blessing that we bless [NIV: for which we give thanks], is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.
18 Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?

Our fellowship, or joint participation (*koinōnia*), in Christ's sacrifice is graphically symbolized in the Lord's Supper. I will never forget a weekend "time away" that I was asked to lead in Dodoma, Tanzania, for the workers of Mission Aviation Fellowship and their families. After two days of "feeding" on the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross, we did it again, symbolically and dramatically, but in a way that brought out the implications of the cross for that community, the engineers and other ground staff, the pilots, wives and husbands, nationals and expatriates. All who had professed faith in Christ were invited to gather around a table. On the table was a huge saucepan of "ugali", which is maize meal

boiled up in water till it is very thick. It is the staple food or "bread" of many parts of Africa. Next to it was a large urn of hot "chai" (sweet, milky tea). We could all see one another across the table; we viewed one another through these symbols of Christ's one, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for our sins.

We all took small bowls and dug out a portion of hot ugali from the one large "loaf". It was hygienic, and yet we were able to retain the symbolism of eating from a common "loaf".

This, incidentally, is something quite lost when we use "wafers", or have two groups eating two types of bread, as if everyone could not agree to eat gluten-free bread, with some sacrificing their taste-preferences for oneness and the health of others!

"In the same way," we all drank from a common "cup", and there was no hygiene issue since we all used our own regular tea mugs. The hot chai was scooped out of one common "cup", a large bucket, and into the jugs of a dozen or so helpers, who then poured it out into everyone's cups. The same could be done with any brown or reddish drink. Again, there was no need to choose between separate sterile cups of grape juice and sharing our common salvation by—if you will excuse me—common salivation of one cup of wine, hoping the alcohol will sterilize the cup! Here, too, there is no need for two groups. The main point here is that we all had Christ-crucified in common. We were all justified in his blood. That is the most precious bond.

Maybe, across the table from me is a most difficult person, 'holier-than-thou', and even quite offensive. The supper says, "Wait! Wasn't all *his* sin punished on the cross when my sin, too, was punished?" Just perhaps, if I begin by regarding him as my brother, justified as I am by grace alone, by Christ's blood alone, albeit a learner like me in the Father's school, my approach to him might be less vengeful and more humble, and my eyes might be opened by love to see something behind his offensiveness that I had missed.

Of course, if his life is so persistently evil as to raise grave questions about his very justification, then that is another matter. Jesus, in Matthew 18:15ff, tells you clearly what you have to do if he has offended you, and what the next step is if he remains unrepentant, and, as a last resort, what the church has to do. It is not helping such a person, and it is not loving him, to assure him that you and he are sharing in Christ together. But that is precisely what the Lord's Supper *is* meant to do.

In this way, the Supper reminds us that justification is not only about *me* as an individual, but also *us* as the community of the justified. However, it is what we share as individuals that gives us communion with one another. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, we are one body because we all partake of the same loaf. The *soma* (body) derives from the *koinōnia*, and not the other way round.

38. Fellowship fraying at the edges— Unjustified children and communion?

For the same reason that openly unrepentant sinners should not be included in the fellowship meal of believers—namely, we don't want to mislead them (or anyone else)—we should not hastily admit our children either. If we love them, we will think not just about their *feelings* of belonging and inclusion now, but about their *actual* inclusion in God's eternal family. We should not want our children to conclude that they are justified when they are not. If a child has not come to the point of trusting only Christ's sacrifice for his salvation, then we do not want to do anything that might lead him to think that he is a fellow partaker with us in that sacrifice. We do him a grave disservice if we encourage him to have a false sense of peace with God.

In principle, churches on both sides of the child-baptism divide can face the same problem here. Little Anglicans and little Presbyterians have a wash in church to show they were born into a clean or holy community, just as little Isaac was cut. His circumcision showed that he was part of God's cut-off community simply by birth to Abraham's mob—especially in the light of God's special promises to the old man. But evangelical Anglicans and Presbyterians, etc., stress that little Isaac still needed circumcision of the heart. If he had just coasted along into adulthood without personal repentance and faith in God's promises, he would have become a "covenant-breaker". So, these days, too, before "covenant children" are treated by their church as God's children—born

again—many churches ask them to say something in front of the church that might help to "confirm" that they are not just part of God's "people" (God's children and *their* young children) but they themselves are now God's children—inwardly washed by Jesus into his "body", using the Holy Spirit, not water. They long that their children might personally come to Christ and be washed in his blood—that they be *justified*, washed clean in God's court by the punishing God inflicted on his Son. They long that their children be not Absaloms but Isaacs, belonging to the "true Israel", "the circumcision of God".

Baptist parents want the same for their children as Presbyterian parents. They, too, may take comfort from the faithfulness of God to his promises to Abraham, that there was always a "remnant", a group of believers among his blood descendants, right up to the birth of the promised "Seed", Jesus. They, too, will be glad their own children were born to believers. But they are not convinced that baptism is the right way to symbolize this birth into God's covenant people. *Many will believe that under the new covenant, no-one belongs in any sense unless he is justified, and so already God's child.* Although this makes the new covenant people less inclusive than God's people under his everlasting covenant of grace with Abraham, which did include infants, Baptists tend to view *that* covenant people more as a physical nation and less a spiritual community—although John the Baptizer and Paul do not appear to agree; they do not consider unbelieving Jews to be "true Jews". Such Israelites only "presume" to call Abraham their father.

Whereas those scholars today who favour baptizing covenant children tend to see a clear continuity between the Abrahamic covenant that pre-dated by 430 years the setting up of the nation state that entered Canaan, Baptist scholars appear to focus more on the discontinuity between the "old" national covenant and the "new" spiritual covenant. Circumcision marked off the nation state, and so has little to say to inform our thinking about the new covenant, and the place of our children in it.

However, in Hebrews, the now-superseded "old covenant" is not the Abrahamic covenant but the Mosaic covenant. This covenant is what Paul, in Galatians, calls "the law", whereas the Abrahamic is "the promise", which has not been superseded. Under the Abrahamic covenant circumcision was firstly a sign of the faith of Abraham and his righteousness—his justification. It marked off his true, spiritual descendants, who, through the coming Seed, Jesus, now include people of all ethnic groups, not just one physical nation, but a spiritual, holy "nation" of "priests". There is no reason to suppose that Isaac's circumcision had a less spiritual meaning than his father's, just because he was a baby and could know nothing of his father's faith till later. The attention was not on his setting himself apart, but on God's setting him apart, and not least through exposure to his law and gospel at home.

Whereas some say that children were included in what was essentially a spiritual covenant through Abraham, and were marked by a symbol of God's everlasting covenant of grace, while still infants, before they had come to faith like that of

their parents, others see nothing in the New Testament corresponding to the entry of whole households into the people of God, and no category of membership of the new covenant community that corresponds to the membership of children in Israel. They stress that the household baptisms of the New Testament do not specifically mention children.

Others observe that this silence of the NT on the presence of children does not alter the fact that the concept of household baptisms, though confronting to modern western individualism, was less so against the background of male circumcision of proselytes by household. What would have been more remarkable—and would have cried out more for mention—would have been not the inclusion of the children in household baptisms but their exclusion. And so the question comes, with Jesus' death and resurrection, are there suddenly no such people as covenant children?

What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 7:14? In what sense are these children "holy"? Is it that the whole family was a "holy" *environment*, "sanctified" by the presence of a believing mother, for example? Is the Abrahamic covenant still the everlasting covenant of grace, the Promise, continuing into the new covenant, which was sealed in the blood of the promised "Seed"—not replaced by it, as the "old covenant" through Moses was? Are Gentile believers not the sons of Abraham, and children of the promise? And although the Seed has come and done his justifying work, is this "sealing" of the promise the same as its ultimate fulfilment, when indeed all God's elect will now have believed, and "all

the nations will be blessed", calling the believing Abraham their father? So, the question remains, are believers' young children in the covenant?

If they are, is there a way of clearly conveying this without lessening the imperative of personal faith? Can the baptism of a covenant child not symbolize two types of cleansing: (1) by his physical birth to a believing parent (as with circumcision), the child has already entered God's clean covenant people, a community of prayer and loving, and of evangelistic nurture, with a view to (2) his spiritual birth, when he believes and permanently enters the community of the justified, cleansed by the blood of Christ? And what if he should not go on to believe? He forfeits his covenant membership. He is no different to any others who refuse circumcision of the heart. Can baptism not speak of both types of cleansing?

What holds for Baptism, does that not hold for the Supper?

When small Israelite children took part (at least in its earliest days) in the Passover commemorations, it was recalling and making present a redemption they were really enjoying. Even if they were quite unrepentant, if they drew the conclusion that they were really free from the Egyptians, they were not misled. Likewise, if, from their circumcision, they drew the conclusion that they were part of God's clean, set-apart nation, they were not misled. From before birth (not from the symbolic cutting, note), they were in a holy environment. But had there been in those days a rite that set out to assure

all participants, over and over again, that their hearts were now circumcised, then unbelieving participants would have been at serious risk of being misled.

Had there been such a rite or practice, then perhaps it could have legitimately informed our practice now, but to argue from the Passover to the Supper is not comparing apples with apples.

There appear to have been different levels of covenant membership in Israel. Abraham, himself, believed the Lord's Promise and was justified by this faith, and would go on to enjoy *fellowship* in faith with other believers of his day. However, as we have just been discussing, he could not for some time enjoy that same fellowship with baby Isaac, who would have had no understanding whatsoever of the Promise. Nevertheless, baby Isaac was circumcised showing he was very much part of the covenant people. In the New Covenant, the Supper is the fellowship meal of "the circumcision of God", those who were Abraham's sons by faith. I have not seen these terms used, but we might think of the little Isaacs as *non-responsible members* of the covenant community. They were not at this stage held responsible for their unrepentance and unbelief and so treated as covenant breakers. On the other hand, people of faith, such as Abraham, Elijah, and David, might be called *responsible members* of the covenant people.

The key question, here, is the one which we have just been asking in relation to child baptism: whether there can be

non-responsible—i.e., unregenerate—members in the community of the new covenant (of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:6-13—see also Ezekiel 36:26,27; 37:14,26,27; and Joel 2:28). Or is this community "the Body of Christ", and you will not find there any non-responsible covenant members—you will find *neither* any who later become responsible members ("children of the promise" or "children of God"—Romans 9:8) *nor* any who remain in their unbelief and so become covenant breakers? In other words, is the Abrahamic "everlasting covenant of grace" wider in scope and inclusive of the children of covenant members, while the new covenant with Abraham is narrower and excludes them? This is where the heart of the issue is, whether one is a credo-baptist or a paedo-baptist.

The Vine discourse of Jesus in John 15 makes it very clear that unbelieving people can indeed be in the Vine, or that now, too, as in former times, "… not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel …" (Romans 9:6). As we saw earlier, we should not rush to wrench from its context the "in Christ" of Paul—as in 2 Corinthians 5:17—and transplant it into John 15, reading it into "in me [the Vine]". The new vine, too, as with Israel of old, can have branches that are fruitless because dead, branches who never became disciples of Jesus. Note also, 2 Peter 2:19-22. These days, too, there can be children who by birth belong to the covenant community, just as much as Isaac did; some of these will remain in their unbelief and so become covenant breakers. They were in the covenant but were never born again. Now they are out.

The Lord's Supper is clearly for responsible covenant members, those who, like Abraham, have true faith and are justified. It is for those who have come to Jesus, the Bread, and have eaten and drunk him—Christ-sacrificed—for their eternal life. Every participant sees every other participant dramatically act out this image, showing how each one professes to have eaten and drunk Christ crucified. If he has, then he has believed in him and so has been justified, given life, and welcomed by God as his lasting child.

Speaking as an Anglican, something that troubles me is the "sacramentalist" language that is used in a number of our churches in baptism liturgy (infant and adult). The person, once baptised, is all-but-assumed to be mechanically made regenerate by the washing. But such a view of "sacramental efficacy" is, of course, no truer for infant baptism than it is for believer's baptism. Surely, an unbaptised believer is already born again, now a child of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44), or he should not be baptised.

We have moved far away from the Genesis 17 model, where the baby is not *ushered* into, but *welcomed* into, the clean community he was born into, praying that he, too, will one day be brought to faith and so cleaned, in justification.

Sadly, too, wrong thinking can all too easily be reinforced by child communion. We should not judge circumcision by what old Israel did with it, and we should not judge baptism (infant or adult baptism) by what churches have done with it. Of course, infant baptism can be completely misconstrued. As

with circumcision, there is potential for abuse. It may be viewed in a way that feeds nominalism. It may be viewed superstitiously, especially in animistic contexts, or in churches where a "priest" prays for the water to be "blessed" so that it is now mystically "sanctified" and supposedly powerful to bring the new birth or "wash away sin" when applied to the child. Countering such a magical understanding of baptism can, indeed, be an uphill battle, but, by God's power, it is doable, through challenging parents to raise the child in the knowledge of God's word, both law and gospel, and to pray that he might be brought to repentance by the law, and believe the word of the cross, and so *be justified and be* God's child. That is, our prayer should be that the child whose little body is now washed with water will, in God's good time, be born again, born God's child—that he will be baptized *by Jesus* into his Body, using not water but the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:7-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Baptists should be happy to pray in this way for the children of their Anglican or Presbyterian brothers and sisters, and evangelical Anglican believers should be delighted to have them so pray.

However, just as it would be unfair to say that infant circumcision necessarily lent itself to promoting the widespread nominalism in Israel, it would also be less than fair to say that infant baptism, *per se*, in the absence of superstitious input, lends itself to being perceived as a magic charm or, at least, a sure indication that you are "in", and so you now don't need to be born again. But could we say the same for child participation in the Lord's Supper?

What is the central symbolic action?

If we look at the central symbolic action in baptism, *being washed*, the participant is *passive*: it is not primarily about what *he* does. However, in the corresponding action in the Supper—*eating and drinking*—the participant is *decidedly active*. Secondly, baptism *is a once-for-all event* that, as we saw, can quite simply be explained as depicting both (1) the physical birth of a believer's child into a clean, holy family, and (2) a future new birth, into repentance, faith and justification, that is entirely *God's doing* and done when *he* pleases—though parents pray he will do it sooner rather than later. The Supper, on the other hand, as well as dramatically depicting what each of us has at one time done with Christ's sacrifice, *is repeated regularly*, and this lends it more to being read as depicting a *current*, ongoing reality, the real peace with God we *now* enjoy as a result of having been justified through faith in Christ's blood. To carelessly convey such a message to an unregenerate child would be to do the same as those false prophets in Ezekiel's day of whom the Lord declared, "… they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace', when there is no peace" (Ezekiel 13:10—read on to v16).

Some have even suggested using the Supper to evangelize our children. But then, why stop there? Why not welcome other children, too? In fact, why not open the table to any unbelievers? Why not? Because that would strike at the heart of *koinōnia*, fellowship. Can you imagine having a mandatory word of caution to the child participants at every communion service, along the following lines? It might be a

valiant attempt to temper the obvious danger of false comfort to unbelieving children, but what would it do to *koinōnia*?

> "*If you have not come to true repentance and faith yet*, this eating and drinking symbolizes the fellowship you will have with us in the future, when or if you do believe. You are welcome to take part, but please don't run away with the idea that it means you have peace with God now. Please don't imagine that you are really sharing in the saving sacrifice of Jesus, or that you and we really have Jesus in common! We are sharing in Christ; you are not. We urge you to come to Jesus, the Bread of Life, without delay, and then tell us, so that we can know that you and we are truly sharing him together."

Even if such words were uttered at every communion service, what is the child more likely to notice, words or actions? In any case, the real *fellowship* would be dissipated or thinned out. Is this the *metechomen* Paul has in mind when he says that "we, the many, are one body because we *all* [*hoi … pantes*] *jointly partake* of the one loaf?"

It is therefore an over-simplification to say that what goes for Baptism should apply to the Supper also—i.e., that if small children are baptized, they should be welcomed to the Supper also. It is not comparing apples with apples. It is a classic *non sequitur*, focussing selectively on points of comparison while overlooking key points of difference, especially in regard to the central symbolic actions in these two gospel dramas.

The Lord's Supper can all too easily be reduced to a semi-pagan communal appeasement rite for the priestly extraction from God, and distribution to people, of divine "strength" (as if believers did not already have God the Holy Spirit in them!). There may be little or no connection to a shared personal enjoyment of justification through the once-for-all priestly work of the solitary Mediator. The focus shifts to inclusion in the community and away from the terms (or basis) of that inclusion. It moves away from the shared grounds of personal reconciliation with God to the mystical celebration of a supposed reconciliation with God and community that needs no grounds, except "God loves us". Who would be so hard-hearted that they would not suffer the little children to be warmly wrapped up in that? I would. I would not suffer them to come to the Supper while I feared it might give them a false peace. I would suffer them to come to Christ and be justified, first, before welcoming them to the fellowship meal of the justified. *How does it help, to treat as evangelized those we want to evangelize?* Should we revive the notorious doctrine of "presumptive regeneration", and insist that covenant children do not need to be evangelized?

How does it help, to treat as evangelized those we want to evangelize?

What is at stake here? The gospel of justification by grace alone through faith in Christ's redeeming death, is it merely an optional extra in a tolerable soup of natural, performance-based religion? This brings us to our next question.

39. Biblical justification vs man-made religion

Romans 1:18-22…
18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

1 Timothy 2:3-6a:
3 This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

A major challenge in communicating justification cross-culturally or even within our own cultures and sub-cultures, is that we are trying to promote a product that many people are not in the market for—they don't know they need it. And they won't know this unless God works to bring them face-to-face with himself, with the word of his law and his gospel.

a) **Muslims** boast that Allah does not require a sacrifice in order to accept the faithful into paradise. They have a teacher, a guide, but they don't see the need for a punishment-bearer—and, of course, they have none. Allah does expect you to put some effort into good deeds, and this can persuade him to have mercy on you, although they may acknowledge that your good deeds could never fully repay him for your evil deeds.

Allah's holiness, then, is not the holiness of God: he does not have the impeccable goodness and true justice of God, who is repulsed by any hint of evil or defiance and has to have full satisfaction for it. Allah's justness is pliable enough to put paradise within reach of the believer's efforts—even if they may have to taste hell first.

b) In **atheism**, who needs to be justified by a supernatural 'god' when he/she/it is not even there, and when nothing is absolutely good or evil, or true?

c) In **Buddhism**, in its major forms, even where the supernatural may not be ruled out altogether, there is no Creator God who is personal and permanent, there is nothing that is objectively right as against wrong (only what is more or less *beneficial* or *wise*) and there is no moral Arbiter whom

we must give account to or be reconciled to. There is no sin or guilt and so no need for justification.

On the other hand, in Buddhism with room for the supernatural, a person can acquire “karma”, which affects the state he is reborn into after death. Through a long pathway of discipline and meditation the devout follower seeks to rise above the delusion of having a self; he must transcend “attachments” and “desires” that bring suffering, or the experience of it, until he reaches *enlightenment* and then *nirvana* where he is finally free from all consciousness of a separate, lasting self—and, of course, free from all suffering. But in the end their goal is seen as attainable—within reach.

c) In **Hinduism**, too, in its multitude of forms, there is no personal creator God, although there are many deities with person-like features. These are expressions of Brahman, the divine essence of everything, including us. We are just extensions of Brahman. Our problem is that we forget that, and we assert our individual selves. A personal act of the will on our part constitutes karma, which causes rebirth after death—and that involves levels of suffering. The goal is no karma and no rebirth, an enlightened state where you are fully resigned to being merged with Brahman.

Some karma can have fewer undesirable consequences than other karma. The degree of suffering associated with rebirth can vary greatly. You can be reborn into higher and higher forms of human existence, or, if when you die your karma is really bad, it can take you back to a lower, even non-human form, where your violence, for example, may come back on

you. *Samsara*, the cycles of death and rebirth, may involve many lifetimes before you reach *moksha* and are set free from it all. During each cycle, to reduce your debt of karma, you need to accept what your past karma has brought on you, and you need to do so without acting on any desires or ambitions your ego might want to push. That way you can eventually remove your debt of karma altogether. Who knows how many rebirths and how much suffering it will cost you to get there. But that is the point: it is *doable*—the price is within reach. God has been brought down to a size that fits us—impersonal, more user-friendly, and reachable; there is no need for justification by grace.

In **animistic religion**, at least as I have encountered it in **African Traditional Religion**, evil is more a matter of what harms the social group. There may be a supreme deity, but he is likely to be remote and unapproachable. The spirits of the dead are intermediaries and effectively run the show. And so, man (or man collectively) is answerable to man (in an advanced state). Evil is ultimately what offends *them*, "the fathers", bringing bad consequences for the clan or tribe—the withholding of rain or success in hunting, etc. But the fathers, in turn, can be consulted by living human mediators who can make offerings to remove their wrath. The offense is against the fathers, and we can handle it. God appears to be flexible enough to leave matters to the living dead, the men on the second floor. If they're OK with the appeasement for some offence, apparently, he too is OK with it.

At the same time, evil is often seen as the hidden activity of "witches" who, through their curses, bring suffering and

death upon the community. The witchdoctor is not seen as a witch, but as the one who doctors the witches, finding them, testing, and treating them (if the people don't kill them!). He treats the victims of the witches: he prepares 'medicines' to ward off the misfortune the witches cause, and to bring prosperity. The 'doctor' is the friend of the community.

Witchcraft accusation can easily substitute for taking personal responsibility for your own decisions and actions. Beside the witch, another particularly evil person is the one who causes an individual to experience shame in the eyes of the community—perhaps a teacher who calls out a defiant student in front of the class (Some of us missionaries have found this out the hard way and watched our students close ranks!) In both cases, the offense is against the group. Loyalty to the social grouping can trump individual or personal morality. What the group says is right, is right. Good and evil are viewed more in communal terms.

Where personal evil is reduced to manageable terms, in these various ways, generations of people can programme their children in suppressing the truth of God's righteousness, and what evil is by his standards. Where this happens, the notion of free justification by God as a gift will seem like over-kill. Who needs it? Such evil and offense as we admit to can be handled by human pain and/or mediation—priests and offerings. Reconciliation is about man magically manipulating the gods or the spirits, bending them and their will, winning their smile. In Christianity, however, it is *we* ourselves who are bent and so need to be bent back by God.

d) Such thinking is not all that different from **sacramentalist**

religion, which can be found even in some Protestant churches. We have seen how justification "by faith apart from works of the law", in Romans 3:28, means justification by faith alone, quite apart from your obedience—that is, justification as a sheer gift through leaving all the meriting of it to Christ alone. Opposition to this teaching seems to be strong among those who see the actions of the pastor and people in Baptism and the Lord's Supper in a rather bizarre way. They see the Lord's Supper not so much as symbolizing our common reconciliation to God "by [Christ's] blood", but as itself somehow clinching the deal on our reconciliation with God, at least for now. The "priest" through the sacrament re-establishes it for us, and then freshly applies it to us as we eat and drink. Special strength is supernaturally conveyed through the bread and wine (as if the Holy Spirit, who is already in believers, were not God, and as if God's power could be added to). That supposedly empowers us on our pathway to develop the virtues that, *hopefully*, will eventually bring us *lasting* reconciliation with God.

However, if justification by faith alone is true, if "we have been justified by his blood" or "we have been reconciled by the death of his Son", then all such human "priests" are out of a job. Who needs priests, now, to manipulate the divine and extract blessings which they then dispense to the rest of us? That thinking is more in tune with natural, manipulative religion and magic than with the Bible.

Where mission churches dabble with sacramentalism, perhaps from a love of colour and ritual, a desire to emulate the west, or to enjoy the glory it gives to the 'priest', it is not

likely to advance the spread of the gospel of free justification through faith in Christ's blood. We can easily forget that effective non-verbal communication can take place in cultic activity that to us is harmless tradition. For example, if the pastor faces the congregation when he preaches, but turns 180 degrees and gives them his back when he prays to God, what does that say? God is somehow specially located in the end of the building that he is now facing, and he, the pastor, is somehow their go-between. He powerfully reinforces this message if he bows repeatedly when he passes in front of the communion table. Of course, some will explain this as symbolic of the "otherness" of God, etc., but what does it say to those we want to teach about the full-time real presence of Christ, by the Spirit, in the heart of the believer? And what does it teach about the immediate access to God of all believers, without having to line up behind a priest?

When western missions come to Africa with their European sacramentalist baggage, do they consider what message they are conveying to Africa? What does it *say*, when the "priest" enters with much bowing a specially holy place called "the sanctuary", with a place to offer sacrifices at centre stage, an "altar", that features special lights and must be doused with special smoke, and where only those specially clad in weird, counter-cultural garb may tread, and where they, themselves, must be doused in the holy smoke, and where these "priests" apparently manipulate "sacraments" to manipulate God into conveying blessing through these channels? However much we might justify it as beautiful, awe-inspiring symbolism, to local eyes, is this not mediatorial religion? Is it all that different from what the older members

of our target audience know from their traditional religion? Is it not irresistibly similar to the manipulations of the doctor-priest invoking the spirits and courting their favour?

In all worldly religion, we ourselves have a hand in removing the eternal consequences of our own evil (if it is even acknowledged) and winning peace with the deity or deities or the spirits, or "everything".

Given the gravity of our sin, the problem with the pagan sacrifices is not only the falseness of the gods whom those sacrifices are intended for, or that some sacrifices are offered to the spirits of the dead when Israel was told not to contact them (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:10-1), or that those making the offerings are not personally fit to make any offering to the only God since they are sinners themselves, and so unholy; the primary problem is that they themselves *are not the one true God*. The Sacrifice of Calvary was "presented" by God himself (Romans 3:25, John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:19), the priest was 100% man (so that he could represent us), 100% sinless (making him a holy priest and holy victim, making the sacrifice holy), and 100% God (making this the only fitting and sufficient sacrifice for all those he saved). Any other offering would minimize our sin. No other offering could atone for sin. It is vital that these facts be clearly communicated in all evangelism.

For the nations scattered across the globe, or gathered together in Lygon St, Melbourne, understanding the need for justification calls for a radical confrontation with God and *his* view of good and evil. The best way for us to be engaged in this confrontation is to model the law by loving people in

practice (*especially when we are wronged by them!*) while making clear *who* has got us doing this, and to get the gospel accounts of him into their hands or ears or onto their smartphones. If, by reading the gospels, people are brought face to face with the claims of Christ, backed by his character and miracles, especially his resurrection, and become convinced that he is God, *then* suddenly everything has changed: *God* has spoken. Relativism and subjectivism show up as arrogant guesswork. And, above all, in the cross, there is a real solution to guilt.

The pronouncements of pontiffs or the insights of 'enlightened' gurus or 'spiritual directors', or the prevailing opinions of the pious, though laced no doubt with much truth, become collective guesswork, based on the delicate foundation of "Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong—especially for so many centuries!" The problem is that the Frenchmen are just that, French-*men*, in vast numbers. Then come others, somehow holier than all the rest because they claim to enfold the lot into their tolerant embrace—although they cannot tolerate those not equally tolerant.

But if Jesus is God, then God has spoken, and yes, he *does* have a monopoly on the truth. If he says something, then we have it straight from the top. For those who come to see Jesus as the one who is in authority, here and everywhere, and that he has the final word on God, good and evil, then questions of offence and judgment, condemnation, and justification, should become *very* real.

The question we are entitled to ask adherents of all religions, including post-moderns, *and which we must be prepared to*

answer ourselves, concerning Jesus, is, HOW DO YOU KNOW?

"How do you know this is true? Or do you hold to your religion merely out of 'tribal' loyalty?"
"How do you know that your church leaders even belong to God's Church? How do you know that what "the Church" teaches is what God teaches?"
"How do you know that your 'enlightened ones' were not 'enlightened' by evil, lying spirits?"
"What is the source of the 'doctor's' revelations or his healings? How do you know that his revelations are from 'the fathers', and not from lying demons, impersonating 'the fathers'? And even if it were from 'the fathers', how would you know it was true?

If Jesus is the one Creator God, and the prophetic words that he treated as God's words strictly prohibited all attempts to contact the dead, why should anyone believe these doctors who claim to have contacted the dead? If they present themselves as "witch-finders", how do you know that they themselves are not practising witchcraft, and being used as tools by demons to accuse innocent old people?

Sadly, even in some "Christian" settings we need to ask, "How do you know that this self-styled 'pastor' or 'prophet' is a true Christian, born of God?" It seems that some servants of Satan, seeing the influx of people into churches, have followed the market and set themselves up as Christian prophets. As I write this, I have just got telling news from Moses Makanta, a courageous evangelist in northern Zambia with a strategic radio ministry. A man has been accused of secretly paying for witchcraft services against a relative,

following ‘revelations’ given to both a “witch-finder” and a “Christian” prophet! The effect was a split family. In Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, children as young as two-years old have been brought to so-called “prophets” to be tested, even by fire, to see if they are witches. Of course, many die. One “pastor” has been convicted of multiple counts of murder. “As Jesus said, “… you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:20).

In posing the key question, “How do you know?” our goal should be to introduce people to the one in whom God has spoken most clearly, so that we *can* know. It will not mean that everything they already understand about God is necessarily wrong, insofar as some of it might be from God’s general revelation. However, it is only when they know the sole God, that his words will carry authority. When, confronted with his holy will for their lives, they become aware that they have been giving that very One their back, and that all their flouting of his authority is exposed to his holy gaze, then, as God moves in them, news of justification by grace should begin to meet a desperate need.

In the same case I mentioned above, members of that family torn apart by witchcraft accusations gathered in Moses’ home. After he asked those who had believed the so-called prophet, “How do you know?” and explained to them “the word of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18), both accusers and accused fell on their knees, in open repentance before God, and begged to be covered by Christ’s sacrifice. Out of 11 of them, 10 went away joyfully reconciled with one another.

40. Communicating justification prayerfully

Isaiah 6:1-5
In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. [2] Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. [3] And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"

[4] And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. [5] And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

As we introduce people to the God of creation, who has made himself known in *God's* prophets and, supremely, in Christ, we need to be asking God, himself, to personally reveal to them his authority and his holiness, just as he did to Isaiah. Our prayer should be that they might so see his holiness that they crash as Isaiah did and begin to see their evil and offensiveness for what it is. It takes a miracle for that to happen.

41. Justification and repentance

Repentance is a change of mind (*metanoia*, the metamorphosis of your *nous*!) that is marked by fruit (Matthew 3:7-8). *But your justification is not contingent upon that fruit.* Sometimes repentance is understood in a way that undermines the gospel of grace. It is seen as "an about-turn" in your lifestyle, and your justification depends on, or awaits, this change in you. That would mean we had come full circle, back to salvation by good works.

In evangelism, we can be tempted to rush in with the word of the cross. However, those who come truly to the Bread of life will be the *hungry*, who hunger and thirst for righteousness and life. They come horrified at their arrogance for effectively telling the Creator of the universe to go away. Even as believers we can still tremble at the thought of our insolence and the terrifying judgment we have been rescued from. And yet, some may hear the gospel and conclude, "Yes, Jesus paid for me to get off. That's cool; I won't go to hell; I'm in that." There is no thought of *repentance*, the radical change of mind about God and sin that Isaiah experienced. By contrast, real repentance is the "Woe is me" state of mind of the person who begins to have a realistic, negative "self-image" following the "reality therapy" of confrontation with the purity of God's holiness. It is self-despair.

However, the same holy God has announced his solution. The truly repentant person, it is true, despairs of his sinful self, and his ability to even begin to make amends for his defiance, but he will not remain despairing of life after

hearing the gospel. The person who, by grace, is truly repentant, will, by grace, listen to God's gospel and collapse in faith onto Christ-crucified, having despaired of finding any merit in his own obedience. This is the person who now needs no more convincing that justification can *only* be possible "*apart from* works of the law" (Romans 3:21,28; 4:4-8).

He knows that, while he is not yet judged "Clean", any "good" that he might dare to contribute towards his salvation would be offered with dirty, guilty, hands. And so, it would be an unholy offering—an insulting offering (You will find an illustration for this below, on pp.307-308).

This is not to say we must wait until our target audience is *fully* convinced of their evil and crushed by the kingship of Christ before we talk about the cross and justification. Could it be that some retreat into agnosticism or atheism because the only 'God' they have heard of, or been searching for, is decidedly unapproachable? Moralistic 'Christianity', where the gospel of free justification is not communicated clearly, or it dies the death of a thousand qualifications, is not helping such people. After all, who comes up to the moral standards of Jesus? While we must announce to the world that Christ is King, totally in charge of heaven and earth, the ultimate authority and arbiter, who has set the mark as to what is good and evil, and while we must model the radical love he commands, how can we leave our hearers there, condemned?

Let me here briefly speak to a view that still occasionally surfaces, at least in Australia. I recall in the early 1970's

hearing a prominent Sydney evangelical insisting that the atoning work of Christ on the cross was not the gospel proclaimed by the apostles as recorded in the Gospels and Acts. The gospel comprised the news of the kingship or lordship of Jesus, the Christ, and the message of the cross belonged to "follow-up", once someone had come to "faith", seen as submission to Jesus as King.

However, let's consider Paul's urgent words to Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:8-10
[8] Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, [9] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, [10] and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, [11] for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, [12] which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, …

What a message to those suffering for Christ! And what a clear statement of "the testimony about our Lord", "the gospel", that is so worth suffering for! Our salvation, and our holy calling, was purposed for us as a gift "in Christ Jesus, before the ages began". Paul and Timothy are "saved … not according to (*kata*) works but according to (*kata*) his [God's] own purpose and grace …", just as we saw in Romans 4:4-5

on justification. This salvation by grace came to the light in the appearing of our Saviour to abolish death, bringing life through this gospel. Timothy should not be ashamed of this gospel, and neither is Paul as he suffers for it. He won't be let down by it. He knows who it is he has put his trust in. Salvation by grace, and Christ's abolition of death for believers, is at the heart of this gospel that Paul is suffering for. Salvation in Christ's death is not the stuff of "follow-up" teaching, where "the gospel" has already been received.

Romans 1:16-17
16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

"The gospel" is powerful for "salvation" to those who believe it, because in "it", as we noted in the Introduction, is revealed what? "The righteousness of God" through faith, through and through, is revealed. We noted earlier the ESVUK margin: "the righteous by faith shall live". The doctrine of justification by faith, apart from obeying God's commanments (Romans 3:20-21), is what the gospel reveals.

Is "the gospel" here merely the announcement that righteousness is even more out of reach than anyone had imagined? Not at all. As we saw, the great parenthesis from Romans 1:18 to 3:20 shows the desperate need for the "righteousness of God" revealed in "the gospel" of 1:16-17. It is the "righteousness of God apart from law", of 3:21, that is

given in response to faith as a pure gift (vv22-24). Or does "But now" (of 3:21) merely introduce a demoralizing anti-climax? Is there no solution after all to the universal absence (3:9ff) and elusiveness of the "righteousness" required for life in 2:13?

Is the Lord Christ of Romans 6, to whom we are willing slaves, not the crucified-and-risen Lord of Romans 4:23-25? Was he not delivered up to death on the cross because of our sins and raised so we could trust him to have carried them, and so be justified by this faith (5:1-2)? In Romans 6, is it not our union with him in his death that sets us free from the control of "Lord" sin, and thus free to obey him (Christ) as our Lord? In Romans 8, is it not our justification, the liberation from condemnation, through the condemnation of our sin in his flesh, that has freed us to walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, being "led" by him? Is it not the Spirit of the Lord who has thus freed the sons of God from the control of the flesh, to serve their new Lord? In Galatians 3-5, is it not our redemption from the curse of the law (through the cursing of Christ—3:10-13) that secured our justification through faith, and with that our adoption and the gift of the Spirit? And is it not this holy Spirit in us who makes our submission to the lordship of Jesus do-able (even will-able)? Is walking in step with the Spirit, as he bears fruit in us, not walking in step with the Lord Christ?

The world needs to hear about the Servant-King Jesus who is the Servant and Saviour of Isaiah 53. Even in the law, the lordship of God which is at the heart of the law is the lordship of the Redeemer Lord (Ex. 20:2, Dt. 10:17). Is redemption a

feature of God's lordship under Moses but not under Christ? If the OT lordship should not be stripped of its redemptive context, why should Christ's? Is the difference between God's lordship in Moses' day and Christ's lordship now nothing more than the difference between the law of Exodus 20 and that of Matthew 5? And if the latter is a true exposition of the former, then does that not remove the difference altogether?

What did Paul write to the Corinthians about the gospel?

1 Cor. 15:1-4
Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you …. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, …"

Sometimes the relative silence of Luke, for example, on the place of the cross in evangelism, is overstated. In the Gospels and Acts, is the message of forgiveness kept under wraps when repentance is preached?

And as we consider the Name in which this message was proclaimed, we should not overlook the elephant in the room. The risen King the apostles preached had to have died before he was raised. More than that, he had been raised from an utterly humiliating, un-kingly death. That "the Christ should suffer" (Luke 24:26) cried out for an explanation. To

Jews, at least, it was the cursed death on “a tree”. The very notion that the coming King, anointed by God, and whom the Christians saw as “the Lord of Glory” (1 Cor. 2:8), should be cursed by God would have been scandalous. To non-Jews, such a message was absurd (1 Cor.1:23-24), and unlikely to escape vigorous discussion and wide dissemination, even if it was purely for ridicule.

At the heart of Paul’s evangelistic message is (lit.) “the word, the (word) of the cross”:

1 Cor. 1:17-18
For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Cor. 2:2
For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

It is right to be distressed by the antinomianism of some who dare to assert that a person can be “saved” while remaining a “carnal Christian”, a chronic sinner and not a fruit-bearer, not a disciple of Jesus (something John 15 and 1 John dismiss, as we have seen, and Romans 8 also). However, there is a danger of over-reacting to this error by unduly holding back on the news of the atonement, and doing so where it is desperately needed. While some may speak of a time when Christ was their Saviour but not their Lord (which is

impossible—Romans 8:14[38]), others of us spent painful years knowing him only as Lord—not as Redeemer Lord. All we knew of “grace”, or “redemption”, was that real Christians had supposedly been empowered to redeem themselves by their obedience. Those in prison ministry are perhaps more likely to encounter people who have long known their guilt before God, and their imprisonment in sin, and while the chaplain gives them lectures in the morality of Jesus, their hearts are screaming, “Yes, this is all good and true. This I know, but tell me, HOW?”

[38] Lit.: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”

42. Rejected by men; clean to God

Romans 8:33-34
[33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Notice how here, also, "to justify" is the opposite of "to condemn". Justification is no more a positive transformation than condemnation is a negative transformation. If you have been justified, then you stand acquitted not merely by some "kangaroo court" of flatterers, but by the court of heaven. If a criminal genuinely comes to faith in Christ while in prison, but the judge who sentenced him to prison is not a believer, then while the prisoner stands spotless before the court of heaven, the judge stands guilty!

What if you are wrongly accused by a human court, or at work? Don't return the charges. Weigh the criticism to see if there is any 'meat' on it, anything you should confess, and move on. Often, we do the real damage by being defensive, and then returning offense. The truth is, whatever sentence they pass on you, in the court of heaven you are as clean as the Judge himself, Jesus. Will you allow the Creator himself to be your judge, or those he created? Everything that any accuser could justly "have on you", the Creator has lifted off you. As the old hymn says, "The best friend to have is one who knows the worst about you and loves you just the same." (Note: we will consider these verses, and Romans 8, in more detail later, in chapters 47 and 48.)

43. Justification and sickness.

Romans 8:22-23
[22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Being justified, and thereby ushered into God's family, does not free me from pain now. Paul tells us that while we wait for "the redemption of our bodies" (our resurrection), and while the whole creation waits for that day (because that is when it too will be gloriously set free from its bondage to decay[39]), we "groan". The "we" here is people who "have the firstfruits of the Spirit". The rest of the harvest (and that includes being clothed with glorified new bodies), we will come to enjoy later. The Spirit, as we read in Ephesians 1:13-14, is the Deposit or Guarantee of that. This means that when Paul talks in Romans 8 about *groaning* in our old bodies, he is speaking of true, justified, children of God groaning! *In* that groaning, though, we can look ahead to our glorification, since v30 makes it clear that in our justification that has been sewn up.

We saw that the Greek word the ESVUK translates as "rejoice", both in 5:2 and 5:3, conveys the idea of living with your head up high—i.e., with God-given confidence.

[39] It is all the result of the curse following Adam's rebellion.

Romans 5:1-5
Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

"Rejoice" is a derived meaning; the joy is from what you are confident *about*—i.e., *even* our suffering, which, for its own sake, is nothing whatsoever to be joyful about. No Christian should feel guilty for not feeling ecstatic about some illness! The reason for the joy is the Lord himself and what lies ahead, and not the suffering *per se*. Jesus was not exactly ecstatic in the garden the night before he died, but he was conscious of the joy that lay before him.

So, even when our physical crania are pushed painfully down, we can carry our spiritual heads high. Our boasting is in the coup that our Father has irreversibly carried off for us by his Son's pain. I, a rebel, have been judged to be obedient. That makes being with him in glory a certainty. And, most of all, he, himself, is going to show up as beautifully right in all he has done—and why he did it that way. We are going to be overwhelmed by his personal love for us, and his selfless grace, which as we see him in his utter holiness and glory is going to be all the more obvious and stunning.

44. The rest of the story ("But now …"—Romans 3:21).

Earlier, I touched on how I was left hanging with Saul in Romans 3:20. Let now tell you how my "But now" happened.

A young minister in our church warned me, "If I were in your shoes, I would not go into the ministry." I went to yet another minister, whom I knew did not see eye-to-eye with him, but he looked me in the eye, and said, "John, do you know God?" He was a rather stuffy bachelor, and I greatly respected him. I had heard friends at school talk about knowing God personally and being sure of heaven, but I had just dismissed this as being arrogant. After all, they were not from my church: they were "non-conformists"! But now I had to sit up and take notice when this fine clergyman handed me a book by John Stott, called, "Becoming a Christian". It pointed me to what the Bible taught about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. I chased it up avidly in the Bible and was shocked by what I was reading—but delighted. Jesus had not died on the cross merely to show me how to save myself from hell. He had died to save me. He did the job for me! Repentance was not the issue; I had long since begun to see my sorry state. Now, though, I had discovered that I could safely leave all the work of my salvation to Jesus on the cross. God would count my sin as fully punished. If I trusted Jesus to have done his job properly as my Rescuer, I had eternal life. And that is what I did—if "did" is the right word, since it was more a matter of giving up "doing"—i.e., doing things to win his favour.

I cannot remember what I said to God, but I certainly got talking to him. I now knew I was fully accepted by the holy God and could speak to him person-to-person. I had no sudden, dramatic change of lifestyle. Thanks very much to my great God-fearing parents, I was not a criminal. I cannot testify to being set free from being a terrorist. I never experienced any bubbly sensation; it was not a matter of brain chemistry. I just knew from God's *promises* that I was his child and his Spirit had entered me. I belonged to his holy family, as a baby Christian, and I soon learnt that I had a whole lot of growing up ahead of me. Most of all, I knew that God and I were at peace, and it was no thanks to me.

45. Evangelism: explaining faith and repentance, for justification.

"… how shall they hear without" … communication?

A. The meaning of faith.

The following is an interactive approach to explaining the meaning of "faith" in Romans 4:4-5.

You might begin by giving practical examples of trusting someone with a task. Choose some household task and ask the women if they would trust their husbands with this task. Then ask for three volunteers and whisper to each of them a different answer to the question, "Who is it you trust with the work of saving you from hell?" Help everyone present to learn the question, and then, together with all of them, ask it of each of the three. Each will give a simple 1-2-word answer:

(a) *Samson*: "*Me!"* (Stand beside him and add: "I am trusting me, myself, alone—without any help from the Lord."

(b) *Peter*: "Jesus!" (You add, "I trust Jesus with that task—Jesus alone, without any help from me. I'm NOT lazy: there's other work I do, but not *that* work. The work of saving me from hell is 100% Christ's work. He did it on the cross. That is not my work at all!")

(c) *Justin*. "Jesus and me!" (You add: "I'm trusting *the Lord and me* working together. Jesus did the bulk of the work of saving me there on the cross; my part is to try my best to love and obey him with all my heart—as the Holy Spirit enables me.")

Now ask everyone, *all at once* (so that no-one is embarrassed!) to name the person they agree with. If there are pastors present, I would urge you to ask them not to answer (in case "the sheep" follow "the shepherd"!). Then ask your three helpers to sit down briefly.

After a little background on the meaning of 'justify', and 'righteousness' and a brief tour of the context, go to Romans 4:4-5. Read those verses, and, with the three standing up again, ask, "Which of the three is 'the one who does not work but trusts …'? *That person's* faith is counted to righteousness.

Usually, I find that after reading 4:4-5, people are quick to see that it is Peter who has true faith. Finally, come back to Peter with two questions:

1) Peter, are you working for the Lord *so that he will save you from Hell?*

"No" (You add, "No way! Jesus has already saved me from going to hell. He went to jail *for* me.")

2) "OK, but are you working for the Lord?

"Yes!" (And you add, "YES! With all my new heart"). At this point, talk about Galatians 5:22-23 (the fruit of the Spirit).

The way people answer the initial question may not necessarily be a true indication of where their faith really lies, but having committed themselves to an answer, they are probably more likely to be right with you as you lead them on a hunt for the Bible's answer.

B. True faith is found in the basket of true repentance.

Call up your three helpers again, “Samson”, “Peter”, and “Justin” (in the middle), and ask each one in turn this question (but first, whisper to each one his answer):

“Tell me, how do you see your sin? How serious is it in the eyes of a holy God, how ugly and dirty? How heavy is the load of your guilt?”

Samson (on the left): “Ah, no heavier than *a very small stone*!”

(Add a little to his answer, “If I have any guilt, it’s as light as a small pebble!”)

Peter (on the right): “It’s a huge load, like *an enormous rock*!”

(Add: “There is so much rebellion in me, it really grieves me. If I had to carry the load of my guilt, I’d be really weighed down—in fact, I’d be squashed flat! It’s heavier than a 20-tonne boulder!”)

Justin (standing in the middle between Samson and Peter): “It’s like *a big sack of maize*.”

(Add: “I’m not perfect, but I’m also not all *that* bad. I’m in the middle.”)

Next, whisper to each one his answer, and then ask him out loud, “Could you carry your load just 100 metres from here?”

1) Samson will answer, “Yes, of course—without any help!”

2) Peter: “You must be joking! Even with hundreds of people

helping, I could not move my load one centimetre!"

3) Justin: "Yes, sure, if I have the help of someone really strong."

So now ask everyone, "Out of these three, which one *has truly begun to repent*?" And wait for their answer.

Explain that Peter is the only one who has begun to feel the real weight of his sin and guilt. He has totally despaired of even *helping* to save himself and has just thrown himself on God's mercy: "I am lost in sin, defeated—helpless to save myself. Oh God, please have mercy on me and take my load!"

Ask Peter: "Let's say that a rich man arrives with a huge lorry for carrying road-making vehicles. He offers to carry your massive rock for you for free and you gladly agree. The lorry's powerful winch pulls your boulder safely onto its tray, and it drives off very slowly, carrying your 20-tonne boulder. Now tell me, Peter, will you need to run alongside the lorry and help it to carry your load?"

Let him answer, and then ask all the people, "Will Peter need to *help* the lorry carry his load?"

Explain to them that this big lorry is Jesus Christ.

True repentance is to be weighed down and to collapse under the heavy weight of your sin and guilt.

True faith is to let the load of your guilt fall off you onto Jesus. Faith is to trust him to have carried the load of your guilt. Faith is to leave to him alone *all* the work of saving you from Hell. If you try to help him, it is not true faith.

C. Justin's problem

Justin thinks that if he works together with Jesus it will help to convince God the Judge to let him go free—to acquit him; He thinks that his serving the Lord will help clean his record in God's court.

What's wrong with thinking this?

The problem with this is that, while he is not 100% cleaned of guilt, he is still dirty in the eyes of the holy Judge. That means that even the most self-sacrificing actions he does cannot work as offerings for sin, because they are offered with dirty hands—not holy hands! As offerings for sin, they cannot possibly please a holy God, and so they cannot serve even to *help* cover his sin—as if the Lord of glory needed our help! In fact, they are repulsive! In Old Testament terms, how dare an unholy priest presume to enter the holy place! Such offerings are an insulting underestimation of the weight of sin and guilt.

Justin simply does not see this. He is trying to help the Lorry to carry his load, because he does not see how heavy his load really is.

Illustrating this further:

A man has to feed a very important guest. His wife works really hard, staying up all night to cook the most delicious, fresh bread, with a delightful aroma. Suddenly, just as the guest arrives, the baby is sick all over her hands. She wants to

go and wash, but her husband shouts, “Quick, bring the bread!” So, with foul-smelling hands she places the bread on the table in front of the guest. Will he be pleased? No. She is trying to present a fragrant offering with foul-smelling hands.

That is what Justin is trying to do.

46. The covenants and justification

What is the relationship of the Mosaic covenant, “the Law”, to God’s dealing with Adam and Eve before they disobeyed him? Or what is its relationship to “the Promise”, the covenant with Abraham, or to the “new covenant” we know today? Did God change his plans, and dispense his grace in different ways at different stages? Have there been different ways of salvation at different times? In the Garden of Eden, when God promised Adam and Eve eternal life on condition of obedience during their probationary testing, it was a realistic offer: the condition could be met. But after their disobedience, this would no longer be the case. Now, “in Adam”, our rebel father, all of us were born covenant breakers, with a native hostility to God and his authority.

No matter how we obeyed thereafter, even were our obedience not polluted by the rebellion in us, it could never have covered the guilt already incurred. For all our days here, our “obedience” would always be only a poisoned “obedience”, accumulating guilt. We would never have any hope of building up a credit that might cover our past rebellion, making us worthy of life. Our only hope was the merciful imputation of righteousness to the believing disobedient, at the cost of real atonement.

Our innate enslavement to our own defiance was not God’s doing. Hence, at Sinai, God is not being unrealistic in alerting Israel to the unchanging terms of justification and eternal life; he is not thereby offering them a way to dig themselves out of their grave. He is re-presenting to them, in full (not

just to some extent), these real terms of life, so that they might have a realistic view of their sin—that they might have "the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20) and stop pretending to dig. The new covenant in Christ's blood is *earthed* in the reality of what the "old" Mosaic covenant exposed about sin and guilt. The writing of the law on hearts that Jeremiah foresaw (Jeremiah 31:33) was not the mere gift of a spade so that the dead could start digging by following the law in the Spirit's power. The law itself prefigured how the only obedient One would be judged to have our guilt and would be put to death and buried for us, under the curse of the same law.

Note that, although the law has a great deal to say about the earthly consequences for Israel of obedience, in terms of their blessings in the promised land, this does not exhaust the meaning of "life" in the law. Clearly, in Luke 10:28, Jesus's words, "Do this and you will live", addressed to the lawyer, who has just recited the two foundational love commandments, show that Jesus himself did not confine the "life" promised for law-obedience to life in the land of Canaan. This has to be more than Canaan life or increasing earthly days or blessings. This is eschatological life—that is, the life of the coming age, given to those of any age who are judged to be "righteous". See Paul's use of Lev.18:5, in

Galatians 3:12, as promising eternal life to those found obedient to the law.[40]

But those who have been tipped by these terms, tipped out of their imagined "righteousness" (Phil.3:1-9) onto Christ, will be found on the last day as they are now, "righteous". This is "the righteousness from faith" of Romans 9:30-10:13. In 10:6, it is contrasted with "the righteousness from the law". Note that it is "from faith" (*ek pisteōs*), and not "based on faith", as in ESVUK. The righteousness of faith is the gift of righteousness that is yours through trusting Christ to have bought it for you—through your faith in him. But it is not *based on* your magnificent, all-conquering faith! Faith is basing your acquittal on the punishing of the righteous Christ since that was the full punishing of all your unrighteousness.

When Paul, in Galatians 3:10-12, speaks about "the law" that is not "of faith", it is the good law of Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 27:26, etc., which his unbelieving contemporaries read out of context. That law is not *the whole covenant*; the law that "is not of faith" is that good law *wrongly isolated* from the Mosaic covenant and its gracious purpose, which was to drive God's people …

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[40] Dunson, Ben C., *"The Law Evidently is Not Contrary to Faith": Galatians and the Republication of the Covenant of Works*, The Westminster Theological Journal, Vol.79/2, Fall 2017, p250, footnote 16: "Already in the OT Lev.18:5 was interpreted to refer to the granting of eternal life. On this see Preston M. Sprinkle, "Law and Life: Leviticus 18:5 in the Literary Framework of Ezekiel" *JSOT*31, 2007: 275-93; …"

1. to despair—of their obedience to that law as the way to justification and life—and
2. to faith—trusting God alone to provide for that in the coming Sin-bearer.

This is by no means to treat the law as a *theoretical* way of attaining eternal life. Its terms for eschatological life were no more theoretical than its terms for life or blessing in the land of promise. Its threats of cursing were no more theoretical than the exile. It is the crushingly real terms of this law that the man of faith looked to God, on his own, to meet for him.

None of the Biblical covenants—including the "new covenant"—brought a change in the terms of judgment.

The Mosaic covenant laid down the moral laws that must be obeyed from the heart for a person to be found good enough for God to give him eternal life. The prophets and Jesus spelt out what was always there in the law, the heart-morality without which fellowship with the holy, and hence life with him, was utterly impossible. In Romans 2, when Paul reminds his readers of the terms of God's final judgment, he is not speaking theoretically, except (I would suggest) for a brief segment regarding Gentiles, in 2:26-28. We should never forget that neither this nor any of God's covenants was ever

a way for any *sinner* to win eternal life for himself. For sure, if Adam had obeyed God, he would have received eternal life,

Neither this nor any of God's covenants was ever a way for any *sinner* to win eternal life for himself.

but in that case the command was not given to a sinner. And in any of the post-Fall covenants, the covenants of mercy, whether it was a covenant of promise or of promise-fulfilled, God's morality never moved, His justice was never compromised, or made less severe, and His grace never faltered. His unmerited love never slipped beneath that of the pre-Fall redemptive agreement within the Godhead spoken of in John 6:37-44; 10:14-16, 26-30. Every aspect of God's character remains intact for eternity.

Was Sinai a Republication of Eden?

Was 'Sinai', *to some degree*, a republication of 'Eden'? It depends on what the original "publication" was. If it was the "book" of God's moral will, and the terms of eternal life, it is the same book. The substance of God's moral will is spelt out in wonderful detail through Moses, but the submission commanded in Eden was no less than that required at Sinai. The covenant of Eden was broken, but the absolute submission that God was entitled to, viewed as a book, never went out of print! And so, it never needed to be republished.

The grace of any of the covenants could never be appreciated except against the backdrop of God's absolute kingship. The sheer grace of Christ's redeeming work as described in Galatians 3:13, cannot even be glimpsed apart from the reality-check of 3:10-12. That the sole grounds for justification are the shocking cursing of the righteous Lamb of God, only makes sense in the light of the unbending terms of judgment according to works. 'Calvary' (the new covenant in Christ's blood) did nothing to expunge or soften God's moral standards or the terms of the final judgment. Man's rebellion has never obliged God to back down and issue a revised, more reachable, edition of his holy will. The terms of judgment in Leviticus 18:5 and Romans 2:13 are in no way theoretical. They are deadly serious, and enduring. The fact that these terms have been met for us in Christ, does nothing to tame or to domesticate the commandments—or, for that matter, to make them obsolete, as if God has repented of commanding us to live by them.

Was 'Sinai' the republication of an original manual for sinners seeking to win eternal life by good works? No. No such manual was written in Eden! God's command to Adam and Eve was not given to sinners. It was given to a sinless, guiltless couple who could have obeyed. When the command was given, they did not yet need to be saved. The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, had plenty to say about mercy and salvation. In particular, the sacrifices spoke of salvation by faith *to those who had been crushed by the demands of the law*. Such people—David being a clear example—could then utterly delight in the very statutes that had been used to bring out their crushing sinfulness. Perhaps the apparently

conflicting views of the law in the New Testament, that puzzle some, can be resolved even in the person of David. As their *paidagōgos*[41], or tutor/guardian, the commandments had completely upended the Jews (and their self-righteousness) onto God and his provision of a Redeemer, a new Passover Lamb, a Sin-bearer, just as he had provided a substitute for Isaac in Genesis 22.

But those who boasted in the law, or, like the still-uncrushed Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, looked to their own obedience for righteousness and life, clearly had no such faith. The moral law as a stark statement of reality regarding God's unchanging terms of life and death at the final judgment on the day or wrath, unpacking and fleshing-out the very terms given to Adam and Eve, threw some of Abraham's children over to the faith of their father. These were justified justly, just as believers are today, for the same reason Paul explains in Romans 3:24-26, Christ's vicarious death for them.

In Christ's death, those unchanging terms are met for us, who, by faith, are "in Christ". Under the Mosaic covenant, there was not only a crushing moral code. There was a mass of symbolic object lessons on cleansing from the unholiness of guilt, especially sacrifices, intended, as the Lord's Supper does with us today, to "show forth his [Christ's] death". Just as God had acted in grace to his people enslaved by Pharoah, by grace he would provide a Guilt-bearer for those who would look to him in faith to deliver them from enslaving

[41] See below, p316ff.

condemnation. By this faith, they could come to delight in the sweet statutes of this loving Redeemer.

1. The law misconstrued.

We can get confused by the apparent ambivalence of the New Testament's treatment of the law. Paul, in particular, appears to think of the law in negative terms (as an enslaving yoke—Galatians 3:10) and positive terms (as "holy and just and good"—Romans 7:12).

But we can miss that he writes negatively, even polemically, about "the law" *as misconstrued* by his kinsmen as a vehicle for self-rescue. Had Paul been one of the OT prophets he would have been equally justified in condemning this misconstrued "law". It was not just the coming of Christ that explains his polemic against it. The "law" of his contemporaries was a caricature that was never given to Moses; hence it was never there in any covenant.

2. The law as a fence.

Then there was the law as a fence, which divided Jews from all others. This must be something other than the law that, obeyed by Gentiles, could show itself as written on their hearts (Romans 2:15). The 'fence' law, however, that set Jews apart, has been abolished by Christ's death, according to Ephesians 2:13-16. Those who are "in Christ Jesus",

whether Jew or Gentile, are reconciled to God. “By the blood of Christ”, former strangers to Israel, Gentiles, who now have peace with God, have been brought near and made fellow citizens, and fellow members of God’s household, with Jews who have peace with God the same way—Christ’s death.

Ephesians 2:13-16
13 But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility *15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances*, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

So much for the Jews’ precious law and privileges! By this reconciliation, the Jews’ privileged possession of decrees, *wrongly viewed as a claim to special, privileged access to God*, has now been completely side-lined—it is “abolished” in the sense of exposed as utterly useless for reconciliation.

3. The law as a *paidagōgos*.

In Galatians 3:19, the law is spoken of as “added”:

> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made…

There is something that was not there before, at least, not in that spelt-out form. But nothing was given to Moses that abrogated the terms of "the Promise" to Abraham.

In the Abrahamic covenant, the land was simply a gift. In Genesis 15:17-21, Abraham did not make an oath, or ratify the covenant as the people did in Moses' time. He himself was not seen walking with God, making an oath alongside God. God alone was making an oath against himself, that he would see to the fulfilment of the covenant, symbolised and pledged by the passing of the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch.[42] This did not mean that Abraham's offspring would always be faithful to God, or that God would not have strong discipline for them. It did not mean that *all* his physical offspring would be personally saved from condemnation (Romans 9:33-10:4) and enter the eternal "land". But it did mean that his promises to Abraham would be fulfilled, and that there would always be a faithful "remnant" among his wayward people, until the Seed, Christ. Then all those "in Christ" *by faith*, not only Jewish, but also Gentile believers, would be God's people—the *true* Israel—indwelt by his Spirit (Galatians 3:1-14).

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[42] Vos, G*eerhardus, Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, p86. "The dividing of the animals and the walking of God (alone) between the pieces literally signifies that God invokes upon Himself the fate of dismemberment in case He should not keep faith with Abraham [cp. Jer. 34.18–19]."

The law was never meant to drive anyone to despair *and leave them there*. It was given to drive them to self-despair *and to faith in Christ*. In particular, the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments), was graciously given to bring repentance and faith in the gracious promised redemption. Yes, the Mosaic covenant was a restatement of the lasting terms of life, but it only promised life *to the wholly obedient*; the rest of us (i.e., all of us) need a Redeemer:

Galatians 3:10-13
10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." 12 But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The purpose? Paul, in the second part of Galatians 3, is addressing a particular *misunderstanding* of the moral law, whereby it was looked upon as a covenant of works offering *sinners* justification for good works. Paul's opponents were extracting the law from its gracious whole. But the law is not opposed to the promise; the inheritance did not come to Israel by law. God gave it to Abraham by promise (3:17-19a):

[17] This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterwards, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. [18] For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. [19] Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.

Why then the law? Why even ask this question if the inheritance could have come by the law? In Gal.3:21, there is nothing hypothetical about the law itself. What is hypothetical is not the notion of justification by the law—i.e., by obeying it—but the justification of any *sinner* by the law, the idea of any sinner meeting the demands of the law for eternal life, and so not needing Christ, or the promise of Christ. There is nothing hypothetical about the demands of the law for eternal life. The absolute terms of the law were real, and still are. The law, as commandments, was never a way for sinners to save themselves. What was it (vv21-24)?

[21] Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. [22] But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.[23] Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. [24] So then, the law was our *guardian* [*paidagōgos*] until Christ came, …

the law was a very much expanded edition of what submission to God's unchanging will looks like, for the individual and the holy nation, its gracious goal was to lead Israel to repentance and faith in "the promise" (Romans 2:4-6). In this way, it was intended as a "*paidogōgos*" (v24), to lead them to Christ. The *paidogōgos* was the slave-tutor assigned to noble Roman boys, to bring them to manhood.

4. A lasting law

In contrast, there was a lasting law, that of Romans 2 and 3, that was supposed to so humble the Jews, that, for peace with God, they should look altogether outside their own moral obedience, which gave them no grounds for boasting. But if they are too blind to acknowledge that reliance on their law-obedience for peace with God is fatal, if they are too proud to confess their guilt, then their possession of any law was useful for nothing—except to increase their guilt, since ignorance of God's will could be no excuse, especially for those "under the law" (note Paul's refrain in Romans 2, "to the Jew first"). Through uncircumcised Gentiles being, in Christ, fully reconciled to God, the law, *wrongly understood as a vehicle for self-rescue*, was demolished.

The Christian and the Ten Commandments.

We noted earlier "the fence law" of Ephesians 2:13-16, the "ordinances" that Christ abolished. Yet, in the same letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6:1-3, there is a *lasting* law that is as

imperative as ever. There is no hint whatsoever that the commandment to children to obey their parents is no longer standing since the “law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (ESVUK) was abolished at the cross. This law of Ephesians 6 is lasting law. The commandment is appealed to, and even the promise is appealed to which singled out that commandment in the Decalogue. This is more than wise counsel or suggestion to children—it is a standing command of God. Children *must* do this. For sure, there is no threat of condemnation to these children who are commanded to obey their parents “in the Lord”, just as there is no condemnation for *anyone* who is "in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). But something is very wrong if God’s moral imperatives are imperative merely because of the punishment or promise attached:

1 John 4:16-21
16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgement, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, “I love God”, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

What gives God's commands their imperative is who he is, and what he has done for us. God's imperatives, surely, should not lose their compelling power because we know how much he loves us! It should be enough that a command represents his will.

Does my assurance of God's love, my confidence for the day of judgment, and the casting out of my fear from me, defuse the imperative of the commandment to love my brother? Quite the opposite: "We love because he first loved us."

To this we can add Matthew 22:34-40. New Covenant believers have it on Jesus' authority that all the law hangs on the two great love commandments. That makes the Ten Commandments as imperative for us today as the love commandments. The love commandments are no more imperative for *salvation* than they, or any of their OT derivatives, the moral laws, were in Moses' day. But the moral laws remain moral imperatives. We are more than modern "humanists", or advocates of "the new morality" who insist that "love" trumps the old moral absolutes.

Some speak of God's Ten Commandments as being abolished along with the laws on sacrifices and ceremonies. In that case, what "law" does Jesus have in mind in Matthew 22:40, that hangs on the love commandments? We should also note that if God's moral law is abolished, why does anyone today still need to be justified (judged clean in the eyes of the law), in order to have eternal life? Or does the law apply now to the unjustified but not the justified? Was the law that some Gentiles might conceivably keep, in Romans 2:27, a different

law of God to that which Jews were required to keep? If so, how could their obedience condemn any Jew? Is God still not honoured when we keep his law (2:23-24)? Did Jesus abolish the moral law he "fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17)? And most importantly, is it not "righteousness" in the final judgment according to "works of law" (which those of us in Christ are already found with by grace, apart from works) that is still the criterion for peace with the Judge? The "doers of law *will be justified—i.e., will be judged doers of the law*" (future indicative, Romans 2:13). By faith, the judgment rightfully counted to "doers of the law" will already have been counted to them "apart from works" (4:6), while they were "not working" but "ungodly" (4:5!). This will happen because the counting—the judging—will have already happened! He does not say, "Under the old law which no longer applies, it would have been the doers of the law who would have been justified." The moral law of Romans 2 and 3 still applies, and by grace ungodly believers are found on the right side of it.

Likewise, those with eternal life now through believing in Christ in John 5:24, are they not found as "those having done the good things" who will be raised in 5:29? Even where a person is justified by grace, to be justified by God is still, as always, to be judged as "having done the good things" (or, in terms of Matthew 25, to be judged as a sheep and not a goat). How can God do this justly? He himself saw to the full punishment of my lawlessness, in the death of his Son.

To proclaim the gospel of justification by faith (in Christ) "apart from law" (Romans 3:28) is not to promote living now "apart from law".

D. What your justification says about your future and your past.

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47. Being clean in court now means you'll shine then —Romans 8:28-30

Being already clean in court makes you God's child already. Being a child of God makes you an heir; being an heir of God guarantees you will come into your inheritance—and shine.

In earthly families, being an heir does not guarantee that you will come into your inheritance. Traditionally, in many cultures, being the firstborn son can mean that you are born the heir to your father's farm. But then you may die young, and so not inherit.

Secondly, in earthly families, the heir comes into his inheritance when his father dies. Our heavenly Father never dies. His heirs enter their full inheritance "on the last day", which, for very many of them, will be after *they* have already died, and on the day when they return with Jesus and are given new bodies (John 6:40, 44, 54). Or, if they have not died before then, their bodies will instantly be changed into new, glorious ones (1 Corinthians 15:52—cf. Daniel 12:1-3; Matthew 13:43; Philippians 3:20-21).

Thirdly, they are heirs together with their "brother", figuratively speaking, who died. Even though he died, he did not miss out on his inheritance. He was raised. In the "family" of those who will have new bodies, Jesus is "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18), "the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). He has already inherited a new and glorious resurrection body: he is the "first-fruits", and we are the rest of the harvest (1 Corinthians 15:23). Unlike him, we are yet to enter our full inheritance, but it is certain we will.

In Romans 8, *all* God's children are heirs who will enter a glorious inheritance.

In Romans 8:13, those who "are living" according to the flesh are about to die, while those who, by the Spirit, "are putting to death" the deeds of the body, will live." According to v14, it is those who *are being led* by the Spirit of God who are the sons of God. Hence, the sons of God are not living according to the flesh, but are being led by the Spirit, which means in practice that they are putting to death the deeds of the body. It is not that they are putting to death the things of the body (the remains of evil in them) in order to become God sons; rather, it is because they are God's sons that they have the Spirit dwelling in them and are therefore being led by him (14) and are killing off, by him (13), what is left of "the flesh" in them.

In 8:15, the gift of the indwelling Spirit comes with adoption as God's sons.

In 8:16, it is the Spirit, in fact, who testifies with our spirits that we are God's children (8:16).

In 8:17, those who are truly the children and heirs of God will suffer with him and will be glorified with him. Note, v17 does not raise the question of true heirs not suffering with Christ. Also, it does not suggest that one could be an heir and yet not be glorified. That would conflict with what follows in vv18ff. Translating literally, v17 reads: "… if children now, heirs, truly heirs of God, fellow heirs now with Christ, if, in fact, we suffer together with him, so that we might be glorified, too, with him". That is, if we are not prepared to suffer with Christ, we are not heirs with him, and not sons of God. The suffering verifies our sonship; it shows we are fellow heirs with Christ, and we are heirs so that we will be glorified with him. All the sons will be glorified. All the heirs will enter their inheritance.

The glorious inheritance is ours just as surely as we *are* truly God's sons and heirs. However, the true sons (a) have the Spirit of God living in them, (b) are not living according to the flesh, (c) are putting to death their evildoing, (d) are being led by the Spirit, and (e) are Christ's fellow sufferers.

It is not that only some of the children of God will be glorified, or that only some of the heirs will inherit. This is confirmed by vv18-19, where not only will glory be revealed "to us" who suffer now, but "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." Paul does not speak of "the revealing of *some* of the sons of God—namely, those who suffered with Christ." Likewise, in v21, the

creation will not obtain “the glorious liberty” of *some* of the children of God. With being God’s child necessarily comes glorification then but suffering now. Compare Philippians 1:29, where the gift of suffering for Christ comes with the gift of faith, and Romans 5:3-5, where Paul speaks of our rejoicing not only in our expectation of glory but also in our sufferings.

According to 8:21, the creation will be set free (literally) “into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” The creation will be as gloriously free from the curse on it as the sons of God will be free—finally free—from all the effects of that curse. When is the creation going to be set free from what makes it groan? That’s simple: when are the sons of God going to be free? After all, is that not what the creation is longing for? Is it longing for that event because it will show that it still has at least 1,000+ years to wait for its freedom? No. The creation is longing for that event because that is the time when it, too, will be freed. When are we going to be gloriously revealed as the true adopted sons of God? At the time when our bodies will be gloriously redeemed (v23). The whole creation waits for that time. It will be made new and saved from groaning when we will have glorious new bodies and no more groaning (Romans 8:2, 2 Corinthians 5:2). We, in our new bodies will live on the new earth with its “new body”.

This is the time when we, God’s heirs, will inherit—when we will enter the full blessings of our inheritance. This is the time when all the redeemed, all who will have been adopted as

God's sons, will enter the full blessings of their redemption and the full glory of their adoption (8:23).

We have the Spirit now as the *firstfruits* of that harvest, when we will be in glorified bodies, conformed to the glorious image of Christ in the glorious body he has already, making him "the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). For now, we have the Spirit as the *guarantee* or pledge not only that we are sons and heirs now (8:16), but that we will most certainly be glorified (Romans 8:11, Ephesians 1:13-14, 1 Corinthians 1:22, 2 Corinthians 5:5).

You must be found righteous—guilt-free—to be adopted into God's guilt-free family. We who trust Christ as our Redeemer are God's children because our redemption by Christ's blood has paid for us to be judged innocent—Romans 3:23-25. The punishing of Christ for our sins means that we who trust him as our Redeemer have no debt of punishment. This qualified or fitted us for "adoption" into that guilt-free family.

Finally, coming back to Romans 8, read vv28-30. ALL the justified are glorified. All God's sons, without exception, will be glorified. "… (those) whom he justified, *these* he also glorified." We will consider these verses in the next chapter. We will also look at John 6:35-40,44,47,54: every believer in Christ "has" eternal life, and to everyone with eternal life Jesus promises, "I will raise him up on the last day."

In the OT and NT, throughout, *eternal life* is granted to those who are given the judgment fitting only to law-keepers. In the OT and NT, *salvation of sinners* is never by persevering in

the works of the law, but always by grace. By grace, law-breakers who by faith are in Christ, are judged as law-keepers would be judged, and are granted eternal life.

48. Loved and Chosen to be called, justified, and raised —Romans 8:7-8, 28-30

1. Chosen

The idea of God choosing who will believe is especially challenging to those who see themselves as at the centre of the universe, ordering God around, summoning him with a snap of their fingers. People's hearts scream:

> "If God chooses anybody to believe he should choose everybody, or else choose to give all the same chance to believe."
>
> "Why would he make people when he has no intention of even giving them a chance to escape from hell?"
>
> "Doesn't the Bible teach that God loves the whole world, and that Jesus died for everyone?"
>
> "It is unjust!"

In Ephesians 1, this thinking is turned on its head:

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace …

In other words, we are redeemed by his blood—i.e., we are justified, and we are sons—because before the foundation of the earth he chose us to be his sons.

This is reinforced at the beginning of chapter 2. Our condition was “dead”, and we had to be “made alive”. Could the dead repent and believe? (See below, p335, on Romans 8:7-8.) Faith, as we saw when we looked at Ephesians 2:8-10, is included with salvation in the neuter “this”, which is “the gift of God”.

Let us make one thing clear: no one says that God, looking ahead, saw only good people, and chose some of them to reject his love and so be lost. That *would* be unjust, hopelessly unjust. Rather, what *did* God foresee?

If we consider the condition of Jew and Gentile alike, as described in Romans 3:9-20, what good was there for God to foresee? Jesus, in John 3:6-8, speaks of people as merely “born of the flesh”, and needing to be born of the Spirit, before they could even *see* the kingdom of God.

What if, instead of seeing only good people ahead—or even *some* good that he, himself, had not put there—God saw only hostile people? And what if, looking ahead, God could see, even beneath widespread socially acceptable behaviour, secretly evil hearts in *everyone*? And what if, out of unimaginable kindness, he chose, or selected, *some* of these offensive creatures for rescue? Is he somehow in debt to them all, that he *must* choose to save all of them, or that he must put salvation equally into the hands of all of them? If he

chose to have mercy on only one solitary person, where is the injustice?

What if I am not the centre of all things? What if I am in no position to take the moral high ground with God? What if God is …holy, holy, holy? Where, then, should I be? Up on my feet, with my hands on my hips, or waving my fists, shouting at him, reminding him of his obligations to me? OR down on the ground, prostrate before him, crying, "Holy Lord, have mercy"?

What you think of the doctrine of God's choosing may reflect whether you are on your feet or on your face.

Recall Jesus' parable of the vineyard workers in Matthew 20:1-6. We can all do with a good reality check like this:

12 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

13 "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

What amazes you more, the justice of God or the generosity of God? Which shocks you more, that God should not have mercy on everybody, or that God should have mercy on anybody? Romans 9 is very clear, especially vv10-16:

10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

We have already seen how, according to Romans 8:1-11, there are two classes of people, those who are "in the flesh", and those who are "in Christ", or "in the Spirit", with the Spirit of God (the Spirit of Christ) dwelling in them. There is "the mind that is set on the flesh" and the mind that submits to God's law and pleases God. Note vv7-8:

7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The way we are by nature, not only do we fail to submit to God's law, but we *cannot* submit to it. We are so bound-up by ropes of innate hostility to God that obtaining life by obedience is hopelessly beyond us, and our disobedience leaves us helplessly offensive. We simply *cannot* please God. Notice in Romans 9:15, above, God's only options are to have mercy or not to have mercy. No-one presents as deserving life.

Imagine that you are a corn farmer, and for centuries your family and the neighbouring family have been fighting. They all want you and your family to die; you all want them to die. One year, locusts destroy all their crops, but don't touch yours. In fact, you have the best harvest you have had in many years. For some time, as their food supply runs low, they are too proud to seek your help, but finally the old grandmother crawls to your house, lies prostrate, at your door. Trembling, she pleads for food. Can you help them? Your family has plenty of food, and you have strong arms and backs to lift sacks of corn. But you cannot feed them and save them from dying with hunger. Why not? Because your arms and legs are tied up, bound tightly with strong "ropes" of hatred. They murdered your mother and four of your brothers: you just want them all to die.

In Romans 8:7-8, those who have "the mind of the flesh" *cannot* submit to God and his law. Why not? Because "the mind of the flesh is hostile to [lit., is *hostility* to] God". Some folk talk loosely about the "free will" of every soul; Paul does not. By nature, our wills are so tied up with ropes of hostility that our hearts *cannot* bow down to the will of God and

submit to his authority and his law. That, of course, means that without a total miracle setting our minds free to do it, we cannot even repent, since that, if it is anything, is submission to his will.

This was how God saw all of us when he looked ahead. He saw people who could not repent. God did not bind our wills. God did not make us his enemies. When he sent Christ to die for us, he sent him to die for only enemies (Romans 5:6-10). He was never morally bound to save even one enemy. When God, before making the earth, looked ahead to us, he saw only enemies, so hostile that they *could not* submit to his authority (Romans 8:7), and he chose some of them to give new birth to, so that they could bow to his will.

God's "election" is his selection of *some* to be "in the Spirit". As we saw earlier in Romans 11:4-6, this election is based on grace alone and not on foreseen merit. This is not to say that it is purely arbitrary. On the contrary, as is clear from Ephesians 1:4-6, he predestined us "… according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace …" (cf.1:11-12). He has his reasons for choosing his elect; it is just that his choosing is not merited by their works. It is pure grace. He predestines "in love" (1:4; 2:4). This is far from the mindless fatalism of the non-existent Allah.

2. Called.

Romans 8:28-30.
[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

In v28, the dative articles, *tois … tois*, introduce two dative phrases. Those for whose good God works all things *are* "the ones" loving God, *being* the purposefully "called ones". In v29, Paul looks at the beginning and end of a deliberate process. The *foreknowing*, in the light of v28, and the "*gar*" ("for") introducing the explanation for v28, is the pro-active God working for a certain outcome for his "called ones"—their good. It is certain since God works all things together for that outcome. Literally, it reads, "He is working *all things* together for *good* to the ones loving God, being the called ones according to his purpose." It does not say, "to *some* of the ones loving God, being *some* of the called ones". It also does not say, "to those being called" as if the calling were a present, ongoing action like "loving God". The ones loving God are "the called ones" (*tois … klētois*). The calling has preceded their love for God. Those "loving God", here, are "the saints" of v27 who have the mind of the Spirit, which is those of 8:6b. Together with the mind of the Spirit, they have

"life and peace", by contrast with those who have the mind of the flesh and with it, "hostility" to God (7a).

The subject in vv28-29 is still God's adopted sons of v23, or his "holy ones" of 8:27, who have in them the heart-searching Spirit who knows their mind. "All things" must include the suffering of God's sons. This is another word of encouragement to suffering sons who could otherwise fear that their suffering means they are not God's sons. In the mind of God, their suffering has a purpose.

Romans 8:29 shows that God's end-goal is the conforming of his adopted sons to the glorious image of his Son. The opening "for" ("since") means that what follows is spelling out both the "purpose" in the calling of v28, and the ultimate "good" they are called to. If we do not read v29 in the light of v28, we can miss the sense of purpose in "foreknew". There is purpose not only in "predestined", but also in "foreknew" before it: this is no mere acknowledgment. God has actively set his sights on his sons' glorification, when they will be conformed to the glorious image of his Son, making him, who is already glorified, the firstborn in a glorified brotherhood. This "good" outcome of the foreknowledge, predestination, justification of his sons is their glorification. It is certain because he, himself, purposefully works it.

Some commentators see the reason for the choosing in something that God, looking ahead, foresaw in the chosen. He looked ahead and, seeing who would believe and persevere in believing, he chose to call *them* for justification and glorification. This requires a significant addition to "foreknew", taking us beyond the text and making their

merits the explanation for his foreknowledge. It becomes mere acknowledgment, responsive to their initiative, rather than God's pro-active working. In place of his initiatory foreloving, we have a submissive "Noted! Copy that!" This does not do justice to the purposing of v28. God did not need to hunt the future for anything commendable in them to cause him to arrive at his purpose!

God, of course, has always foreseen everything. But if that is all there is to his foreknowing here, what did he foresee in the "all flesh" of Romans 3:9-20? Would he have seen in anyone repentance and faith that he had not put there? Or did he foresee only helplessly hostile hearts that *could not* bring themselves to submit in repentance to his will (Romans 8:7-8), but needed him to give them repentance as a gift (Acts 5:32; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:24-26)?

Often, in the Bible, "knowledge" is much more than "awareness". To pair foreknowledge and predestination parallels Ephesians 1:5, "In *love*, he predestined …". There is love behind the choosing, as, for example, in God's foreknowledge of Abraham for a clear purpose (Genesis 18:19—cf. Jeremiah 1:5). In Exodus 2:25, God was not just aware of the Israelites' suffering in Egypt. There is compassion in this knowledge (cf. Ps. 144:3, Hosea 13:5).

Finally, is God's call resistible? The problem with the notion of resistible "grace" is that it makes salvation rest on something more than grace alone. It now rests not wholly on God, but on God *and* our goodness and humility in not resisting his calling. If to any extent God had chosen people

according to foreseen faith or perseverance, or anything at all that gave him grounds for choosing them over others, then the selection would be based to that extent on merit and not grace. The predestination of Romans 8 would not then be that of Ephesians 1, which is "to the praise of his glorious *grace*" (Ephesians 1:6). Rather, it would be "to the praise of his glorious grace AND of the humility of those of us who agreed not to fight, but to co-operate."

Returning for a moment to Romans 11:1-6, in the case of the 7,000, God had not kept them for himself because he foresaw their refusal to bow the knee to Baal. That would not be grace. They were faithful, and did not bow to Baal, because of God's choosing them and keeping them for himself. The chosen remnant was not chosen because God, looking ahead, knew that they would be faithful. They were the chosen remnant because God had foreknown them (v2). It is because of his unmerited love for them that he chose them. Note that "a remnant chosen by grace", in 11:6, points back to those whom God "foreknew" in 11:2. What goes for God's choosing, goes for his foreknowing, too; if it is by grace, it is not on the basis of anything that God, looking ahead, found commendable in them; otherwise "grace would no longer be grace".

The called, in vv28 and 30, should not be confused with the "called" of Matthew 22:14. There, the called and the chosen are not identical (lit., "the called are many; the chosen are few"), whereas here in Romans all the chosen will be the called (v30). In Matthew, the "called" are the "invited"—note the king's words in v9: "Go therefore to the main roads and

invite to the wedding feast as many as you find." The called in Romans, on the other hand, have received more than an invitation; they are so powerfully called that they all come and are justified. No-one resists this call.

3. Justified

In 8:30, between the *predestining* and the *glorifying, Paul* inserts *calling* (that of v28 again) and *justification.*

For the called, the outcome is, beyond doubt, their justification and glorification.

This time, each *hous* (whom, a relative pronoun) is treated to its own demonstrative pronoun (these—*toutous*), indicating that the very same individuals are the beneficiaries of each stage from beginning to end. With each pair, the "*kai*" ("also") reinforces that the same people are the objects of the two actions covered by each *kai.*

In the light of prior—and ensuing—discussion of suffering of God's heirs, the message is that in "all things" God's purpose that all his sons enter their glorious inheritance will not be thwarted.

Notice that, as in the Ephesians 1 passage (initially, that is—not till v12), so here; there is no mention of faith. And yet, in Romans 3, is a person not justified by faith? Yes, indeed. And so, if the called are justified, surely, they must all respond to God's call with faith. And if all the called are not only justified by faith, but are eventually glorified, then surely, they will

have continued believing till the end. But that is not Paul's focus right now. His focus is on what God does, in the end, with each of those he foreknew and chose in the first place.

Note the repeated, "(those) whom …, these"—i.e., "the individuals who …, these individuals". This does not fit well with the view referred to as "corporate-only election", where God did not choose individuals to be saved. Some defend that position by appealing to God's choice of Israel, and then not all in Israel believing as Abraham did. However, as Paul says in Romans 9:6 (lit.), "… it is not so that the word of God had failed, for all who are from Israel, not all these are Israel". In 11:1-6, "the people [God] foreknew" are not all Abraham's blood descendants; they are not the whole nation, but "a remnant chosen by grace". The number of the true Israel, whom he knew, neither grew nor shrank. The predestination, in Romans 8, is not merely the choosing of a group that individuals may opt in or out of, but the choosing of individuals to make up a group whose number is unchanging. Those originally foreknown *are* those who are called and justified, and the justification is permanent, resulting in their glorification. The selection of those whom he foreknew is determinative for their glorification.

The prior attention throughout vv28-30 is on what God does with individuals. There are two plural nouns with articles in v28, referring to these people, and, in vv29-30, seven pronouns referring to the same individuals (*hous* x 4, *toutous* x 3—all plurals again), but not one pronoun for a group. It is not that the glorified, as a group, were all once in the group of the justified, which may have been larger, so that some of

the justified may no longer be found among the glorified. Rather, the outcome for the predestined is certain: “these” he also called. The outcome for the called is certain: “these” he also justified. The outcome for the justified is equally certain: “these” [not “some of these”, or “many of these”] he also glorified. As the following arrangement (translated literally) shows, the one group comprises the same individuals, from foreknowledge to glorification (in v30, note the repeated “these also”—*toutous kai*):

“We know that,
to the ones [*tois*] loving God
he works all things together to [*eis*] good
to the ones [*tois*] being the called according to his purpose
For
whom [*hous*—i.e., those **whom**] he foreknew,
he **also** predestined conformed to the image of his Son, to (*eis*) him being the firstborn among many brothers,
and [*de*] **whom** (*hous*) he predestined,
these (*toutous*) **also** he called,
and [or “also”, *kai*] **whom** (*hous*) he called,
these (*toutous*) **also** he justified,
and [*de*] **whom** (*hous*) he justified,
these (*toutous*) **also** he glorified.”

Note the repeated, "(those) whom …, these"—i.e., "the individuals who …, these individuals". This does not fit well with the view referred to as "corporate-only election", where God did not choose individuals to be saved.

4. Raised

Finally, looking ahead from v31, Paul closes his case for the security of the justified until their resurrection to glory, when they will be conformed to the image of God's firstborn Son (v29).

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn?

There is no doubt whatsoever in the mind of Paul that, having justified us, God will come through with our glorious resurrection. Something that is conspicuously absent from these final verses (31-39) is any hint of exhortation to the believers. We are not even urged to be conquerors. It is all about what others might do with us, and how we *are*

conquerors in that, and what God will do to us, graciously giving us “all things”, now that he has already given up his own Son for us.

Since God is for us today, could he be against some of us tomorrow? Could he have justified us in the past but then condemn us in the future—perhaps in 10 years’ time—if perhaps we …? No. If God is for us, who can be against us? God himself? That is unthinkable.

Notice, especially, that there is a wide range of scenarios contemplated of human condemnation of us, but God’s condemnation of us is out of the question. There is no hint that “If God is for us” should mean anything less certain than, “Since God is for us”. His being for us is as certain as his giving up of his Son for us since *that* is the basis of our justification. And, as v31 follows from v30, God’s being for us, in lasting justification, is as certain as *his* predestination and calling of us.

Two truths about justification are highlighted here:
(1) justification is as much a judicial decision as is condemnation; it is no more a process than is condemnation.
(2) God’s justification of us is never overturned; it is his lasting and final judgment of us. All the justified will be glorified.

49. Given to Christ and drawn to justifying faith —in John 6 and 10.

1. Objections to Selective Drawing.

"Prevenient Grace"

Together with "corporate-only election", many interpreters, notably John Wesley, have taught that God's initial grace is resistible. Although we were born dead in sin, and too hostile to be able to repent and believe, God supplies *all*, from before birth, with a work of grace that, if we co-operate with it, frees us to choose to believe in Christ. "Prevenient grace", as they call it, is resistible, since not everyone dies a believer.

John 12:32

One passage offered in support of a universal drawing is John 12:32, where Jesus said (lit.), "And I, when I am lifted up, will draw *all* to myself". However, we should ask, "all" of *which group*? All of mankind? We should note the context of Jesus' words. Some Greeks came to Philip, wanting to see Jesus. He asked Andrew, and then the two of them spoke to Jesus. It was at this point that Jesus began his discourse about his coming death, which he likened to the death of a grain of wheat: it bears "much fruit". Greeks, of course, were not Abraham's blood descendants, but God had promised Abraham a Seed in whom *all the nations* of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). In this context, the "all" of v32, who will be drawn to Jesus by his death, is probably *people scattered among all tribes of the world,* who will be gathered by his death (cf. John 11:49-52) and reconciled to God by his

redeeming blood. Besides, if in John 12 absolutely all people are drawn to Jesus, they must all be drawn not right *to* Jesus, but merely *toward* Jesus, since, even up till now, multitudes have died without believing. But we shall see from John 6 that God's drawing is not just *toward* Jesus.

Coercion?

A common objection to an irresistible drawing of *some* people is that it would mean that people only come to Christ by being coerced to come, instead of being free to resist. But who are these people who would freely resist the Father's drawing? Why would the supposed "universal drawing" be resisted by anyone if he really were free not to resist? Being irresistibly drawn does not have to mean that you do not come freely. Could it not be true that, given the alternatives, merited hell vs unmerited life, life is the only choice any free person would choose? Who would freely choose hell? For all the supposed work of "drawing" in him, is he still not dead in his sins and blind if he cannot see his enslaving hostility to God, and find free redemption through the cross to be irresistible love? Is such a person, or such a will, really free?

2. John 6:35-40
—None of his gifts finally resists.

Jesus taught that the Father's giving of a person to him does not merely bring him near, but right to him, and to stay there. Personally "coming" for life to the Bread of life (vv35-37) to "eat" him, is the certain outcome of being in the group

given by the Father to the Son. In v36 Jesus can say of his opponents, "… you (plural) do not believe". Then in v37 he speaks of a contrasting group—gifts: "All that the Father gives me will come to me." That is, unlike those in v36, they do not resist to the point of not coming. Jesus does not merely say, "All that the Father gives me will *be enabled to* come but some might not avail themselves of this enabling." He says, "All that the Father gives me *will come* to me …"

In speaking of this group given to believe, there is a fascinating mix of group and personal language. In 37a, he uses a neuter pronoun, *pan* (everything), to speak of the whole group that the Father has given him, but then he can say that he will definitely not throw out "the one" (*ton*, masculine singular—i.e., "the person") coming to him.

In vv38-40, the Father's will as to what the Son *should do* (subjunctive) with the complete group given to him by the Father (not the will that he should *attempt* to do), is indeed what he *will* do, in the raising of each individual believer: "I *will* raise *him* up" (v40b—indicative, not subjunctive).

In v39 he can speak again of "the whole thing" (*pan*—i.e., the group) that the Father has given him, and that it is the Father's will that he should not lose of "it" (neuter) but raise "it" (neuter) up on the last day, and then, almost immediately (v40b), he can say of each individual making up that group, "and I will raise *him* (*auton*) up on the last day."

In 40a, the Father's will is that "everyone (*pas*, masculine singular) looking to (masculine singular participle) the Son and believing (masculine singular participle—cf. 3:14-16) in

him should have eternal life …" And this will is indeed done. Personal resurrection at the end necessarily comes inside the package of the present personal gift of eternal life. In v54, the promise to the person with eternal life now, through personally "eating" (masculine participle)/ "drinking" (masculine participle) Jesus-sacrificed, is personal (*auton*) resurrection later.

Since not all come, the giving of people to Christ *so that they* "*come*", and are not merely found with his disciples, as Judas was (John 17:12), must be a selective giving of individuals. That is, even their entry by faith into the body of believers is selectively given (cf. Acts 13:48b, lit.: "… and they believed, as many as were having been appointed for eternal life.").

3. John 6:44-45, 64-65
—No-one drawn finally resists ...

Supporters of group-only election also appeal to John 6:44. Granted that all who come to Jesus were drawn to him by the Father, they claim that Jesus is silent over whether all the drawn come, and they see room here for the idea of a resistible, universal drawing.

Arguing from silence, of course, would prove nothing. However, Jesus is not silent about the outcome of the drawing. Not only does the individual who comes to him do so because he is drawn to him by the Father, but in v44b the "him" (*auton*) who is drawn is the same "him" (*auton*) of whom Jesus says, "I will raise *him* (*auton*) up on the last day".

Since he will be raised on the last day, the person drawn must have "come" to the Son first. Clearly, any person who will not be raised to glory on the last day was never drawn to him in this way—i.e., to "come" to him. The Father's drawing is therefore selective.

In the very next verse (v45), Jesus explains this same *drawing* using a teaching image from Isaiah 54:13: "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me …" If it is objected that all are taught but not all hear and learn, this would surely sound strange to the prophet. Is it remotely possible that he has ineffective teaching in mind, when he says, "All your children shall be taught by the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children" (Isaiah 54:13)?

Jesus is appealing to the prophecy, not qualifying it. He does not say, "It is written…, 'all will be taught by God', *but only* everyone who has heard *and learned* from the Father comes to me." No, the "all" is the "everyone". Being drawn means effective teaching: it involves hearing *and* learning. Everyone so taught "comes" to Jesus.

However, since not everyone comes to Jesus, not everyone universally is "taught by God". Hence, since v45 is explaining the drawing of v44, not everyone is drawn by the Father to Jesus. The "all" in the prophecy does not imply that the teaching is universal, any more than it implies that there will be peace for those who are not "your children".

In all these texts above, the view that election is only corporate is not supported by the grammar. Personal

believing predates membership of the body of believers—yes—but it does not do justice to these texts to say that, in the foresight of God, individual believing precedes membership of God's corporate elect. After all, believing itself is given to the group first given to the Son (John 6:37): "All [*pan*, neuter—i.e. "everything"] that the Father gives (present) me will come (future) to me …".

In John 6:65, Jesus says, "This is why I told you that no one [masculine] can come to me unless it is granted him [masculine] by the Father." (Literally, it reads, "… unless *it should be* (*ē*) having been given to him (*dedomenon*, a perfect) *from the Father*. Again, more clearly this time, the giving precedes the coming. We meet the same turn of phrase in John, the Baptizer's, words in John 3:27: "a man is not able to receive, not one thing, *unless it should be having been given* to him from heaven." John's followers have just been commenting on the fact that Jesus "is baptizing, and all are going to him." John probably means that Jesus would not have received this following unless it were to have been given to him from heaven.

So how does this help us? Jesus has just pointed out that not all of them believe in him, and now he gives the explanation: no-one can come to him unless it should have been given him. This is presented as sufficient reason to explain Judas' unbelief.

In v64, John places him squarely in the camp of unbelievers. In terms of v37a, although Judas was given to Jesus as one of his disciples (17:12), he was not given in the sense of 6:37,

because all those gifts "come" to the Bread for life—they believe—but Judas did not "come" to Jesus in that sense. Whatever was needed for Judas to believe had to have been given to him by the Father, which did not happen. The point is, the disciples should not be too surprized that he did not believe (= come), because unless the gift is given, a person will not come. Clearly, since Judas did not come, the gift is not given to everybody.

Jesus' words in v65, "I have said to you", seem to refer back to v44, but in any case, the drawing in v44 is clearly not done to everyone: "No-one is able to come to me, unless *the Father, who sent me, should draw him* [i.e., to me] …" He does not say, "No one can come to me unless *he should respond to the Father's drawing*", which he might have said if the Father drew everyone equally, but "no one can come to me *unless the Father … should draw him*." The "should" (i.e., the subjunctive, coming after 'unless') implies uncertainty, and in this case the uncertainty is about whether a person is drawn, not the effect of the drawing—i.e., not the response.

The drawing effectively removes whatever it is that makes a person unable to come, and, as we noted above, the outcome for the "him" (*auton*) who is drawn is to be raised by Jesus on the last day, which presupposes his coming to Jesus. This means that to the extent that the inability constitutes, or even includes, an unwillingness to come, this unwillingness is now removed, since the *auton* drawn is the *auton* who will be raised. Ultimately, no-one resists this drawing. Therefore, it cannot be a universal drawing since

not all come. In the group given to Jesus to come, all the individuals come, and all are finally raised to glory (6:35-40).

4. John 10:14-16; 25-29
—None of his sheep finally resists.

Whereas, in John 6*,* to believe in Christ is *to come to the Bread of life and eat him* (or *to come to the Drink—Water*?—*of life and drink him*—v35), here, in John 10, to believe in Christ *is to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd*—i.e., so that you follow him out to good pasture. It is a different word-picture, but the teaching is the same.

Firstly, in v16, he already *has* his sheep before they *hear his voice*. As he speaks, these "other sheep" *will* hear his voice (will believe) because they *are* already his.

It is interesting to ask this question of Jesus' words here, and in vv25-29: if you are one of Christ's sheep now, did you become his sheep when you heard his voice (believed in him), or did you hear his voice (believe) because you were his sheep? Which came first, to hear his voice, or to be his sheep? Jesus' replies, in vv26-27: "You do not believe because you are not my sheep; my sheep hear my voice …" To believe is to hear his voice, and they hear his voice because they are already among those he regards as "my sheep". How did they come to be his sheep in the first place? The Father had given them to him (v29): "My Father who *has given* them to me is greater than all …"

E. A final plea

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50. A final plea: fish for feedback

My final plea is to church leaders who may unwittingly be breeding Justins[43]. Often this may be due to a dead moralism, where fine teaching on Christian ethics is not *consistently* placed in the context of what God has done in Christ to love us into being that loving. Perhaps our teaching on inward sanctification or growth in holiness—e.g., "running the race"—is unintentionally communicated by us as the means of justification.

Recalling our earlier discussion, the position of Justin is the wrong sort of "synergism". The "*erg*" part of the Greek word "*ergō*" (I work) is hiding there. The prefix, *syn*, means "with", and so the term applies where people or forces are "working together". Its opposite is "monergism", which is where *only one* party is doing all the work. In Greek, "*mónos*" means "alone" or without a companion. In our illustration of faith above, monergism is represented by Samson, on the one hand, and Peter, on the other. A purely works-based understanding of salvation (Samson), or, more likely, a synergistic view (Justin), appears to exercise a relentless gravitational pull, even on active church members. It can

[43] See above, pp303-305

stealthily remain the default position of many of our hearers, unless we look for non-invasive, non-embarrassing ways of betraying its presence, through carefully designed questioning, respectfully offered. Even in churches with a long history of sound words from the pulpit, without *interactive teaching where "feedback" is sensitively sought*, it is all too easy for Justins to remain hidden and never have their synergistic thinking challenged by the gospel of grace. It needs to be done, not only in the mid-week Bible study groups, which may be poorly attended, but especially in the main worship services. Whether we like it or not, that is prime time for Christian education. What people do with the gospel once it is effectively communicated to them is a question of election and is beyond our control. But where the gospel has not been effectively communicated, it has not been preached.

"*…how shall they hear without …*" *communication?*

Conclusion

Whom do you trust with the work of meriting your rescue from Hell? Is it (1) you alone, (2) Jesus alone, or (3) you and Jesus?

Faith is totally disengaging from the merit enterprise, *taking your hands right off that work and abandoning it to the Lord*. By the faith of Romans 4:4-5, you leave well-alone, you leave in better hands, the work of meriting your acquittal. As far as *that* task goes, you put your feet up and rest. Immediately, God …

counts total innocence to you (4:3,6),

as this resting—this faith—in Christ-crucified is …

counted to your total innocence (4:5b),

counted to your lasting innocence (8:30).

Have you been acquitted for good by God the Judge? Nothing else can free you to work for him.

I cannot work my soul to save,
For that my Lord has done,
But I would work like any slave
For love of God's dear Son.

(Author unknown)

Questions for group discussion.

1. Romans 1:18ff. Is what Paul says about being judged innocent or guilty simply a law-court image or illustration, or is God really a Judge and does he really punish people?

2. Romans 2:13. "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified."

"To be justified", what does it mean here? Does it mean …

(a) to be changed into a good person, OR
(b) to be judged innocent?

3. Romans 3:31 When Paul speaks of upholding *the law*, is he thinking of circumcision (note 2:25-29) and the old ceremonial or purification laws, or does he have in mind the *moral* law?

4. Romans 3:28 When Paul says that a man is justified by means of faith "apart from works of *the law*", from what you highlighted in red or blue, which *category of law* do you think he has in mind,

(a) the law affecting circumcision, ceremonial cleanness, sacrifices, food, feast days, or...
(b) the *moral* law?

5. Would you agree or disagree with this view: "Of course, when a person is judged innocent by God, that judgment is still based on the person's moral obedience, but what has changed is this: these days when he judges people, it has nothing to do with being circumcised"?

6. In other words, in v28, is Paul saying …

(a) that someone is judged to be obedient (is justified), by faith apart from how he obeys the old laws on circumcision or ceremonial cleanness (clean foods, etc.), BUT, of course, not apart from his moral obedience, OR …

(b) that someone is judged to be obedient (is justified) by faith apart from how he obeys even the *moral* law?

7. A pastor who has faith in Christ steals money from the church and is headed to a shop to buy something with it. At this moment, does the court of heaven judge him ("find him") (a) *guilty* of disobeying the law, "You shall not steal", or (b) *innocent* of disobeying that law?

8. To help you review your answer to Question 7, let's now return to Question 6 and ask it in a slightly different way:

In Romans 3:28, Paul says that a person "is justified by faith *apart from* works of the law", but what does "works of the law" mean? In other words, a person is justified "by faith apart from" WHAT?

a) *Apart from* obeying the ceremonial laws and food laws given through Moses that, as with circumcision, marked Jews off from Gentiles, OR …

b) *Apart from* obeying any of his commands, even his moral commands?

9. Which of these two positions (8a or 8b) is justification by "grace", and leaves no room whatsoever for merit or boasting in your own goodness (3:27)?

10. Now look at each position (8a and 8b) in the light of the law, as Jesus spelt it out in Luke 10:25-28. Note especially Jesus' words in v28, "*Do* this, and you will live." (Not "*try* to do this"!) In the light of v28, which of the two positions would leave *you* with eternal life?

11. Now consider a third way that some read Romans 3:28:

> "A man is justified by his *faithfulness* (or a lifestyle of faith lived out in love, or covenant faithfulness) apart from exhaustive obedience of the Old Testament moral law."

Do you think that God has, in fact, lowered the bar since Sinai? Has his moral will changed, or "eased up"?

[*Note: the moral law in Romans 1:18-3:21, that you had to be found obedient to (2:13) if you were to qualify for life and glory, is the same law that Paul now upholds in 3:31, and that Jesus upholds in Matthew 5 and 22:34ff, and Luke 10:25-28. In 3:23-24 it is in respect to this law that we are found with sin and it is this law that, by grace, we are judged to have obeyed*.]

12. In terms of Romans 11:4-6 and 3:24, would "justification" (as stated in Question 11) be justification by *grace*, as opposed to works or merit (as in Romans 11:6), or justification by mercifully-lighter works as opposed to heavy works?

13. In other words, is a person with faith justified (judged to be obedient) *because of* his obedience or *in spite of* his *dis*obedience. What does Romans 3:28 say?

14. Are you working for the Lord SO THAT you will get off when you stand before him?

15. Are you working for the Lord?

16. In terms of Romans 4:4-5, if a person looks to his own *faithfulness* and sees it as counting towards his salvation,

(a) is he "the one *not working*" for his salvation, or …

(b) does he (enabled by the Spirit?) have to *work* at it by trying to be faithful enough to get it (or, at least, to *keep* it)?

(In other words, according to Romans 4:5, if someone is *working* to be faithful enough to be found righteous, *is* righteousness counted to him?)

17. In terms of Romans 5:8-10 (and 4:5), could the justification of someone because of his *faithfulness* be called justification of a "wicked", or "godless", person?

18. In terms of Romans 3:27 and Ephesians 2:8-10, if a person actually made it to glory on the grounds of his *faithfulness* (or even partly on the grounds of his faithfulness), could it be said that he had *no* grounds for boasting?

19. If you are a church member, does that guarantee your future resurrection? (1 John 2:18-19)

20. If, already, you "have been justified by faith" (Ro.5:1) does this guarantee your future resurrection (Ro.5:1-2, and 8:30)?

21. Ned: “Right now, I thank God alone that I find myself in his very special multinational community, the Church. I am here by grace alone. But what the Judge will do with me on the Day of Judgment I cannot tell you for sure. Why not? Because that is not a given. It’s not a foregone conclusion. I should be OK, but it will depend on the general direction of my new life now that I have the Spirit to lead and empower me.”

Do you agree with Ned?

23. Does he see the Judge’s final verdict …
   (a) as being at least partly based on his Spirit-empowered new life of service to the Lord and others, or
   (b) as a total gift that will be the opposite of what he deserves?

24. If “grace” is understood as in Romans 11:4-6, and not just as God’s gracious empowering, is Ned’s position justification *by grace alone*?

25. For the next four questions, let’s assume that what Ned says truly reflects what is in his heart. If so, where is he looking to source the righteousness that he needs to get him past the Judge? Is he looking to source it totally outside of himself?

26. In the light of Romans 10:1ff, would you be praying for Ned’s salvation?

27. In the light of Romans 4:5, is Ned “one who does not work”?

28. And so, is his faith counted to righteousness? Is he justified?

29. In the end, although none of the people on the new earth will be there because of their obedience, should we still expect the Judgment to show that God's Spirit has been working in them?

30. If a justified person commits suicide, where will he go?

31. In Romans 11:4-6, is "grace" (a) strength or power from God, or (b) to be blessed by God when you deserve to be punished by him?

32. Which position is justification by grace—at least, the 'grace' of Romans 11:6 and 3:24?

(a) "God empowers me to live for him, and as I co-operate with that power, my life of faith and my new character and love and virtues will increasingly merit eternal life for me, although this process probably won't finish before my death, and, even then, after a time of suffering."

(b) "God gave his Son to die *for* me, to pay for me to receive eternal life as a gift that I can never merit."

33. Which preacher do you agree with?

John: "By grace God has simply *given* me eternal life, even though my life is so bad I will only ever deserve hell."

Francis: "By grace God enables me to live a holy life so that I might deserve to inherit eternal life."

34. Elia is an evangelist who loves to give his testimony of the wonderful change in his life, but secretly for many years he has been sleeping with different women, drinking heavily,

and practising witchcraft. He is full of hatred and never forgives anyone. He is still like this when he dies digging a well for poor people and the soil falls on him. Will he go to heaven?

35. Daniel is not a womaniser or a drinker. For most of his life he has served the poor. Living in wretched conditions himself, he has rescued hundreds of orphans and given them hope and a life. In humility, he insists that this service is all the Lord's doing, and not his own doing. But he humbly trusts that *it might help persuade God to spare him from punishment after he dies* and accept him into paradise. He, too, dies when he is digging a well for poor people and the soil falls on him. Will he go to heaven?

36. Titus is a Protestant evangelist who tries to preach the gospel to at least thirty people each day *so that* when he dies the Lord will find him good enough and accept him into heaven. He, too, dies when he is digging a well for poor people and the soil falls on him. Will he go to heaven?

37. Do you already know the Judge's final judgment on you?