

## IMPUTATION OR UNION WITH CHRIST? A RESPONSE TO JOHN PIPER

Don Garlington

### *1. Introduction*

Recent days have seen the publication of a new study from Dr. John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002). According to one reader, Dr. Piper's book is "certainly the most solid defense of the imputed righteousness of Christ since the work of John Murray fifty years ago" (John Frame, from the back cover). This book emerges from vigorous contemporary debate over the cardinal issues of imputation, justification and righteousness, and represents a reaffirmation of the traditional Protestant position on these questions.

It must be clarified from the outset that this response to Piper's book represents a kind of "mediating" position. Not that the purpose is to bridge a gap simply for the sake of being a "peacemaker," but rather that the baby is not to be thrown out with the bath water. That is to say, the *intention* of the doctrine of imputation is not to be disputed: *our righteousness comes from Christ and is for that reason an "alien righteousness."* However, it is a question of modality. The prophets anticipate the day when the Lord himself will become our righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16), corresponding to the time when none other than his Servant will make many righteous (Isaiah 53:11). But how precisely does this transpire? It is the contention of this paper that the free gift of righteousness comes our way by virtue of *union with Christ*, not imputation as classically defined.

The design of this study is to engage Piper's exegetical/theological arguments. The introductory material pertaining to the setting in family, church, culture and nations is really not in dispute. Every Christian would agree that justification by faith is vital for the preservation and well-being of each. But in their own way, these remarks tellingly bring to the fore a central issue in Piper's presentation. Throughout his book, Piper assumes that justification by faith and imputation are tantamount to each other, as though the former could not exist apart from the latter. So, it is well from the outset of this response to go on record that justification by faith as such is not in contention, only the mechanics of how justification "works." Likewise, that the righteousness of Christ becomes our possession by faith alone is taken for granted, and indeed defended, in the following pages.

Given, then, our common faith in Christ and the efficacy of his blood and righteousness, we are obliged, even in the climate of heated debate, to be ever vigilant to maintain the apostolic mandate to the church: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, *with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Procedurally, I have chosen to follow Piper's own outline. His arguments are normally summarized in detail and sometimes with lengthy quotations, in order to let him speak for himself as much as possible. Then, in some cases following the summaries and in others intertwined with them, I have sought to provide what response is possible within the parameters allotted.

## 2. A Sketch of Piper's Argument

The launching pad of Piper's book is an article by Robert Gundry (see p. 44), who is taken as a leading representative of "the challenge to historic Protestant teaching."<sup>1</sup> According to Piper, Gundry's revision of the Protestant schema of justification can be summarized under four heads (pp. 47-48).

- (1) Our "faith is reckoned as righteousness" in the sense that our righteousness "consists of faith even though faith is not itself a work." In other words, faith, instead of receiving the imputed righteousness of Christ, is itself our righteousness by God's decision to impute it to be so.
- (2) Justification does not involve any positive imputation of divine righteousness (neither God's nor Christ's) to believers.
- (3) God's righteousness is his "salvific activity in a covenantal framework" as opposed to imputation in a "bookkeeping framework." This salvific activity, called "justification," includes what has traditionally been called "sanctification": justification "has to do with liberation from sin's mastery."
- (4) The doctrine that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believing sinners needs to be abandoned as unbiblical.

In Piper's "Exegetical Response to the Challenge," appeal is made to the standard Pauline texts which are supposed to contain the doctrine of imputation. Piper is particularly concerned to deny that justification is in any sense a liberation from sin. In his view, such a understanding of texts like Romans 6:6-7 results in a confusion of justification and sanctification. As much at stake as anything is a methodology of reading Pauline texts. In particular, Piper objects to a "controlling biblical-theological paradigm" ("new paradigm") which, he believes, is too "vague and general" and fails to do justice to passages in Paul. Piper is afraid that this approach "bears all the marks of a widespread scholarly paradigm that exerts a controlling effect on the exegesis of the texts that do not clearly support it" (p. 70).

## 3. Piper's Exegetical Presentation and Response

### 1. The Evidence that the Righteousness Imputed to Us is External and Not Our Faith

The primary passage adduced in support of this proposition is Romans 4:1-11. Verse 3 of chapter 4 quotes Genesis 15:6. As translated by Piper, the latter passage reads: "Abraham believed God, and *it was credited* to him for righteousness" (italics his). The mainstay of the argument from Romans 4 is the translation of the Greek verb *logizomai* as "reckoned," "counted" or "imputed." Thus, given such a translation of Paul's Greek, it follows for Piper that righteousness becomes the possession of the believer by virtue of imputation.

However, the problem resides precisely in the translation and, consequently, the interpretation of *logizomai*. It is true that members of this basic family of words can mean "credit/charge to one's account" (for example, Philemon 18 [*ellogedō*]), and *logizomai* itself

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<sup>1</sup> Documented by Piper as appearing in *Books and Culture*, January/February 2001 and March/April 2001. The choice of Gundry as a representative of "the challenge to historic Protestant teaching" is understandable enough and makes for a convenient foil. However, it is ultimately reductionistic because there are so many variations on the theme, especially considering that "the challenge" is becoming very widespread indeed.

is used by Paul in the sense of “keep a record of” (1 Corinthians 13:5). The LSJ classical Greek lexicon cites a couple of instances in which it bears the sense of “set down to one’s account,” although these are isolated instances and do not occupy any place of prominence in the verb’s semantic range.<sup>2</sup> However, a glance at the BAGD Lexicon informs one that in biblical Greek *logizomai* characteristically means things like “reckon,” “calculate,” “count,” “take into account,” “evaluate,” “estimate,” “think about,” “consider,” “think,” “be of the opinion,” “look upon as” (as do LSJ).<sup>3</sup>

Given such established and common usages, it is striking that Piper overlooks the fact that the most proximate occurrence of *logizomai* to Romans 4 is Romans 3:28, where the verb can hardly be translated “impute” or “credit.” Rather, Paul “considers” or “concludes” that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law (cf. the same usage in Romans 6:11). Indeed, this strategic employment of *logizomai* provides a very natural lead-in to chapter 4, which almost immediately quotes Genesis 15:6.

It is true that BAGD translate *logizomai* in Romans 4:4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 22 as “place to one’s account” or “credit.” The editors do so because these verses, they correctly note, are taken after Genesis 15:6. Yet it is just Genesis 15:6, *rightly understood*, that provides the linguistic and conceptual background to Romans 4. What the exegete must “reckon with” is that *logizomai* is not an isolated entry in a lexicon, but rather part of an idiom that is Hebrew in origin.

In quoting the LXX of Genesis 15:6, Paul draws upon the phrase *logizomai eis* (“it was reckoned to him as righteousness”). The language of the LXX, in turn, is based on the underlying Hebrew phrase *hashab le*. This idiom is common enough in the Old Testament as meaning “to consider a thing to be true.”<sup>4</sup> As such, the Hebrew and Greek phrases at stake are best translated as “reckon,” not “credit” or “impute.” Piper seems to use all three more or less synonymously; but in fact they are not. Dictionaries such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* and *Merriam Webster* assign to “reckon” meanings like “to count or compute” or “to consider as being; regard as,” the latter being more relevant for the present purposes.

In short, the point of Genesis 15:6, as taken up by Romans 4, is that Abraham was regarded as a righteous, that is, covenant keeping, person when he continued to place his trust in God’s promise of a seed.<sup>5</sup> This correlation of fidelity to God and the reckoning of righteousness was alive in the Jewish consciousness of the Second Temple period. According to 1 Maccabees 2:52, “Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and *it was reckoned to him as righteousness?*”

<sup>2</sup>H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1055.

<sup>3</sup>W. Baur, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 475-76.

<sup>4</sup>The passages that have a direct bearing on Genesis 15:6 are those which are generally translated “regard as” or “reckon,” whereby the verb, to quote G. Von Rad, gives voice to “a process of thought which results in a value-judgment, but in which *this value-judgment is related not to the speaker but to the value of an object*” (“Faith Reckoned as Righteousness,” *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* [London: SCM, 1984], 125-26). To phrase it otherwise, a thing is considered to be acceptable not because of a predisposition in the one making the judgment, but because the object commends itself by its inherent qualities. See Leviticus 7:11-18; 17:1-9; Numbers 18:25-32; 2 Samuel 19:20; Proverbs 27:14; and especially Psalm 106:31, the only other place in the Old Testament that replicates Genesis 15:6: “it was reckoned to him [Phinehas] as righteousness.” In the case of Phinehas, it was hardly a matter of imputation, but the declaration that this man was considered to be faithful to Yahweh’s covenant. A bit ironically, the passages adduced by O. P. Robertson, as cited by Piper (p. 57, n. 4), support a “non-imputational” reading of *logizomai* (Genesis 31:15; Numbers 18:27).

<sup>5</sup>See the stimulating exposition of Abraham’s pilgrimage of faith in W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

Having quoted Genesis 15:6, with its full phraseology, “*it was reckoned to him as righteousness*,” Paul, in good midrashic fashion, singles out key words from the text, in particular “righteousness” and “reckon.” In vv. 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 22, he reiterates that righteousness “is reckoned to” individuals. As observable in Paul’s writing, shorthand expressions can serve as stand-ins for a longer string of words. The most conspicuous example is Paul’s substitution of “works” for “works of the law.” In the instances before us, “righteousness” is placed in the passive voice with the indirect object in the dative case. Thus, instead of wording that renders more literally the Hebrew text of Genesis 15:6, Paul streamlines his diction into a more recognizable Greek idiom.<sup>6</sup>

But in every case, the point is the same: individuals are considered to be righteous.<sup>7</sup> In context, Paul is driving home the argument that righteousness does not hinge on circumcision and devotion to Israel’s Torah. Abraham in particular is singled out, among other reasons, because he was vindicated (justified) as a righteous person before circumcision and the advent of the law. The argument gains in impact in light of the standard Jewish dogma that the patriarch kept none other than the law of Moses before Sinai (Sirach 44:20; 2 Baruch 57:2; Damascus Document 3:2).<sup>8</sup>

Piper picks up on the common understanding that Romans 4:4-5 is cast in terms of a commercial transaction. Verse 4, anyway, is capable of such an interpretation, since *logizomai* can be used in the sense of “calculating” a wage. It may well be that Paul here pauses to draw on an analogy from the business world, because, in terms of contractual relationships, *logizomai* can mean a reckoning of payment for work done.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the control factor over Paul’s choice of words is Genesis 15:6. While 4:4 may be a reflection on a well-known principle of business practice, 4:5 returns to the idiom of *logizomai eis*: the believer’s faith is considered to be his righteousness. Paul’s thought is grounded in the sphere of the Hebrew covenant, according to which individuals are thought to be faithful when they place their confidence in the God of Israel and give concrete expression to their faith by obedience to his commands.<sup>10</sup> The radical thing in

<sup>6</sup> Actually, the Hebrew original of Genesis 15:6 is in the active, not passive, voice. The text reads literally: “He [God] reckoned it to him [Abraham] as righteousness.”

<sup>7</sup> The same applies to the non-reckoning of sin to David in Paul’s quotation of Psalm 32:2. A. A. Anderson remarks that vv. 1-2 of the Psalm exhibit three different terms for sin, which are matched by three different expressions describing the ways of God in dealing with transgression. The third phrase, “to reckon no iniquity,” says Anderson, “seems to imply that God *no longer considers* the repentant man a sinner” (*The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 1.31-32, italics mine). He refers as well to 2 Samuel 19:19 and considers the possibility that Psalm 32:2 contains an allusion to release from a debt.

<sup>8</sup> See further T. R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 215-17.

<sup>9</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary 38 A, B, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word, 1988), 1.203.

<sup>10</sup> Inasmuch as the backdrop for Paul is the covenant with Israel, the “working” of Romans 4:4 is most naturally understood as “covenantal nomism,” to use the phrase placed in vogue by E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 75, 420, 422, 544). In following this “covenantal nomism” model, it is not to be denied that in Romans 4:4-5 Paul challenges a works-principle in Judaism. Yet the ensuing context (vv. 9-12) supports the contention that Paul’s concern is not with a merit theology, but with the works of covenant loyalty subsequent to circumcision (cf. Galatians 5:3). That “the one who works” receives a “wage” (v. 4) is not a particular problem, because the “wage” in question is eternal life bestowed at the end of this age on those who remain faithful to Yahweh, whose will is enshrined in the Torah. Qualitatively, the Jewish position is no different than that embodied in the parable of Matthew 20:1-16: the workers in the vineyard receive the wage of their labor, that is, the eschatological kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. Hence, the works envisaged by Romans 4 (and other passages) are just those demanded by the Torah; they accompany faith and eventuate in the life of the age to come. To be sure, works *are* a condition of “staying in” the covenant. Yet “staying in”

Paul, however, is that peoples of all kinds can be looked upon as obediently faithful quite apart from Torah observance and Jewish ethnic identity. It is those who simply place their trust in Jesus who truly walk in Abraham's footsteps, making the patriarch the father of circumcised and uncircumcised alike (Romans 4:12).

It is just such an appraisal of the reckoning of righteousness that opens up the intention of Romans 4:6: *because of its object*, faith, and faith alone, is accepted in the place of allegiance to the law of Moses, including, most prominently, the various boundary markers of Jewish identity. In strict terms, faith is *reckoned as* righteousness: our faith in Christ is looked upon as tantamount to righteousness in its quintessential meaning—conformity to the will of God—because *in Christ* we have become God's very righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Again, we must read Paul in light of his Jewish context and the polemics of the Roman letter. To his Jewish compatriots, righteousness was inconceivable apart from the Torah, so much so that one document can actually coin the phrase, "*the righteousness of the law of God*" (Testament of Dan 6:11).<sup>11</sup> Given, additionally, that faith in Paul is specifically trust in Jesus of Nazareth as Israel's Messiah, the impact of Romans 4 is that righteousness is no longer to be assessed in terms of one's relation to the law, but rather by one's relation to Jesus the Christ. His purpose, then, is to argue that Abraham's (and our) faith is considered to be covenant fidelity, with no further qualifications and requirements.

To my mind at least, this interpretation is bolstered by a consideration of the alternative. On Piper's construction, faith is "credited/imputed for righteousness" (p. 55). However, this introduces at least a *prima facie* confusion. Surely, the heart of Piper's argument is that righteousness is imputed or credited to the believer in the act of faith. This being so, in what sense can faith meaningfully be "imputed?" If righteousness is imputed by faith, then how can faith itself be imputed? It would seem that Piper has arrived at a double imputation, that of righteousness and of faith. This would appear to be a muddling of ideas, particularly as everywhere in the New Testament faith is predicated as the response of the human being himself/herself to the gospel. To be sure, faith is the gift of God, but to speak of the imputation of faith makes for an odd combination of terms. By contrast, if faith is *reckoned/considered to be* righteousness, the difficulty disappears.

#### *Excursus: Does Righteousness Consist of Faith?*

Piper takes issue with Gundry's formulation, "It is our faith, not Christ's righteousness, that is credited to us as righteousness" (quoted on p. 59, n. 6; p. 122). Who is right? First notice the following tabulation of passages in Romans 4:

- v. 4: the wage is reckoned (calculated) according to grace;
- v. 5: faith is reckoned as righteousness;
- v. 6: God reckons righteousness apart from works;  
the Lord does not reckon sin;
- v. 9: Abraham's faith reckoned as righteousness;
- v. 11: righteousness reckoned to all believers;
- v. 22: Abraham's faith reckoned as righteousness.

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is not "getting in." Israel's works are but its response to Yahweh's saving grace: they are tantamount to *perseverance*, not "works-righteousness legalism."

<sup>11</sup>See my *'The Obedience of Faith': A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2/38 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), 232-253, 258-59.

It is readily evident that both faith and righteousness are the objects of “reckoning:” faith is considered to be righteousness; righteousness is considered to exist apart from works; all believers are looked upon as being righteous (righteousness is reckoned to them).

Nevertheless, in a certain qualified sense, one may say that righteousness does consist of faith. But a formulation of the matter must be carefully nuanced. Strictly speaking, righteousness is, by definition, conformity to the covenant relationship; it *consists of* a faithful obedience to the Lord whose will is enshrined in the covenant. Yet the beginning of “faithfulness” is “faith.” In keeping with the Hebrew term *’emunah*, the Greek noun translated “faith,” *pistis*, is two-sided: faith and faithfulness.<sup>12</sup> Given this set of data, righteousness does consist of *pistis* in the expansive sense of *’emunah*, that is, covenant conformity. At the same time, however, as Piper correctly observes from Romans 10:10, *pistis* as initial trust in Christ has righteousness as its goal, that is, righteousness as covenant standing. In one sense, faith leads to righteousness; and in another, faith consists in righteousness.

It is simply a fact of church history that there has never been uniformity on the relation of faith to righteousness. In a paper entitled “John Wesley: Spiritual Empiricist,” D. A. Adams remarks that as far back as Luther’s controversy with Rome, the point of friction lay in respective understandings of how justification was applied.<sup>13</sup> It is in the question, “How is the sinner accounted righteous before God?” that the various doctrines of justification diverge.

He notes that the Augsburg Confession confronts this issue specifically. According to the Confession: “Also they [the churches] teach that men can not be justified [obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness] before God by their own powers, merits, or works; but are justified freely [of grace] for Christ’s sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and their sins forgiven for Christ’s sake who by his death hath satisfied for our sin. This faith doth God impute for righteousness before him.”

Adams continues that, in the Lutheran conception, faith is not only the means to justification, but also in some way is the substance of that justification. The sinner is made just, not initially by the removal of sin, but by the infusion of faith. This is why Luther can talk about being *simul justus et peccator*, “at once righteous and a sinner.” Sin remains; but because of faith, God, in grace, does not impute it to us. Faith is an inward righteousness (*justitia interior*), which is awakened by God and which heals the malady of the soul and makes man righteous. Everyone who believes in Christ is righteous, not yet fully in reality, but in hope. It is this theology which the Augsburg confession reflects when it states: “This faith doth God

<sup>12</sup> Garlington, *Obedience of Faith*, 10-11 (with other literature); id., *An Exposition of Galatians: A New Perspective/Reformational Reading* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 113. I would submit that the revelation of the righteousness of God “from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17) can be understood along these lines. No doubt, the precise significance Paul’s Greek phrase *ek pisteôs eis pistin* is widely disputed. However, in keeping with the basic idiom *ek... eis...* (for example, Psalm 83:8 [LXX]; 2 Corinthians 3:18), and the parallel of Romans 1:5 with 1:17, it is not farfetched to take it as a declaration of the multi-functional character of faith in its initial, intermediate and ultimate phases. The Christian life commences with trust in Christ (faith) and eventuates in faithfulness to him.

<sup>13</sup> Adams, “John Wesley: Spiritual Empiricist,” unpublished seminar paper, University of Western Ontario, 1992. The paper can be accessed online at [www.tbs.edu/documents.htm](http://www.tbs.edu/documents.htm).

impute for righteousness before him.” Faith seems to be equated with the righteousness that comes of justification. Faith is accepted by God instead of righteousness. Wesley, in contrast, perceives faith differently: rather than being the substance of righteousness, faith is the means to righteousness.

Adams then proceeds to demonstrate how the Westminster Confession formulated its doctrine of imputation in direct reaction to Augsburg. In this light, I would ask, Which is the more “orthodox:” Augsburg or Westminster? Since theologians of such standing have been at odds over this question for centuries, I would plead that it is unnecessary—at the very least—to take Gundry to task for his equation of faith with righteousness. He would appear to be in rather good (Lutheran!) company.

As confirming evidence of his exposition of Romans 4, Piper cites Romans 10:10 and Philippians 3:8-9. As to the former, Piper is quite right that faith has righteousness as its goal. I would add that the verse is structured in terms of the familiar Already/Not Yet schema of salvation inaugurated and salvation consummated. Our initial faith in Christ results in righteousness as our covenant standing. Then, from the stance of covenant loyalty, we confess Christ, a confession which has as its terminal point eschatological salvation (cf. Romans 5:9-10; Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26 as compared with Matthew 10:32-33 and Luke 12:8-9).<sup>14</sup>

By contrast, Piper’s treatment of Philippians 3:8-9 is less adequate. He simply assumes that the “righteousness from God” is by way of imputation. In so doing, he has overlooked the most obvious factor of the text, namely, *union with Christ*: Paul desires to be *found in him*, not having a righteousness of his own as derived from the law. The locus of God’s righteousness is now Christ, not the Torah.

Thereafter, Piper refers to Romans 3:28, whose wording is quite similar to Romans 4:5, 6. Given his understanding of the “crediting” of righteousness in Romans 4, he draws the conclusion that justification by faith, spoken of in 3:28, must be in terms of imputation. Yet, another reading of Romans 4 will result in a different take on 3:28, namely, that faith justifies because we are united to Christ and are “found in him” (Philippians 3:9). While this identification is not explicit in Romans 3:28, it will become so in 5:12-19, and 8:1-11 (the mutual indwelling of believers in Christ and in the Spirit, and vice versa).

To be sure, Romans 3:27-31 serves as lead-in to Romans 4 and paves the way for the discussion of that chapter. But we must not overlook the obvious: this concluding paragraph of chapter 3 is devoted to the proposition that Jew and Gentile are now equal in the eyes of God.<sup>15</sup> The great effect of justification by faith is that boasting is now

<sup>14</sup> Scholars point out that Romans 1:17 is actually a confessional formula, corresponding to Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26 as compared with Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9. P. Stuhlmacher and O. Michel were the first to draw attention to this. Both note that in positive terms Paul could have said “I confess the gospel.” See Stuhlmacher, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit bei Paulus*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 87 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 78; Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament. 14th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 86.

<sup>15</sup> It is frequently noted that Romans 3:29 (“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?”) is an allusion to the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4: the oneness of the God of Israel. In Judaism, the confession “God is one” was the hallmark of Jewish distinctiveness (see V. H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, New Testament Tools and Studies 5 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963], 34-41). Paul, of course, agrees that the God of Israel is the sole God. However, he infers that the oneness of God, as reflected by the *Shema*, is an indication of the oneness of the human race. This, he says, has a direct bearing on justification: “since God is one, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” He takes the “God is one” confession of Judaism and makes it serve the interests of Gentile equality

excluded.<sup>16</sup> It is precisely on this note that chapter four commences. Thus, the mainstay of the argument of Romans 4 is that all who walk in the footsteps of Abraham are “reckoned,” that is, considered to be his seed, quite apart from circumcision and the Torah. Paul’s purpose is not to articulate a dogma of imputation, but to demonstrate that faith is the great equalizer of nations.

## 2. The External Righteousness Credited to Us is God’s

Under this heading, Piper, first of all, gives consideration to the flow of thought from Romans 3:20 to 4:6. This phase of the argument is essentially presuppositional. By referring back to 3:20 and onward, the set of assumptions derived from the earlier part of his book provides the conceptual framework for asserting that the verses leading up to 4:6 provide “strong contextual evidence...that Paul conceived of justification in terms of an imputation of external righteousness...” (p. 67). Methodologically, it would have been preferable to do things the other way around, by tracing the context forward instead of backward. Imputation is simply not mentioned in 3:21-26, and one has to assume its presence in order to find it.

In actuality, the argument from context can be seen to yield rather different results. Romans 3:21-26 can be termed, “The Eschatological Revelation of the Righteousness of God.” At the head of the section stands 3:21 (“But now the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it”). This declaration is, in fact, a recapitulation of 1:16-17, but with the addition of the important phrase, “but now.” This “eschatological now” marks the turn of the ages (Romans 5:9; 7:6; 16:26; Ephesians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:26-27; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; Hebrews 9:26). “Now” is the period of the definitive fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures, the “fullness of time,” in which God has sent forth his son (Galatians 4:4), or, in terms of 2 Corinthians 6:2, it is the “acceptable time,” the “day of salvation.”

There is a dramatic and climactic quality to these words as they form the contrast to everything that has gone before in 1:18-3:20, but especially 3:19-20. In those verses in particular, Paul drew his conclusion that the “works of the law” cannot justify because they were never intended to justify; the law’s purpose was to reveal sin. He maintains this over against Israel’s misunderstanding of the law. For her, the law in its unmodified Mosaic form was meant to be eternal. For Paul, however, the law was only a means to an end, namely, to reveal sin and direct people to the righteousness which is through faith *in Jesus Christ*.

This is not the place to provide anything like a full commentary on this portion of Romans. Suffice it to say that as a throwback to 1:16-17, “righteousness” and “justification” in 3:21-31 are to be understood in terms of Paul’s thematic statement of the letter: the revelation of the righteousness of God.<sup>17</sup> In point of fact, 1:16-17 itself is a restatement of 1:5: the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of the name of

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with Israel, not exclusion from her, just as in 2:14-15 the Decalogue, possessed by Jew and Gentile alike, serves the same function (J. M. Bassler, *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 59 [Chico: Scholars Press, 1982], 141-52).

<sup>16</sup>S. J. Gathercole has demonstrated that Israel’s boasting pertains to her confidence before God and her distinctiveness from other nations (*Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1-5* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]). To be sure, Gathercole has demonstrated that boasting is grounded in actual performance of the law. Even so, it is not necessary to place a “legalistic” construction on the obedience in question. See my review of Gathercole’s book at this web site.

<sup>17</sup>The thesis of A. Schlatter’s commentary, *Romans: The Righteousness of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), and propounded more recently by A. K. Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative of God’s Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002).



Christ.<sup>18</sup> Inasmuch as Paul commences and concludes Romans by rooting his christological gospel in the prophetic Scriptures (1:2; 16:26; cf. 3:21),<sup>19</sup> we are not surprised that the conception of righteousness found in 1:17 is none other than that of the Prophets (and the Psalms) themselves. The parallel between “salvation” and “righteousness” in 1:16-17 is particularly to be noted. According to some prominent prophecies of Israel’s return from exile, these two theologically charged terms stand in synonymous parallelism.<sup>20</sup> “Righteousness,” according to these texts, is “salvation” (deliverance from exile). Accordingly, justification in Paul has to do with a new exodus on which the latter-day people of God have embarked.<sup>21</sup>

It is especially to be observed that the wording of Romans 1:17 is dictated by Psalm 98:2, 9 (LXX 97:2, 9): “The Lord has made known his salvation; before the nations he has revealed his righteousness.... For he comes to judge the earth; he will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with uprightness.” In Paul’s mind also must have been such Psalm texts as 9:8; 96:13. God’s righteousness, therefore, is to be revealed to *the nations* and no longer restricted to Israel. The Psalmist, as alluded to by Paul, declares that the Gentiles as well as Israel are to be the recipients of the Lord’s saving deed; both without distinction are to be regarded as Yahweh’s special possession (Exodus 19:5 = Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 2:9). Furthermore, Paul’s quotation of Habakkuk 2:4, a conspicuous instance of Yahweh’s saving deed, simply buttresses the point.<sup>22</sup>

To cut to the chase, “righteousness” in *these passages*, and, consequently, in Romans 1:17; 3:21, 22, 25 (26) is not what Piper calls “external righteousness” (= the active obedience of Christ), but rather God’s saving activity on behalf of Israel, when he releases Israel from bondage and plants her again in the land never to be moved.<sup>23</sup> This is not to rule out righteousness as an attribute of God. Indeed, it is just the “righteous,” covenant keeping, God who springs into action to redeem his people from slavery and graciously renew the covenant with them. Therefore, as the bridge into Romans 4, Romans 3:21-31 (as informed by 1:16-17) argues against “the imputation of external righteousness” and in favor of a salvation-historical reading of Paul, whereby the apostle’s intention is seen to be that of announcing the availability of God’s saving activity to *all who believe* (1:16; 3:22), because *there is no distinction* (3:22; 10:12). If the exile has been turned in Israel’s favor, then this latter-day Israel is constituted of Gentile and Jew indiscriminately.<sup>24</sup> The identity of the redeemed people of God is no longer determined by

<sup>18</sup> See Garlington, *Obedience of Faith*, 232-253.

<sup>19</sup> N. T. Wright correctly stresses that throughout Romans Paul’s gospel is christologically conditioned (“The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology with Particular Reference to the Argument of the Epistle to the Romans.” D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1980). This means that the apostle depicts his gospel as the eventuation of the “gospel” (“good news”) of the Hebrew Scriptures (Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1-2; Joel 3:5 [LXX]; Psalm 67:12 [LXX]).

<sup>20</sup> See Isaiah 45:22-25; 51:5-6; 62:1-2; Psalm 98:2-3, 8-9 (LXX 97:2-3, 8-9). Noteworthy as well are Psalm 35:27-28 (LXX 34:27-28); 72:1-4 (LXX 71:1-4, 7); 85:11-13 (LXX 84:12-14); 96:13 (LXX 95:13); Isaiah 9:7 (LXX 9:6); 11:1-2, 5; 45:8, 22-25; 51:5-6; 53:10-11; 61:11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Malachi 4:2 (LXX 3:20).

<sup>21</sup> Standing behind Romans 5:1 is Isaiah 32:1-18, particularly vv. 15-18. See my *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 79 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994), 75-76.

<sup>22</sup> See my *Galatians*, 145.

<sup>23</sup> To be sure, righteousness in Paul has been understood variously. See the handy compendium provided by N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 101.

<sup>24</sup> The notion of a new exodus is hardly new to biblical scholars. However, in recent days, the return from exile motif is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. See throughout N. T. Wright, *The New*

the Jewish Torah, because God's righteousness has been revealed to the nations (in fulfillment of Psalm 98:2, 9) "*apart from the law*" (3:21).

None of this is meant to abstract God's righteousness as saving activity from the work (obedience) of Christ. But it is to say that this salvation-historical reading of the text necessitates a paradigm shift away from the old *loci*-type of discussion of righteousness/justification to an awareness that Paul represents Christ as the bringer of a new creation and a new exodus, the liberator from the bondage of sin and defilement. It is only by "biting the bullet" and making the paradigm shift that we can recover the original *dynamic* of the biblical doctrine of justification.

For further buttressing evidence, Piper cites 2 Corinthians 5:21. In support of Piper *vis-à-vis* Gundry, I would maintain that God's righteousness is not to be distinguished from Christ's righteousness. For all practical purposes, they are one and the same, especially in light of Paul's affirmation of two verses earlier that *God was in Christ* reconciling the world to himself (5:19). On the other hand, it would appear to me that Gundry's handling of this text is not as "vague" as Piper would have us believe (p. 68). Indeed, Gundry is precisely on the mark by his notice that "Paul uses the language of union, reconciliation, being made, and becoming rather than the language of imputation" (*ibid.*).

Piper rejoins that the question is not about "mere explicitness" of language, but about "the *reality* revealed through language" (*ibid.*). This, of course, involves a certain amount of question begging. He seeks to justify that imputation is the reality embedded in this verse by an appeal to the other side of the coin: Christ being made "sin" for us. His reasoning here is essentially circular. He assumes that Christ became sin by virtue of the imputation of our sins to him; therefore, it is not arbitrary or unnatural, he thinks, to understand God's righteousness in terms of imputation as well. In fairness, the verb *logizomai* does occur in the immediate context (v. 19), translated by Piper as "*not imputing* their trespasses to them." As noted above, the sense of *logizomai* as "set down to one's account" does occur in isolated instances (in classical Greek). However, it certainly is not the usual meaning, and it would appear that Piper presses it here (and elsewhere) in the interests of the thesis pursued in his book.

R. P. Martin's rendering, on the other hand, is much better: "*not charging* their trespasses against them," so as to hold the trespassers themselves accountable. He further notes that "reckon something to someone" (*logizesthai tini ti*) is a characteristic of Pauline soteriology and its idioms. He then correctly makes cross reference to Psalm 32:2: "Happy is the man to whom Yahweh *does not reckon* sin."<sup>25</sup> V. P. Furnish likewise translates as "*not charging* their trespasses to them," in the strongly forensic sense, and also picks up the allusion to Psalm 32:2. He cites as well 2 Samuel 19:19 (Shimei pleading with David): "Let now my Lord not charge me with transgression."<sup>26</sup> L. Belleville comments to the same effect: "To 'count against them' (*logizomenos autois*) in the world of commerce referred to calculating the amount of a debt.... Today we might think of charges on a credit card for which we are held legally responsible. Here it means not posting debts to our

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*Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); *id.*, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); *id.*, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 137-56; J. M. Scott (editor), *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); C. M. Pate, *Communities of the Last Days: The Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament and the Story of Israel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000); *id.*, *The Reverse of the Curse: Paul, Wisdom, and the Law*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/114 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary 40 (Waco: Word, 1986), 154. See n. 7 above.

<sup>26</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible 32A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 319. E.-B. Allo similarly renders: "not counting their misdeeds against them" ("ne leur comptant point leurs fautes") (*Saint Paul: Seconde Épître aux Corinthiens*, Etudes Bibliques [Paris: Gabalda, 1937], 169).

account that should be rightfully ours.”<sup>27</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:5: loves does not “keep a record of evil” (*ou logizetai to kakon*).

Therefore, instead of having to bear the consequences of our trespasses ourselves, Paul, by a use of *the abstract for the concrete*, declares Christ to be a “sinner” who has taken accountability for our sins. It is certainly conceivable that Jesus became “sin” by virtue of the imputation of our trespasses to him; and on the theological level this is hardly an objectionable idea.

More to the point exegetically is the consideration that the notions of “sin” and “sinner,” in biblical/Jewish thought, pertain largely to the realm of apostasy.<sup>28</sup> For Christ to be made “sin,” or more concretely, a “sinner,” is a way of saying that he was subjected to “the curse of the law,” when he “became a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). Galatians 3:13 is a fitting analogy to the present text in that Paul consigns the Messiah to the curse which befell the apostate of Deuteronomy 21:23.<sup>29</sup> The ultimate irony, then, is that the Christ, the one who knew (experienced) no sin, was treated as though he were one well-acquainted with sin. And more, by propounding the notion of a crucified Messiah, Paul forwards what F. F. Bruce calls a “blasphemous contradiction in terms.”<sup>30</sup> What is at stake in 2 Corinthians 5:21, therefore, is not imputation, but what M. D. Hooker has termed “interchange in Christ.”<sup>31</sup> That is to say, an exchange has taken place on the cross: Christ and we have switched places. He became what we were—sin—and we have become what he is—the very embodiment of God’s righteousness.

### 3. Justification is not Liberation from Sin’s Mastery

At this stage of the book, methodological issues are raised. In brief, Piper registers his objections to “a controlling biblical-theological paradigm” for exegesis. To quote him:

One of the troubling things about this “developing standard in biblical theological circles” is that it is generally expressed in the same vague and general ways that make systematic categories so annoying to exegetes. In other words, it bears all the marks of a widespread scholarly paradigm that exerts a controlling effect on the exegesis of texts that do not clearly support it (p. 70, citing Gundry).

Piper then proceeds to complain that this “new paradigm” (p. 73) “is so broad and vague (‘salvific activity’) that almost anything God does can be included in it—even

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<sup>27</sup> Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 156. Piper’s translation, “imputing trespasses,” is essentially incongruous, since sin is already our possession: it does not have to be imputed.

<sup>28</sup> On “sin” and “sinners,” see J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 71-77, 150-51; id., *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity Press International, 1991), 102-7; M. Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous: A Comparative Study of the Psalms of Solomon and Paul’s Letters*, *Coniectanea biblica, New Testament* 26 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995); Garlington, *Obedience of Faith*, 49-55, 95-98; id., *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 89-95.

<sup>29</sup> See my *Galatians*, 148-50; and at more length my essay, “Role Reversal and Paul’s Use of Scripture in Galatians 3.10-13,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 65 (1997), 85-121, reprinted in my *Exegetical Essays*. 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 213-47.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 166.

<sup>31</sup> Hooker, “Interchange in Christ,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), 349-59.

punitive judgment, if the punishment is seen as judgment on the enemies of God's people and thus 'salvific' for the elect" (p. 70).

By way of reply, it is a misnomer—and a very misleading one too—to call the biblical-theological approach to exegesis “broad and vague” just because it brings the panorama of redemptive history to bear on individual texts. The method seeks to be holistic, not atomistic (the tendency of the systematic-theological approach), in its appraisal of biblical passages. If the Bible is the “book of the acts of God,”<sup>32</sup> then God has acted supremely in Jesus Christ to bring to fulfillment the story of Israel.<sup>33</sup> If Jesus is the hope of Israel, one would simply expect that the Lord's workings with the ancient people would provide the most natural entrée into his latter-day speaking by his Son (Hebrews 1:2).

This being so, as R. B. Gaffin maintains, the primary interest of biblical study is the interest of the text itself, namely, the history which the text reports and interprets. The concern of exegesis, then, is with what lies behind the text—the history of salvation. The discipline which seeks to correlate the findings of historical exegesis is biblical theology. Gaffin is certainly right that “this is an insight that the program of biblical hermeneutics needs to test and consider more carefully.”<sup>34</sup>

In the concrete, all this means that the context of Paul's pronouncements about justification, righteousness, redemption, etc., is none other than the prophetic Scriptures of Israel, in which his very gospel is anchored (Romans 1:2; 3:21; 16:26; Ephesians 3:4-6). It is hardly “broad and vague” to set Paul's “carefully-worded statements about justification” (p. 71) within the panorama of the magnificent manner in which God has prepared the ground for the final revelation of his righteousness. It is, after all, just “the law and the prophets” that bear witness to the eschatological revelation of the righteousness of God (Romans 3:21). Consequently, Piper is guilty of rather egregious question begging in his allegation that this “widespread scholarly paradigm...exerts a controlling effect on the exegesis of texts that do not clearly support it” (p. 70).

The “cash value” of Piper's aversion to the “new paradigm” is his resistance of justification as a liberation from sin. In part, his disinclination to think of justification in such terms is due to a certain understanding of the Greek verb *dikaioō*, traditionally translated as “justify” or “declare righteous.” According to Piper, *dikaioō* consistently means “justify” in the declarative sense, not “purify” in the transformational sense (p. 71). In so writing, he is particularly concerned not to merge “justification” and “sanctification.”

In fairness once more, he realizes that it is not as though the one has nothing to do with the other:

In a profound sense God's justifying act is “salvific” and is foundational and preparatory for all of God's subsequent sanctifying work by which we are liberated from sin's mastery. So the two works of God (justification and sanctification) are closely connected, and in the broadest sense justification “has to do with” liberation from sin's mastery. It “has to do with” it in the sense that justification gives the foundation of a right standing before God, through the imputation of divine righteousness, which is then followed by

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<sup>32</sup> As per G. E. Wright and R. H. Fuller, *The Book of the Acts of God: Christian Scholarship Interprets the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1957).

<sup>33</sup> See throughout Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

<sup>34</sup> Gaffin, “The Place and Importance of Introduction to the New Testament,” *The New Testament Student. Volume One: Studying the New Testament Today*, edited by J. H. Skilton (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 146. What is true of salvation history is likewise true of the place the New Testament occupies in the setting of the ancient world. See G. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 21; J. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 293.

the blessings that come to a justified sinner, including the liberating, sanctifying work of God's Spirit (p. 71).

After so saying, Piper takes on Gundry again. According to the latter (commenting on Romans 3:24-26), redemption means liberation from slavery. Therefore, "justification," for Gundry, "does not have to do with an exchange of our sins for the righteousness of Christ; rather, it has to do with liberation from sin's mastery" (p. 71). In taking a stance over against such a conception of justification, Piper, again, is partially correct. In view of 2 Corinthians 5:21, an exchange or "interchange" has indeed taken place between Christ and the believer (see above). To this degree, Gundry has at least overstated his case by disallowing any sense in which Christ and we have "switched places." Certainly, the most natural way to understand prophetic passages such as Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16 is in terms of the Lord Jesus becoming the righteousness of his people.

That said, Gundry is still right that redemption is indeed liberation from slavery and pertains especially to the release of Israel from Egyptian and later Babylonian bondage.<sup>35</sup> In brief, redemption has to do with the motif of new exodus/return from exile.<sup>36</sup> To my mind at least, to speak of God's justifying act as "salvific," as Piper does (p. 71), opens the door to a more comprehensive understanding of justification than just the forensic declaration that the sinner has now been acquitted of all charges. Certainly, it does mean this much, and the primary forensic thrust of justification is not to be minimized. However, "salvific," within the scope of biblical thought, is never merely "getting over the hump" of the broken law of God which stands as a witness against one. "Salvation," rather, is two-sided. As Cranfield explains, the negative content of salvation is indicated in Romans 5:9: "it is salvation from the final eschatological wrath of God." But there is a positive side as well: "it is the restoration of the *doxa* [glory] which sinful men lack."<sup>37</sup> In order to be consistent with this definition, it must follow that a "salvific" justification entails no less than a return to the integrity of unfallen Adam before his apostasy from God the Creator.

In this light, P. Stuhlmacher's conclusion, as quoted by Piper (p. 72), is difficult to resist: "the dogmatic distinction...between a justification which is first only reckoned legally (forensic-imputed) and a justification which is creatively at work (effective [= sanctification]) is...an unbiblical abstraction."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, as a biblical theologian, Stuhlmacher is sensitive to the fact that "in the Old Testament, in the early Jewish tradition, and in the New Testament, God's righteousness thus means the salvific activity of God the

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<sup>35</sup>See, among many, D. Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 49-66; L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 18-29; id., "Redemption," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 784-85; R. L. Hubbard, "Redemption," *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond, et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 716-18; B. Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina 6 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 131-32. In a footnote on "redemption" (p. 73, n. 20), Piper agrees with Morris that the "essential meaning" of the word is "ransoming" rather than "deliverance" (Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 41). Given the exodus and new exodus context of the word (and concept), this is unlikely. But even if it were true, the payment of a ransom is always to the end that a release take place.

<sup>36</sup>"That Paul should use *apolutrôsis* ["redemption"] in a sense in which several *lutron*-words are used in the LXX would be natural enough, and natural too for him to see a parallel between the act of liberation accomplished by God in Christ and the act of liberation by which God had set His people free from slavery in Egypt" (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary. 2 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979], 1.206, n. 3).

<sup>37</sup>Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.89.

<sup>38</sup>Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 63-64.

creator and judge, who creates for those concerned righteousness and well-being.”<sup>39</sup> In fact, the sequel to this last statement is worth quoting at length.

In this way Paul made the expression “the righteousness of God” the center of the gospel in that, together with the Christians before and beside him, he spoke of God’s salvific activity for the sinful world in and through Christ and related God’s righteousness strictly to faith. Through faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer and Lord, every individual Jew and Gentile obtains a positive share in the work of the one, just God who brings forth through Jesus Christ peace, salvation, and deliverance for Israel, the Gentile nations, and the (nonhuman) creation. For Paul and his apocalyptic view of history and creation, the final judgment of the entire world is soon approaching. To obtain a share in God’s righteousness by virtue of faith means to be acquitted of all guilt and to be accepted in the new world of God in which death (and with it all distress) will be overcome (cf. Romans 8:18ff.; 1 Corinthians 15:50ff.). But in Paul’s gospel this righteousness of God is already being revealed before the beginning of the day of judgment and made possible for those who believe.<sup>40</sup>

Against this broad biblical backdrop, Gundry is not wrong to infer from Romans 3:24 that justification entails liberation from the mastery of sin. At the very least, we can say with J. A. Ziesler that “the use of this image [redemption] reminds us that though the focus of the passage is on acceptance/justification, and so on the removal of guilt, the idea of release from slavery is also present.”<sup>41</sup> Yet we can go even further by paying attention to Paul’s exact wording: it is *through the redemption* in Christ Jesus that all are justified. The commentators all seize on the theological import of “redemption” without giving the preposition “through” (*dia*) due consideration.<sup>42</sup> Yet Paul’s language is clear enough: in strict terms, *justification transpires by means of redemption*. Since Paul was not encumbered by an *ordo salutis*, he could reverse what to us moderns is the proper order—*first* justification and *then* deliverance from sin!<sup>43</sup> But what, at first sight, might strike us as being odd makes perfectly good sense given the sequence of events in the Prophets: *first* the people are delivered from captivity and *thereupon* are “justified” or vindicated as the faithful remnant returned from exile.<sup>44</sup>

Even apart from this exegetical datum, on the theological level is it simply true that where justification is found deliverance is as well; the one is incomplete without the other. If, in our theology, justification is meant to eventuate in liberation from sin’s mastery (= “sanctification”), it would indeed seem like an unbiblical abstraction to place the two, as it were, in hermetically sealed containers. There must always be an ebb and flow, a give and take, between the two. As the saying goes, “the model has to breathe.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 31 (quoted by Piper, p. 72).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ziesler, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PTI New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM, 1989), 111.

<sup>42</sup> The same preposition features prominently in the discussion of Romans 5:12-19: it is *through* the two men respectively, Adam and Christ, that sin entered the world and then later was rectified.

<sup>43</sup> Note the similar procedure in Galatians 4:6: it is *because we are sons* that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.

<sup>44</sup> The passages that explicitly affirm the Lord’s intention to bestow righteousness on his people, Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16, occur in the setting of return from exile. Additionally, Isaiah 32, the background to Romans 5:1, prophecies to the same effect: righteousness, resulting in peace, is the effect of the new creation attending Israel’s reoccupation of the land.

For the next number of pages (73-79), Dr. Piper pursues the question of how the “new paradigm” mishandles, in his view, the teaching on justification in Romans 6:6-7. He correctly notes that v. 7 provides the rationale for v. 6. That is to say, the reality of our death to sin is predicated on the basis of our having been “justified from sin” The question is, then: *How* does v. 7 ground v. 6? “Does it ground it by saying that when you die with Christ you are freed from sinning? Or does it ground verse 6 by saying that when you die with Christ, you are freed from the guilt and condemnation of sin—that is, that you are justified and acquitted from sin and now have a right standing with God” (p. 75)?

Having posed the issue in these terms, Piper again chastises Gundry for assuming that “justification from sin” means liberation from sin’s mastery (p. 75). In pressing his hard-and-fast distinction between justification and liberation, Piper allows that the former may refer to the “indispensable foundation” of the latter: “It may be that justification—as declaration of freedom from guilt and condemnation—is that without which we could not even get started in the battle against sin’s dominion” (pp. 75-76).

By way of parallel, he cites Acts 13:39, where likewise the phrase “justified from” appears. In light of the preceding verse, it is inferred that the phrase cannot mean “liberated from,” but rather “acquitted from” or “forgiven for.” Thus, Romans 6:7 is likely to have this meaning. “If so,” he writes, “the point of verse 7 would be to give not a definition but a *ground* for the ethical transformation of verse 6. The ground for no longer being enslaved to sin (v. 6) is our justified standing with God (v. 7)” (p. 76, italics his).

In contrast to the “new paradigm,” Piper continues by advancing another way of reading Romans 6:6-7. He begins by reiterating the conviction that the verb *dikaioō* is incapable of meaning “liberate” and must, therefore, bear the meaning it “always has,” that is, “declare righteous.” Not unexpectedly, then, it is argued that “God’s imputed righteousness, and our right standing with God, over against our sin (Romans 6:7) is the clear and distinct and necessary ground for sanctification—our liberation from sin (v. 6, ‘no longer enslaved to sin’)” (p. 77).

Next, Piper contends that the very presence of the questions, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase?” (Romans 6:1), and “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (Romans 6:15), is a “powerful indication that justification does not include liberation from the mastery of sin.” “For if it did, these questions would not plausibly arise. If Paul had just spent three chapters teaching that justification means God’s powerful salvific activity in liberating people from the mastery of sin, why would the question arise: So shall we sin that grace may abound” (ibid.)?

In Piper’s opinion, what gives some measure of plausibility to these rhetorical questions of Romans 6:1 and 6:15 is the teaching of Romans 3-5 that “justification is emphatically not liberation from the mastery of sin;” it does not include sanctification. Such is precisely what creates the need for Paul to write Romans 6-8: to show why God’s imputing his own righteousness to us by faith apart from works does not result in lawlessness, but in fact necessarily leads to righteous living. Therefore, Piper avers, we are not at all encouraged to blur the relationship between sanctification and justification that Paul preserves in Romans 6:6-7: justification is the necessary and prior basis of sanctification (pp. 77-78).

This subsection of the book is rounded off with the proposal that sin enslaves by its guilt, resulting in hopelessness and despair. The remedy to sin’s guilt is justification as legal acquittal from sin, and the declaration of our righteousness before God grounds the possibility of liberation from slavery to sin. “In wakening hope for acceptance with God by faith alone, it creates the very possibility and foundation for fighting against the bondage of sin that enslaves us” (pp. 78-79).

Without anything like a comprehensive reply, I would like to touch on the salient points of Piper’s presentation.

(1) First of all, there is the matter of the verb *dikaioō*. Traditional translations of this verb have been guilty of reductionism, as though the verb always and only means “declare righteous.” A survey of the extant Greek literature argues quite otherwise. In point of fact,

5-58.gton, to my previous stud *dikaioō* is not an easy verb to translate. As is true of any Greek word, there is no one English equivalent to cover its every usage;<sup>45</sup> its overall significance is determined by the cluster of ideas stemming from the Old Testament and Paul's use of it in specific contexts. I refer simply to my previous study of the term.<sup>46</sup> The only real point to be made here is that the semantic range of *dikaioō* is broad enough to cover liberation from sin as well as declarative justification.<sup>47</sup>

(2) Second, in Romans 6:7, Paul speaks specifically of being “justified from sin.” Not unexpectedly, commentators are divided on the precise import of this conjunction of terms, just because of its rarity in the literature. Besides Acts 13:39, Dunn points to two other (non-canonical) occurrences of *dikaioō* followed by the preposition *apo* (“from”): Sirach 26:29: “A merchant can hardly keep from wrongdoing, and a tradesman will not be *declared innocent of sin*,” and Testament of Simeon 6:1: “See, I have told you everything, so that I might be *exonerated with regard to sin*.” Dunn then paraphrases the verse as “declared free from (responsibility in relation to) sin.”<sup>48</sup> In this light, Piper's translation, “acquitted from” or “forgiven for,” is not to be ruled out of court. The resultant English is somewhat awkward, but then so is any attempt to render Paul's Greek quite literally.<sup>49</sup>

D. J. Moo, in contrast to Dunn and Piper, takes “justified from sin” to mean “set free from [the power of] sin.”<sup>50</sup> Some such wording does have the advantage of smoothing out the problem of translation, while fitting quite naturally into the conceptual framework of Romans 6:1-7:6 as a whole, which is entirely devoted to the proposition that the believer has been delivered from the clutches of sin. The point only gains in strength if this text is placed against its natural backdrop of exile and return—the redemption of Israel (see below).

Moo, however, points to two further occurrences of *dikaioō* as construed with *apo*: Matthew 11:19 = Luke 7:35, noting, however, that in these texts *dikaioō* means to “vindicate.”<sup>51</sup> Without developing the idea at all, Moo perhaps has hit on something. I would contend that “justify” and “vindicate” are synonymous, at least virtually.<sup>52</sup> In biblical-theological perspective, the justification of the people of God is their vindication when they return to the land and resume their privileged position within the covenant. Thus, “vindicate from sin” would make fine sense as meaning that we have been absolved with regard to the charges of sin.

<sup>45</sup> See E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 13-14, n. 18; J. L. Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 249-50.

<sup>46</sup> Garlington, “A Study of Justification by Faith,” *Reformation and Revival* 11 (2002), 55-58, 68-70. The article is reprinted in my *Exegetical Essays*, 285-99.

<sup>47</sup> Still valuable is the study of J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 52-58. Ziesler shows that *dikaioō* in the LXX is largely forensic, but forensic in the wider Hebrew sense as including the relational element of the covenant. Moreover, the verb can broaden so as to mean “be righteous.” A similar range of meanings is demonstrated by G. Schrenk, “*dikaioō*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 2.211-19 (including “liberate from” in Acts 13:3; Romans 6:7).

<sup>48</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1.320.

<sup>49</sup> In accord with Piper are Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.311, n. 1; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 437.

<sup>50</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 377.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 129.

<sup>52</sup> See my “Justification by Faith,” 55-58 (passim); *Galatians*, 103-8; *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 56-71.



Perhaps the solution lies in a combination of ideas. The possibility exists that Paul has telescoped his language, so as to compact at least two ideas into one set of words. That is to say, his meaning could be: “the one who has died has been justified/vindicated, so that he has been freed from sin.” In this case, the more usual sense of *dikaioô* could be retained, with, nonetheless, the stress falling on justification in its liberating effects. It would not be unlike Paul to compress complementary and overlapping ideas into a streamlined construction (the most famous of which is “the righteousness of God,” not to mention “the obedience of faith”).

If we ask what in this context would account for Paul’s peculiar turn of phrase, the answer is readily at hand, in Romans 6:17-18: “But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, *having been set free from sin*, have become slaves of righteousness” (NRSV). In this parallel (neglected by Piper), we have a clue to the unusual and almost unprecedented locution, “justify from.”

To pick up from my earlier study of justification, the motif of liberation from a captive power is entirely explicable within the cadre of the righteousness of God as his saving activity to redeem Israel from her oppressors. As Wright explains, in the setting of the Prophets, God is the judge. Israel comes before him to plead her case against the wicked pagans who are oppressing her. She longs for her case to come to court, for God to hear it, and, in his own righteousness, to deliver her from her enemies. She longs, that is, to be justified, acquitted, vindicated. And because the God who is the judge is also her covenant God, she pleads with him; be faithful to your covenant! Vindicate me in your righteousness!<sup>53</sup>

In Paul, all this is transposed into the “higher octave” of what God has done in Christ at the turning of the ages—his own “eschatological courtroom.” The actual enemy of believers is not Babylon (or Egypt) but Satan himself. He is the strong man who held them in the bondage of sin (Matthew 12:29; Luke 11:21-22); he is “the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10; cf. Romans 8:33-34a). It is this cluster of ideas which is embodied by *dikaioô*. If God’s righteousness is “his intervention in a saving act on behalf of his people,” then the passive voice of the verb means “to be an object of the saving righteousness of God (so as to be well-pleasing to him at the judgment).”<sup>54</sup> When God in Christ intervenes to save his covenant partners, he plants them again in the newly created land, the new heavens and earth, never to be removed. This is “salvation” in the pregnant sense of the term: deliverance from evil and the bestowal of “peace” on a redeemed people. In short, justification in Paul signals deliverance from exile and freedom from bondage (one of the key motifs of Galatians). One of the clearest indications is the relationship of Romans 6:7 and 18. In the former verse, *dikaioô* is literally translated “justified from sin.” As such, it forms a parallelism with the verb “liberated from sin” (*eleutheroô*) in 6:18. The parallel is best preserved by rendering 6:7 as “freed from sin.” Therefore, when Paul writes of justification, he characteristically has in mind the new exodus on which the latter-day people of God have embarked. Moreover, this saving

<sup>53</sup> Wright, *Saint Paul*, 98-99.

<sup>54</sup> S. Motyer, “Righteousness by Faith in the New Testament,” *Here We Stand: Justification by Faith Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986), 48.

righteousness is cosmic in its dimensions. At the end of the day, “the righteousness of God” is actively directed at the rescue of the creation.<sup>55</sup>

Schreiner’s exposition of Romans 6:7 is very much in accord with the one represented herein. According to Schreiner, the verb “justified” (*dedikaiôtai*, here in the perfect tense) is not merely forensic in v. 7, as is clear from the way the entire proposition of v. 7 relates to v. 6. The argument, he writes, seems to be that *righteousness necessarily involves freedom from the power of sin*.

This point is crucial for Paul’s argument. Justification cannot be separated from sanctification.... Only those who have died with Christ are righteous and thereby are enabled to conquer the mastery of sin. Many commentators have struggled with the use of *dedikaiôtai* in a context in which power over sin is the theme because they invariably limit justification to being declared righteous. The use of the verb in this context, however, suggests that *righteousness is more than forensic in Paul. Those who are in a right relation to God have also been dramatically changed; they have also been made righteous*. This is confirmed by the language of being enslaved to righteousness (cf. 6:18, 20, 22); believers have been transformed by the Spirit (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:8-9)....<sup>56</sup>

Some may be surprised that John Murray comes remarkably close to the understanding of Romans 6:7 advocated by the proponents of the “new paradigm.” Far from sharply bifurcating justification and freedom from sin, Murray proposes the following:

“Justified from sin” will have to bear the forensic meaning in view of the forensic import of the word “justify”. But since the context deals with deliverance from the power of sin the thought is, no doubt, that of being “quit” of sin. The decisive breach with the reigning power of sin is viewed after the analogy of the kind of dismissal which a judge gives when an arraigned person is justified. Sin has no further claim upon the person who is thus vindicated. This judicial aspect from which deliverance from the power of sin is to be viewed needs to be appreciated. It shows that the forensic is present not only in justification but also in that which lies at the basis of sanctification. A judgment is executed upon the power of sin in the death of Christ (cf. John 12:31) and deliverance from this power on the part of the believer arises from the efficacy of this judgment. This also prepares us for the interpretation of the forensic terms which Paul uses later in 8:1, 3, namely, “condemnation” and “condemned”, and shows that *these terms may likewise point to that which Christ once for all wrought in reference to the power of sin (8:3) and to our deliverance from this power in virtue of the judgment executed upon it in Jesus’ cross (8:1)*.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Garlington, “Justification by Faith,” 62-63. See additionally Motyer, “Righteousness,” 55; E. Käsemann, “‘The Righteousness of God’ in Paul,” *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 168-82.

<sup>56</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 319 (italics mine). Schreiner refers as well to Ziesler, *Romans*, 161; Byrne, *Romans*, 194, 202; Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit*, 75-76. I would add Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament. 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 1.222 (italics mine).

At the end of the day, whatever we make precisely of the expression “justify from” on the semantic plane, on the conceptual level the intention is clear enough: *dikaioō* is the functional equivalent of *eleutheroō*. In the act of justification, we have been “set free from” sin, in both its legal and behavioral effects, and have become enslaved to righteousness.<sup>58</sup> *Dikaioō* is thus seen to be flexible enough to overlap with *eleutheroō*.

Acts 13:38-39 presents us with the same ambiguity as Romans 6:17, and commentators are divided along the same lines as before. C. K. Barrett is of the opinion that *dikaioō* followed by *apo* does not bear its “usual Pauline forensic sense,” but rather means something like “release from.”<sup>59</sup> B. Witherington rightly remarks that the language of justification and faith in Christ echoes the basic Pauline message, but in the sense that “Jesus sets one free from all sins.”<sup>60</sup> Schrenk too takes the verb to signify liberation.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, F. F. Bruce thinks that *dikaioō* is “justify” and should not have its force “weakened” by the rendering “be freed.”<sup>62</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer agrees.<sup>63</sup>

Once more, we may opt for one understanding or the other, or it may be, as suggested above, that Paul’s language is telescoped, so as to include both justification and liberation (I would add that the translation “freed from” is hardly a “weakened sense,” as in Bruce’s estimation). In any event, that v. 38 makes reference to the forgiveness of sins hardly clinches Piper’s exclusive translations of “acquitted from” or “forgiven for.” If we are forgiven, we are, by definition, no longer in bondage to sin. Moreover, in the setting of the Hebrew covenant (remember, Paul is here speaking to Jews), forgiveness is always with a view to restoration to covenant privileges and responsibilities. It is vital to recall that even in those instances in the LXX where *dikaioō* is strongly forensic, Ziesler reminds us that it is forensic in the *Hebrew* sense, that is, the verb signifies “restoration of the community or covenant relationship, and thus cannot be separated from the ethical altogether. The restoration is not merely to a standing, but to an existence in the relationship.”<sup>64</sup>

(3) Third, there is Piper’s contention that if Paul had just spent three chapters teaching that justification means God’s powerful salvific activity in liberating people from the mastery of sin, why would the question arise: “So shall we sin that grace may abound?” The most obvious rejoinder is that Paul is forced to deal with a *misunderstanding* of his teaching up to this point in Romans. As Dunn notes, the question of Romans 6:1 arises because the previous teaching is controversial.<sup>65</sup> In particular, in 5:20-21, Paul has had the temerity to claim that *Christ, not the Torah, is the source of life*.

Various Jewish sources voice the conviction that the law in of itself would insure life. Ben Sira uses the actual phrase “the law of life” (Sirach 17:11; 45:5), while the author of Baruch commends to his readers “the commandments of life” (Baruch 3:9). These commandments are no less than the very embodiment of Israel’s wisdom: “All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die” (Baruch 4:1; see also 4 Ezra 14:30;

<sup>58</sup> See further Schrenk, “*dikaioō*,” 218.

<sup>59</sup> Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary. 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 1.650.

<sup>60</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 413-14.

<sup>61</sup> Schrenk, “*dikaioō*,” 218.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 312.

<sup>63</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 518.

<sup>64</sup> Ziesler, *Righteousness*, 20. See also M. J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 142-43.

<sup>65</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1.306.

Psalms of Solomon 14:2; cf. 4 Ezra 7:129). Hand in hand went the equally strong conviction that the law was eternal and unchangeable (for example, Sirach 24:9, 33; Baruch 4:1; Jubilees 16:29; 31:32; 32:10, 15, 21-26, 28; 33:10; Wisdom 18:4; Testament of Naphtali 3:1-2; 4 Ezra 9:26-37).

In the face of these traditions, Paul's stance is altogether conspicuous. For one thing, the verb "come in alongside" (*pareisêlthen*), in v. 20, implies that the law is not eternal: its entrance onto the stage of history was occasioned only by the advent of sin (5:12). More startling yet is the law's actual function—to intensify the problem created by Adam, that is, to cause sin to reign in death. "Trespass" and "sin" are retained from the foregoing discussion in Romans 5, signifying that Adam's apostasy has not, as supposed, been rectified by the Torah, because it preeminently is the stimulus of "trespass" and "sin." The nation of Israel preferred to view the law as God's definitive answer to sin rather than only a means to an end, that is, as preparation for the "coming one" (v. 14), whose act of obedience would put an end to sin forever. In Paul's mind, therefore, Israel's "sin" has abounded all the more because of her misunderstanding and misapplication of the Torah.

Hence, the specific point of dispute pertains to the place and function of the law in the new creation. To the Jewish mind, the law functioned as an identity marker and a boundary, reinforcing Israel's distinctiveness and separation from the nations. As Jubilees 22:16 not so delicately puts it: "Separate yourself from the Gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated and despicable, and abominable." The Letter of Aristeas (139, 142) expresses the same conviction in terms which reinforce this sociological function of the law:

In his wisdom the legislator...surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter.... So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or by mixing with bad influences, he hedges us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and touch and hearing and sight, after the manner of the law.

Note particularly how the author links observance of the food laws with protection from defiling contact ("bad influences") with outsiders. What entered the mouth, as prescribed by Moses, had scrupulously to be monitored, otherwise the flood gates to pagan immorality would be flung wide open (contrast Mark 7:14-23). Consistent with this consciousness of separation by the "fence" of the Torah is the appraisal of others as outsiders: these were the "lawless" and the "sinners," that is, either pagans who never were within the pale of the law or apostate Jews. It is just this desire to live within the law, to be marked off from the "lawless" and the "sinner," which became in time a dominant concern in the factionalism of the period from the Maccabees to the emergence of rabbinic Judaism.

In this light, Paul's Jewish objector draws what to him is the logical consequence of the apostle's pronouncements in the last paragraph of Romans 5. If life can be obtained through some other source than the Torah, then it follows that *God has removed his safeguard against sin*: Why not, then, sin that grace may abound? Paul's interlocutor thus charges that antinomianism is the logical product of his theology. Accordingly, Paul's rejoinder is that far from opening the doors to sin, new creation life in Christ means yielding one's members to righteousness, not sin. What counts is union with Christ (6:5-11), not an ongoing relationship with the law.

As an indication that Paul has in fact taught liberation from sin prior to Romans 6, I would submit Romans 5:18, with its phrase "the justification of life (*dikaiôsis zoês*)." It is just the concept of life that forms one of the linchpins connecting Romans 5 and 6. The former chapter concludes on this note (5:21, as preceded by vv. 17-18), and the latter virtually commences with the same theme (6:4-11).

“Life” may be taken as the “eternal life” (Romans 2:7) of “the age to come,” the restoration of the Creator/creature relationship enjoyed in Eden. In keeping with the apocalyptic outlook generally, “life” in Paul is eschatological and protological at the same time: the end is a return to the beginning. Yet what is the relation of “justification” to “life?” I would propose that inasmuch as Paul’s use of the Greek genitive case (in this case, “of life”) frequently ignores established conventions, it is plausible to see the present instance as a mingling of various types of genitive: qualitative, result, direction and exegetical. But whatever grammatical tags are applied, F. J. Leenhardt’s comments are particularly relevant. The phrase “justification of life” speaks of “a justification which introduces us to divine life;” and given the close connection of present and future eschatological life in Paul, “justification of life” “suggest equally the idea of a justification which is here and now realized in a life which concretely practises righteousness, as will shortly be said (6:11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23). It will be noted that Christ’s obedience of which our text speaks becomes also the believer’s obedience, an obedience which leads to the practise of righteousness (6:16).”<sup>66</sup>

If, then, our justification is one that has resulted in life, and we have been raised with Christ and have become partakers of the life of the age to come, *ipso facto* we have been liberated from sin. Romans 6:1-7:6 is but the unpacking of the implications of “life.”

In addition to everything else, Piper’s reasoning can be turned against him. A similar objection to Paul’s theology is raised in Romans 6:15: “Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Are we to assume that Paul had not taught such a thing in Romans 3-5 just because some opponent is barking up the wrong tree? In principle, he certainly has instructed us that we are not under law but under grace. See 3:21-31; 4:13-14; 5:12-21 (where the law is placed in the old Adamic era of sin and condemnation, which era we have exited because of the obedience of Christ on our behalf).

(4) In the fourth place, the caveat that we must not blur the relationship between justification and sanctification rests on the underlying *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) that forms a significant substratum of Piper’s book. We will return to this in the concluding reflections. Suffice it to say here that the grid provided by an *ordo salutis* necessitates a rigid distinction between the two, because, on this construction, justification and sanctification refer to two distinct entities. However, a different approach, a *historia salutis* (history of salvation), will yield different results. If justification is conceived of as the entry into the covenant relationship, then it marks the point at which our “definitive sanctification,” to use John Murray’s phrase, commences.<sup>67</sup> Rather than “blurring” the justification/sanctification distinction, I would prefer to speak in terms of the mutual interpenetration of the concepts, as illustrated by overlapping circles.<sup>68</sup>

In this regard, Brad Young very helpfully calls to mind that Paul’s thinking is Jewish in character, a telling point when it comes to comprehending and unpacking his universe of discourse.

As a Jewish theologian, Paul pursues a conceptual approach to his teachings. His thought processes are not linear but circular. His theological concepts are interactive. Indeed, they are connected one with another in continuous motion. Paul’s keen intellect works quickly. The apostle understands God and his great love for all humanity as a vibrant whole. One concept belongs to a complex of interactive ideas. Each term he uses to communicate his thought is clustered with other interactive concepts

<sup>66</sup> Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Cleveland: World, 1961), 148.

<sup>67</sup> See Murray’s surprisingly neglected essay, “Definitive Sanctification,” *Collected Writings of John Murray*. 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2.277-84.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. my *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 151-61.

concerning God's relationship to people.... When the contours of Pauline thought are considered in a cycle of interactive concepts rather than in a straight line where each new idea supersedes and eliminates the previous one, the apostle's conceptual approach to God is given fresh vigor. It is a Jewish way of thinking.<sup>69</sup>

Consequently, what might appear to the Western mind as a "blurring" of ideas is actually, in the Jewish mindset, what Young calls "a cycle of interactive concepts." The hermeneutical impact of this observation is apparent enough: modern interpreters must be prepared to undergo a paradigm shift to this Jewish way of thinking in order to enter the thought processes of the apostle, and indeed of the biblical writers generally.

(5) Fifth, one can agree that sin enslaves by its guilt, resulting in hopelessness and despair, and that the remedy to sin's guilt is justification as legal acquittal from sin and the declaration of our righteousness before God. This much is certain. Nevertheless, the reason why people experience the *guilt* of sin is because of their *practice* of sin. Accordingly, the guilt of sin decreases both because of forensic justification and the ability imparted by the same justification to yield our members as implements of righteousness (Romans 6:19). To this end, we are to "reckon" or "consider" (*logizomai*) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ (Romans 6:11).

After all is said and done, one may argue, and argue well, on the basis of Romans 6:7 (and Acts 13:38) for a forensic justification. The problem with Piper's particular construction, however, is twofold. One, he has to assume that such a justification is made possible only by means of imputation, because the term and the concept nowhere appear in Romans 6. Granted, he makes his assumption on the basis of Romans 4; but, of course, a different reading of Romans 4 will remove the foundation of that supposition. Two, Piper's bifurcation of justification and freedom from sin is a false dichotomy that results, in Stuhlmacher's words, in "an unbiblical abstraction."<sup>70</sup>

Piper's final bit of supporting evidence that (in his view) justification is not liberation from sin's mastery is the flow of thought in Romans 8:3-4. The argument again is from cause to effect: justification results in sanctification. It is doubtful that anyone would disagree with this, given that sanctification, as defined by Piper, is "progressive." I would only qualify that against the backdrop of Romans 6, as illumined by Murray's study, there is a "definitive" quality to sanctification, one that coincides with justification. In any event, Romans 8:3-4 says nothing about imputation.

Piper's conclusion to this entire subsection of the book is that the "assault" on the historic distinction between justification and sanctification is unsuccessful. He finds no exegetical warrant for allowing the "vague and general designation" of the righteousness of God as "salvific activity" to lead us away from the traditional understanding of justification as the imputation of divine righteousness. Accordingly, Piper sees no exegetical warrant for construing justification so as to include liberation from sin's mastery. Gundry's arguments in particular, says Piper, "do not overthrow the traditional Protestant understanding of Scripture that finds in justification the imputation of divine righteousness and a clear and necessary distinction between this act and God's subsequent and necessary work of sanctification" (p. 80).

Our response can be brief. (1) God's righteousness as "salvific activity" is hardly "vague and general." On the contrary, it is as concrete as any concept could be, taking its place squarely within the continuum of salvation history. All one needs do is read Paul against the backdrop of the Prophets of Israel, who so graphically and *concretely* depict the time when Yahweh would spring into action to terminate the exile and plant his people

<sup>69</sup>Young, *Paul the Jewish Theologian: A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 40-41, 42.

<sup>70</sup>Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 63-64.

again in the land. (2) As for myself, there is in fact copious exegetical warrant for construing justification in such a way as to include liberation from sin's mastery, and such exegetical considerations have been presented above. (3) It is not the purpose of this paper to "overthrow" anything, but to submit that the inflexible justification/sanctification model, at the very least, is in need of qualification. It is too schematized and too "scholastic" to allow for the dynamic, not to say dramatic, character of what God has done in Christ to effect a new creation out of the chaos of sin. (4) The most conspicuous shortcoming of this division of the book is the given that justification must transpire by means of imputation and by no other means. I can only say that there is no exegetical warrant for such an assumption.

#### 4. Is The Divine Righteousness That Is Imputed to Believers the Righteousness of Christ?

In this penultimate segment of the book, Dr. Piper adduces passages in support of his proposal that the righteousness imputed to the believer is specifically that *of Christ*.

##### (a) 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 3:9

Piper revisits these two passages to which appeal has been made before. As to the former, he does concede that this text does not say explicitly that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers. "But," he adds, "it does say that believers, because they are 'in Christ,' become God's righteousness the way Christ was made sin as a sinless person" (p. 82). Precisely! Paul points us to the "in Christ" experience as the source of our righteousness.

The problem is that Piper thinks it necessary to resort to imputation to explain the "mechanics" of how we have become the righteousness of God. The same is true of Charles Hodge and G. E. Ladd, both quoted by Piper (pp. 81-83). All three are quite right that it is *Christ's righteousness* that has been made ours. Yet apparently for the sake "doctrinal explicitness" and "systemization" (p. 81, n. 26) it is not sufficient to stick with the actual import of Paul's words. Rather, it is thought that only imputation will explain how such a text as this "ticks." I would submit otherwise: *union with Christ is the modality of our becoming "the righteousness of God."*

As 2 Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 3:9 has been addressed above. The point we endeavored to press from this verse is actually affirmed by Piper (p. 84).

Notice that the righteousness Paul counts on having "from God" is pursued with a longing to "be found in Christ." The righteousness that he has is his because he is "found in Christ." This use of "In Christ" is positional. In Christ by faith is the place where God's righteousness counts as our own. Thus "being found in Christ" is the way to "have a righteousness not my own."

However, an otherwise excellent comment is marred by the follow-up remark: "True, this does not say explicitly that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, but along with the other evidence presented here that is *a natural implication of this verse*" (ibid., italics mine). It is just the "natural implication" that is at issue. It seems to me far simpler and exegetically more straightforward just to stay with the Pauline language. Everything is explained by his doctrine of union with Christ, and one need look no further for a rationale or elucidation. Apart from the factor of imputation, the passage from Calvin quoted by Piper (ibid., n. 30) says it all:

Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our heart—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do

not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because, he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.<sup>71</sup>

(b) 1 Corinthians 1:30

Piper is correct, *vis-à-vis* Gundry, to insist that our union with Christ is what connects us with divine righteousness. The quotation from C. K. Barrett is apropos (pp. 85-86):

The root of the thought is forensic: man is arraigned in God's court, and is unable to satisfy the judge unless righteousness, which he cannot himself produce, is given to him.... Christ himself becomes righteousness for him (2 Cor. 5:21), and God the judge views him not as he is in himself but in Christ.<sup>72</sup>

Piper then reacts to the criticism that he has simply assumed the presence of imputation in this passage. In order to provide our own response, we must hear him in his own words (pp. 86-87):

One may object that Christ's becoming sanctification for us is not an imputed reality but rather is worked in us; so why should we assume that Christ's becoming righteousness for us refers to an imputed righteousness? In answer, I don't *assume* it. Instead I note that the other passages that connect righteousness with being "in Christ" have to do with justification (Galatians 2:17) and speak of a righteousness that is "not our own" (Philippians 3:9) and that "we become the righteousness of God" in the same way Christ became sin, that is, by imputation (2 Corinthians 5:21). Then I observe that there is no reason to think that Christ must "become" for us righteousness exactly the same way he becomes wisdom and sanctification and redemption. This is not said or implied.

In fact, it is plausible to see a natural progression in the four realities that Christ is for us. In our union with Christ he becomes "wisdom" for us in overcoming the blinding and deadening ignorance that keeps us from seeing the glory of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:24). Then he becomes righteousness for us in overcoming our guilt and condemnation (Romans 8:1). Then he becomes sanctification for us in overcoming our corruption and pollution (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 2:10). Finally, he becomes redemption for us in overcoming, in the resurrection, all the miseries, pain, futility, and death of this age (Romans 8:23). There is no reason to force this text to mean that Christ becomes all these things for us in exactly the same way, namely, by imputation. He may become each of these things for us as each reality requires.

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<sup>71</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, edited by J. T. McNeill; translated by F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.10. See further C. B. Carpenter, "A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on justification," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002), 363-386. My thanks to Dr. Robert Letham for this reference.

<sup>72</sup> Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 60.



In reply, first of all, it would be unfair to charge that Piper engages in bare presuppositionalism with regard to 1 Corinthians 1:30, without recourse to other passages that, in his view, teach imputation. To be sure, there are other texts that connect righteousness with being “in Christ,” that have to do with justification as a righteousness “not our own,” and that teach that “we become the righteousness of God” in the same way Christ became “sin.” My only response is that these other passages, taken on their own terms, do not in fact speak of imputation (as I read them, of course).

Second, the point is taken that there is no reason to think that Christ must, at least in the abstract, “become” for us righteousness in exactly the same way that he becomes wisdom, sanctification and redemption. The problem, however, is that it has to be established that Paul does in fact contemplate righteousness in essentially different terms than these three categories.

I would argue that the *prima facie* impact of 1 Corinthians 1:30 is just that *union with Christ* is the source for all these blessings, with no discernible differentiation between them as pertains to modality or mechanics. Literally translated, Paul’s Greek reads: “of him [God] you are *in Christ Jesus*, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” I would submit that an unbiased reading of the text yields the conclusion that Paul is affirming that Christ has become wisdom, sanctification and redemption in precisely the same manner as he has become righteousness for us. If so, then Wright is not off-base at all to maintain that if we take 1 Corinthians 1:30 as a textual basis for imputed righteousness, then “we must also be prepared to talk of the imputed wisdom of Christ; the imputed sanctification of Christ; and the imputed redemption of Christ.”<sup>73</sup>

In the third place, Piper would seem to have constructed his own sort of *ordo salutis* on the basis of 1 Corinthians 1:30, as though Paul were following a schematized progression of salvific realities. That such a “natural progression” is present is not immediately evident, and certainly the commentators do not point to any particular order in Paul’s choice of terms. That Paul is not thinking in *ordo salutis* terms is confirmed by the parallel statement in 1 Corinthians 6:11: “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Here, washing and sanctification precede justification, unthinkable in terms of an *ordo salutis*. Commenting on this text, G. R. Beasley-Murray can say that the “sanctification” by the Spirit and “justification” by the Lord Jesus occurred at the same time—it is a once-for-all consecration Paul has in mind, not a process.<sup>74</sup> In like manner, the “sanctification” of 1 Corinthians 1:30 makes perfectly good sense when viewed as “definitive,” not “progressive” (as understood by Piper). “Sanctification,” then, would correspond to the “righteousness” (covenant conformity) Christ became for us when we were incorporated into him.<sup>75</sup>

In sum, the evidence educed from these passages by Piper clearly confirms that the righteousness of God is none other than the righteousness of Christ. Nevertheless, it has not been established that *imputation* is the means by which Christ’s righteousness becomes ours. As throughout, my contention is that Christ has become our righteousness by virtue of union with himself, plain and simple.

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<sup>73</sup>Wright, *Saint Paul*, 123.

<sup>74</sup>Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1962), 164-65.

<sup>75</sup>G. D. Fee, in my estimation, artificially stresses the forensic side of *dikaioSunê* at the expense of the ethical (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 86).

## (c) Romans 10:4

Apart from certain differences owing to my “New Perspective” reading of this verse, I must agree with Piper that Israel’s problem was her failure to recognize Christ as the goal (*telos*) of the law, and that God’s righteousness is now localized *in Christ* rather than the Torah. However, it is equally conspicuous that Romans 10:4 is silent about any notion of imputation. Piper is sensitive to this, and his appeal takes the following form:

If one allows for biblical reflection and comparison and synthesis and a desire to penetrate to reality behind words (as with, for example, the biblical doctrines of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, or the substitutionary atonement), then the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is not an artificial construct of systematic theologians but is demanded by the relevant texts (p. 90).

Certainly, anyone who believes in the unity of Scripture and its inspiration will want to engage in reflection, comparison and synthesis for the purpose of a penetrating analysis of the text. However, I would prefer to say that instead of realities “behind words,” there are realities *embedded* in words. Granted, we may have to dig deep to uncover these embedded realities by none other than reflection, comparison and synthesis. Nevertheless, there must be the presence of *such words* that serve as symbols of or signposts to underlying realities (referents). The Trinity, the two natures of Christ and substitutionary atonement, I would say, are not appropriate analogies to imputation, simply because there is a preponderance of words that allow for the construction of a theology of each. Not so, I would argue, in the case of imputation: the pertinent words are simply not extant in the New Testament.

## (d) Romans 5:12-19

Now ensues a lengthy defense of imputation based on Romans 5:12-19. Again, it will be possible only to address the most salient aspects of Piper’s argument.<sup>76</sup>

The reasoning deployed is that of analogy: just as Adam’s sin was imputed to his posterity, so also the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to all who are in him. As Piper states: “The basis of our justification before God is a divine righteousness that comes to us in a way analogous to the way Adam’s sin came to us. As we were in him and share in his sin, so we are in Christ and share in his righteousness” (p. 93).

Foundational to this more or less traditional Reformed interpretation of “original sin” is the belief that verses 13-14 of Romans 5 have to do not with individual sins committed by the race of Adam, but Adam’s own trespass which has now been credited to the account of all who are descended from him. According to Piper (p. 94):

Now what is the implication that Paul wants us to see? He wants us to see that universal human death was not owing to individual sins against the Mosaic Law, but to man’s sinning in Adam. That is what he is trying to clarify. Verse 12, at the end, says that death spread to all “because all sinned.” So Paul argues and clarifies: But people died even though their own individual lawbreaking was not the reason for dying; their individual sins weren’t counted. The reason all died is because all sinned in Adam. Adam’s sin was imputed to them.

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<sup>76</sup> See my own treatment of this passage in *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 79-109.

Piper concedes that v. 14 could be read in another way than in terms of the imputation of Adam's sin. Those over whom death reigned from Adam to Moses could have been guilty: (1) of violating individual commands given before Moses; (2) of violating the law written on the heart (Romans 2:15). However, he rejects these possibilities, citing, in part, the case of the infants who died as the result of "the imputation of Adam's sin."

Piper qualifies that his argument does not hinge on infants being in view, but he defends the interpretation contextually in terms of Paul's perceived purpose for focusing on the period between Adam and Moses. For one thing, there is what he calls the way in which Paul "in general and loosely" points to solidarity with Adam in his transgression as the cause of everyone's death, not their own transgressions. Second, there is the "specific and strict" argument that relates to the legal implication of people dying as punishment in a time period that had no explicit laws specifying death penalties.

It is the second of these purposes, says Piper, that commands Paul's attention. "Paul is primarily concerned in Romans 5:12-21 concerned to show the *legal*, not the moral, triumph of grace over the *legal*, not moral, problem of sin" (p. 99). As buttressing evidence, he cites the presence of the term "condemnation" in 5:16, which is taken to be (only) the legal consequence of death. The bottom line, then, of Piper's understanding of Romans 5:13-14 is that "death is not first, and most deeply, owing to our own individual sinning, but to our being connected with Adam in such a way that his sin really made us guilty and liable to condemnation" (p. 100).

On the basis of all the above, Piper, as expected, draws the parallel between the imputation of Adam's sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness (pp. 101-3):

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

So the problem of the human race is not most deeply that everybody does various kinds of sins. Those sins are real, they are huge, they are enough to condemn us, and they do indeed play a role in our condemnation. But the deepest problem is that behind all our depravity and all our guilt and all our sinning there is a deep mysterious connection with Adam, whose sin became our sin and whose judgment became our judgment. And the Savior from this condition and this damage is a Savior who stands in Adam's place as a kind of second Adam (or "the last Adam," 1 Corinthians 15:45). By his obedience he undoes what Adam did. By his obedience he fulfilled what Adam failed to do. In Adam all men were appointed (*katestathêsan*) "sinners," but all who are in Christ are appointed (*katastathêsontai*) "righteous" (5:19). In Adam all received condemnation; in Christ all receive justification (5:18).

The next phase of Piper's exposition is the contrast between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:15-17. Paul's aim, says Piper, is "to magnify the grace and sufficiency of the justification that comes through Christ for sinners" (p. 103). Verse 15 strikes the contrast in terms of Adam's transgression as over against Christ's righteousness, which is understood as a gift. "The implication is that although Adam's transgression brought death to many, Christ's righteousness, as a free gift, abounded...for many" (p. 104).

Verse 16 continues the contrast. From this verse, Piper deduces three things. (1) As the counterpart to "condemnation," justification is a declaration of righteousness, not

liberation from sinning. (2) The judgment that resulted in condemnation is the counting of Adam's sin as our sin, on the basis of our union with Adam. (3) The foundation (basis) for justification is the free gift of Christ's righteousness.

Verse 17 then give another reason why the free gift is not like the effect of Adam's sin, but totally outstrips this one-to-one correspondence of the type and the antitype. "Paul's point is that the triumph of God's grace and gift of righteousness will not simply replace the reign of death with the reign of life, but rather "much more" will make *believers reign in life* like kings in the presence of our Father forever and ever" (p. 106).

As all commentators acknowledge, vv. 18-19 of Romans 5 complete the comparison begun by Paul in v. 12 but immediately broken off by vv. 13-14. Piper now focuses on these verses. The main point of v. 18 is that justification happens to all who are connected to Christ, in the same manner that condemnation happened to those who were connected to Adam. Adam acted sinfully, and because we were connected to him, we are condemned in him. Christ acted righteously, and because we are connected to Christ we are justified in Christ. Adam's sin is counted as ours. Christ's "act of righteousness" is counted as ours.

Verse 19 supports this by making the same point in another way: through the disobedience of Adam many were made sinners, and through the obedience of Christ many will be made righteous. Paul here becomes more specific in explaining how Adam's sin brings condemnation and how Christ's righteousness brings justification. The fulcrum of the argument is the verb translated by NASB (and others) as "made" (*kathistêmi*). Piper favors the rendering of "appointed" because it is consistent with the doctrine of imputation. That is to say, many are "appointed" sinners or righteous by virtue of either Adam's sin or Christ's righteousness. In both cases, the stress falls not on personal transgressions or acts of righteousness, but on our connection with Adam or Christ respectively.

The treatment of Romans 5:12-19 is rounded off by a detailed defense of Christ's "one act of righteousness" as his life of obedience, as contra Gundry, who limits it to his death. In my estimation, each of Piper's arguments is well-taken. As Cranfield maintains, Christ's "one act of righteousness" (*dikaiôma*) is not just his death, but his obedient life as a whole: "His loving God with all His heart and soul and mind and strength, and His neighbour with complete sincerity, which is the righteous conduct which God's law requires."<sup>77</sup>

An adequate exegesis of Romans 5:12-19, with all its grammatical and theological complexities, would require a volume in itself.<sup>78</sup> So, our response must be limited to the actual points raised by Piper from the passage, which we shall take section by section.

### (1) Romans 5:12

To begin, there can hardly be any disagreement as to the basic analogical nature of Paul's argument: just as the work of Adam resulted in condemnation and death, so also the work of Christ has resulted in righteousness and life. The question, of course, pertains to whether these divergent effects are due to imputation or some other factor. The bedrock of Piper's particular reading of Romans 5 is the proposition that "universal human death was

<sup>77</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.289; cf. Leenhardt, *Romans*, 146.

<sup>78</sup> The problems of the passage and the history of interpretation are canvassed by J. Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977); C. E. B. Cranfield, "On Some of the Problems of the Interpretation of Romans 5.12," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (1969), 324-41; S. L. Johnson, "Romans 5:12—An Exercise in Exegesis and Theology," *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, edited by R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenny (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 298-316; G. P. Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin in American Presbyterian Theology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972).

not owing to individual sins against the Mosaic Law, but to man's sinning in Adam.... The reason all died is because all sinned in Adam. Adam's sin was imputed to them" (p. 94).

This more or less traditional Reformed interpretation of Romans 5:12 rests on the words of its last clause, frequently translated "all sinned" (*pantes hêmarton*), in the English simple past tense. That is to say, sin entered the world, and death through sin, because "all sinned" *in Adam*; that is, Adam's sin, by means of imputation, was made the personal responsibility of every human being descended from him and Eve. This view of "all sinned" was spearheaded by Augustine, who was influenced by the Vulgate's translation of the Greek words *eph' hô* in 5:12c (normally translated into English as "because") as *in quo*, that is, "in whom," namely, Adam. From that point onward, it was customarily assumed that Paul was asserting the dogma of "original sin" as formulated by later Roman Catholic (and Protestant) thought.

More contemporary exegetes who have rejected the Vulgate's rendering of *eph' hô* still latch onto the aorist tense of the verb "sinned" (*hêmarton*). L. Morris, for example, is quite sure that the tense has to point to "one act in the past"—the sin of Adam.<sup>79</sup> Yet in order to maintain such a once-for-all point of reference for "all sinned," that is, the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, it is necessary to bypass or at to least minimize the significance of *the very same combination of words* in Romans 3:23: "all have sinned (*pantes hêmarton*) and come short of the glory of God," Paul's epitome of the entire history of human apostasy and idolatry.

In turn, Romans 3:23 glances back to 3:9: Paul's indictment that Jew and Gentile alike are under sin," the bottom line to the foregoing discussion of mankind's rebellion against its Creator. In fact, 3:23 itself is a summary of 1:18-3:20—Paul's "covenant lawsuit" against the "sin" of the human race in Adam—in which Adam/creation motifs occupied a place of some prominence.<sup>80</sup> With the willing compliance of the first man, the agenda of creation was sabotaged by Satan, and all who bear Adam's likeness continue his resistance to the Creator and thus fall perpetually short of the divine image. Humanity (including Israel) in Adam is idolatrous (apostate) by definition: all his progeny bear his image in that they are born in a condition of estrangement from God (cf. Psalm 51:5), with an inbuilt disposition to serve the creature rather than the Creator.

Hence, Romans 3:23, as it distills the charge of 1:18-3:20 that all are "under sin," sheds a considerable amount of light on Romans 5:12. In both cases, the words "all have sinned" are to be taken in the same sense, that is, death has spread to all because all *have sinned*, that is, all *have apostatized*, because of their union with Adam. Thus interpreted, the aorist in each instance is "constative" (summary) and is to be translated by the English present perfect tense.<sup>81</sup>

The point of these observations is to say that a mainstay of the argument for imputation is removed if Romans 5:12c has reference to personal and individual sin. But, then, how do we understand the immediately following verses?

<sup>79</sup>Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 231.

<sup>80</sup>See Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 34-37; M. D. Hooker, "Adam in Romans I," *New Testament Studies* 6 (1959-60), 297-306; D. J. W. Milne, "Genesis 3 in the Letter to the Romans," *Reformed Theological Review* 39 (1980), 10-18.

<sup>81</sup>In agreement with A. J. M. Wedderburn, this interpretation of "sin" (*hamartanô*) is supported by the fact that Paul normally uses the verb with regard to responsible and personal sinning, particularly in the Romans passages just cited, in which, remarks Wedderburn, "Paul's whole argument would be vitiated if any mouth were not stopped by the consciousness of its own guilt before God" ("The Theological Structure of Romans V.12," *New Testament Studies* 19 [1972-73], 351). He further remarks that a reference to individual guilts make the best sense in the light of Jewish parallels (*ibid.*, 352). *Hamartanô* is used of Adam's personal sin in 5:16a, so that the sin of his posterity matches his own.

## (2) Romans 5:13-14

In these verses, Paul provides a rationale for the proposition of v. 12: even in the period from Adam to Moses death reigned over those who did not sin “in the “likeness of Adam’s trespass.” With an apparent glance back to 4:15 (“where there is no law there is no transgression”), the reasoning seems to be that the generations of people between these two men must have violated some law. But what law? If our interpretation is correct that the sinning in 5:12 is not Adam’s exclusively, then precisely which law has been broken, so as to account for sin and death?

As is true more than once in 5:12-19, Paul’s logic is not made explicit, leaving us to discern his intentions from the broader setting of Romans. In one regard, his justification of v. 12 is a statement of the obvious, that is, the reality of death from Adam to Moses; yet, in another, he appears to beg the question, namely, the existence of a law antecedent to that delivered to Israel at the time of the exodus. However, in keeping with his procedure in Romans to bypass the Torah and return to creation, Paul is best understood as here building on presuppositions already established in 2:14-15. That is to say, by virtue of bearing the image of God, all humans are in possession of the law written on the heart, whose function was to regulate the aboriginal (creation) covenant, as seen by its present-day function of linking mankind to its Maker, in conjunction with the co-witness of the conscience (cf. 1:32). Death, therefore, was universal in the pre-Mosaic period because of the repudiation of *this* law, not the Torah. We are thus taken back to 1:18 in that the rejection of the law written on the heart is tantamount to the suppression of the knowledge of God.

It is thus explicable that there were those who died, even though they did not sin “in the likeness of Adam’s transgression” (*epi tô homoiômati tês parabaseôs Adam*). As in 8:3, the noun *homoiôma* here means an “exact likeness.”<sup>82</sup> We might say that Adam’s descendants did not willfully rebuff a clearly revealed command (the normal meaning of “trespass” [*parabasis*] in Paul), as Israel was later to do. But more to the point, “the likeness of Adam’s trespass” indicates that they did not do *precisely* what Adam did, that is, eat a piece of forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden as an act of willful rebellion. Even so, they die because their sin in principle is an act of apostasy from Yahweh. In suppressing the knowledge of God inscribed on the heart (1:18-23), humanity in the first Adam has rejected God himself and, as a result, suffers the fate of Adam. It is especially noteworthy that Adam and Eve ate from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” “Good” and “evil” mean not so much “right” and “wrong” as *the* good of acknowledging God the Creator and *the* evil of renouncing him (see especially Deuteronomy 30:15; Isaiah 7:15; Romans 2:7-10; 7:13-20; 15:2; 16:19; 1 Corinthians 10:6-7).

In opposition to this appeal to “the law written on the heart,” Piper cites the death of infants in the time-frame from Adam to Moses. Attention is frequently called to the fact that “those who did not sin after the likeness of Adam’s trespass” (v. 14) are to be equated with the “all” who “sinned” (v. 12). This, of course, is correct. However, the most pertinent thing we can say is that a large substratum of the Roman letter is formed by the proposition that there is “no distinction” between Jew and Gentile. It is to this end that Paul uses the adjective “all” some 73 times in the epistle. A case in point is 3:23-24: all have sinned, and yet all are justified through the redemption in Christ. The focus here, as in 5:12c, is not so much quantitative as qualitative.<sup>83</sup> “All,” in other words, has reference to the Jew/Gentile

<sup>82</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1.276; U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 6. 3 vols. (Zürich/Neukirchen: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1978-82), 1.318, nn. 1053, 1054.

<sup>83</sup> This is what accounts for the otherwise difficult grammatical construction of Romans 3:23-24, where the participle of v. 24 has as its antecedent the main verb of v. 23, “sinned.” *Qualitative speaking*, “all,” Jew and Gentile, who have sinned and fall short of God’s glory are the very same ones who are justified by Christ. Paul then proceeds, in v. 25, to relate that this justification has been procured by none other than

divide that has now been demolished in Christ. Therefore, in 5:14, Paul's sights are not set on infants or the mentally deficient. His argument is that Israel, as much as the Gentiles, is "in Adam" and repeats his sin.<sup>84</sup>

That Paul should single out the period from Adam to Moses makes most sense when viewed against the backdrop of his dialogue with Israel in 5:12-19.<sup>85</sup> Having stated his thesis that universal sin and death are the effect of one man's disobedience, Paul, in vv. 13-14, seems compelled to defend what he has written. Very noticeable, remarks Dunn, is the speed with which Paul's thought reverts to the law—a further indication that *it* was the chief point of tension between Paul the Christian and the traditional emphases of Judaism.<sup>86</sup> In particular, v. 12 would have appeared to the Jewish mind to contain a puzzling proposition. Given Paul's consistent denial of the existence of the law before Sinai, How could there have been sin strictly speaking, since, ostensibly, there was no law according to which sin could be reckoned? Sin, after all, for Judaism was measured in relation to *the Torah*. It is this which Paul now seeks to clarify.

His explanation glances back at 4:15b, "where there is no law there is no transgression," where these words are appended to the statement of the previous part of the verse, "for the law works wrath." By claiming, in 5:12, that "all" have sinned, Paul has implied that they have rejected God's law and have, therefore, been the recipients of wrath (death). This, of course, raises a historical problem: if the law (of Moses) works wrath, and if sin is not reckoned apart from the law, How could there have been sin and death before Sinai?

For a sizable segment of Judaism anyway, the answer was obvious: the Torah has existed from the dawn of history, and the nations are exposed to wrath because they have spurned the eternal Torah. As early as Ben Sira (2nd century BC) this idea is in evidence: Abraham himself kept none other than the law (of Moses) during a time of testing (Sirach 44:20). Afterward, the author of Jubilees would make the same claim (24:11; cf. 23:10), as does a later rabbinic text (Kiddushin 4:4). Even more striking in Jubilees is the preexistence of the law on "heavenly tablets," "the eternal books always before the Lord" (16:29; 31:32; 32:10, 15, 21-26, 28; 33:10; 39:7). The eternity of the law is likewise the conviction of Sirach 24:9, 33; Baruch 4:1; Wisdom 18:4; Testament of Naphtali 3:1-2.<sup>87</sup>

In rather stark contrast, Paul allows that there was an era prior to and distinguishable from that of the Torah (v. 13a). A law has been spurned, a law which functions similarly to the law which "works wrath." However, it is not the law of the Sinai covenant, as in 4:15; it is, rather, some law in existence before the birth of Israel's nationhood, which effectively eliminates the grounds for Israel's boasting in the Torah; it is none other than this law, preceding the Torah, which produced death in the period from

Christ's atonement. As Dunn relates, Paul's earliest extant teaching on the death of Christ is to the effect that the cross has broken down the boundary of the law in order to procure the blessing of Abraham for all ("Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14)," *New Testament Studies* 31 [1985], 539). See further T. L. Donaldson, "The 'Curse of the Law' and the Inclusion of the Gentiles: Galatians 3.13-14," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986), 94-112.

<sup>84</sup>In point of fact, the majority of commentators oppose any reference to infants here. See, for example, Moo, Dunn, Cranfield, Schreiner, Calvin, Stuart, Godet, Denny.

<sup>85</sup>See Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 82-84.

<sup>86</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 1.274.

<sup>87</sup>On the eternity of the law in Jewish literature, see W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 7 (Philadelphia: SBL, 1952); R. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 28 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 49-64, 67-85; id., "The Eschatological Role of Law in Pre- and Post-Christian Jewish Thought," *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on His 60th Birthday*, edited by R. Banks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 173-85.

Adam to Moses (v. 14). Vv. 13-14, therefore, can be plausibly interpreted as the apostle's denial of a recognized tenet of Jewish theology. For him there was a period during which the Torah as such was not in existence but in which, nevertheless, "death reigned." In turn, this would be a tacit rebuff of the perspective of Sirach 10:19, according to which the non-Jewish segment of the human race is unworthy of honor because it has transgressed the commandments. In other words, the Gentiles, from Paul's perspective, are not deserving of death because they have violated *the Torah*. He thus appeals to the existence of this pre-Mosaic law as a great leveler of the human race. In the words of 3:23: "All have sinned."

Apart from some such historical reading of Paul's text, Piper's explanation leaves us at a loss as to why he would single out the period *from Adam to Moses*. Why do solidarity with Adam and the legal consequences of sin pertain especially to *this period* as opposed to any other? The answer is not clear.

### (3) Romans 5:15-17

Of the three points Piper deduces from these verses, two are in dispute, because we quite agree that the foundation for justification is the free gift of *Christ's righteousness*.

For one, in keeping with overall thesis of this book, the claim is made that as the counterpart to "condemnation," justification is a declaration of righteousness, not liberation from sinning. It is to be granted that in Romans 5 Paul does not speak of liberation as such; that discussion is left for 6:1-7:4. Nevertheless, he has paved the way for this subsequent teaching by his assertion of the union of the believer with Christ the Last Adam, the one who has created a new race of beings in his own image. We have exchanged the headship of Adam for the headship of Christ. By definition, we have been liberated from "sin" in the sense of the old Adamic existence of idolatry and apostasy.

In this regard, an exegetical issue is raised by the word translated "justification" (*dikaiôma*) in v. 16. This rendering is simply taken for granted by Piper and others. However, the same term occurs in v. 18, where it is normally rendered "act of righteousness." Protestant exegesis has tended to assume that the usage in v. 18 is distinct from that in v. 16, where it is taken to be "justification," set within a strictly forensic frame. However, apart from assigning a different sense to the term than it bears in v. 18 (with no particular hint from Paul), the interpretation is flawed in not taking sufficiently into account the Hebraic/covenantal backdrop of the *dik-* family of words.<sup>88</sup> What is in view in v. 16 is not merely a declaration and a resultant status, but a commitment to a relationship, evidenced by the holiness of the covenant and a determination to persevere in it. It is such a wholehearted devotion to the Creator/creature relationship, in v. 16, which is the effect of God's free grace in Christ. The conclusion is reinforced by the recollection that underlying Romans 5:1 is Isaiah 32, Israel's restoration to the covenant, the result of which is "peace" (*shalôm*).

Therefore, at stake in Romans 5:12-19 is not simply a legal standing, but an entire new existence (new creation): we have been enabled to be obedient by virtue of our union with the Obedient One himself, the Last Adam.<sup>89</sup> Correspondingly, "condemnation" is not merely a judicial pronouncement, but a state of estrangement that can do none other than produce death in the all-embracing sense. For this reason, it is better to speak of *original death* rather than original sin.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> In Romans 1:32 and 2:26, *dikaiôma* is the behavior required by the law written on the heart, for which Gentiles are held accountable; in 8:4, it summarizes the obligation of the Sinai covenant as fulfilled in the believer, who, by virtue of the work of Christ and the indwelling Spirit, walks not after the flesh but the Spirit.

<sup>89</sup> In terms of Pauline parenesis (exhortation), Philippians 2:8 and 2:12 in conjunction indicate that this Obedient One is to be obeyed.

<sup>90</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 1.273. One may agree that "original death" requires a corresponding idea of "original sin."



This reading of Romans 5 has been defended by me elsewhere.<sup>91</sup> If I may just quote the conclusion of that study:

The obedience of Christ, according to Romans 5, is specifically his fidelity to God the Creator and his perseverance in the course set before him by his Father. Christ thus plays out the role originally assigned to Adam as the progenitor of the human race: he is the actual *eikôn tou theou* [image of God], the one who projects onto the field of space and time the likeness of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). It is he who is obedient, where another son of God, Israel, failed, whose history can be characterized by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:7, 9 as an era of condemnation and death.

Paul, however, does not contemplate the obedience of Christ as an end in itself, because it is *through* the one man that obedience has been disseminated *to* all. At heart, human obedience is the acceptance of one's identity as the image of God and the consequent obligation of creaturely service. The obedience of the Christian is thus the antipode of his former disobedience, his rejection of Creator/creature distinction. In short, the believer has been delivered from the slavery of his former existence (Romans 6:15-23; 8:2; Ephesians 2:1-3) and enabled to persevere in the faith-commitment incumbent originally on the first Adam.<sup>92</sup>

Piper's other point from Romans 5:15-17 is that the judgment that resulted in condemnation is the counting of Adam's sin as our sin, on the basis of our union with Adam. That man outside of Christ in union with Adam is to be granted, but the first part of the proposition is to be challenged, in that Piper attributes condemnation to the imputation of Adam's sin.

Without going into any real detail, the interpretation favored by me is essentially that of Calvin and Cranfield, with some modification.<sup>93</sup> It usually comes as a surprise to students in the Reformed tradition that Calvin did not follow the lead of Augustine by holding to the imputation of Adam's sin.<sup>94</sup> Cranfield follows suit when he interprets "all sinned" in 5:12 in terms of the "the fruit of the desperate moral debility and corruption which resulted from man's primal transgression and which all succeeding generations of mankind have inherited."<sup>95</sup>

Very much in line with Calvin and Cranfield, I would suggest, nonetheless, a certain refinement. It is not to be overlooked that in Romans 5 the apostle's thought is steeped in the creation. Thus, while it is probable that Paul envisages humanity in Adam as inheriting a "sinful nature," the most relevant thing we can say is that *man in Adam enters the world devoid of the Spirit*. With George Smeaton, we may conceive of Adam as "the temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>96</sup> Therefore, when Adam fell, he forfeited the presence of the

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But it is the definition of "original sin" which is the crux of the debate. In Dunn's words: "Paul could be said to hold a doctrine of *original sin*, in the sense that from the beginning everyone has been under the power of sin with death as the consequence, but not a doctrine of *original guilt*, since individuals are only held responsible for deliberate acts of defiance against God and his law" (ibid., 1.291).

<sup>91</sup> Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 98-107.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 108-09.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 85-88.

<sup>94</sup> Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, edited by D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 111-12; id., *Institutes*, 2.1.8.

<sup>95</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.278; id., "Problems," 335-40. The Calvin/Cranfield line is taken up by H. Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

<sup>96</sup> Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), 10-17. See further M. G.

Spirit, so that all his descendants emerge from the womb bereft of the Spirit's influence. As formed in the likeness of "the man of dust" (1 Corinthians 15:49), man in Adam, in Paul's words elsewhere, is a "natural man" (*psuchikos anthrôpos*) (1 Corinthians 2:13), possessing, in his fallenness, a "reprobate mind" (Rom 1:28).

*Vis-à-vis* Cranfield and others, it is to be conceded that the present context directly concerns man's immediate involvement in Adam's sin and death, not moral corruption as such. This is why I would emphasize that "sin," in the first instance, is not so much "depravity" as a (damnation-) historical state introduced by Adam. Human failing is a reality; yet, in perspective, it is but the by-product of the apostasy bequeathed by Adam, whose hallmark is the absence of the Spirit. Again thinking in salvation-historical terms, confirmation is had by Paul's teaching that the impartation of the Spirit is a new creation: in becoming the renewed image of God, humankind "in Christ" is again indwelt by the Spirit. We might say that whereas the first Adam forfeited the Spirit, the last Adam, in his role as life-giver, restores the Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Most deeply, then, our sin-problem is not due to the imputed guilt of Adam, but rather to our apostasy as a consequence our birth "in Adam," devoid of the Spirit.

Romans 5:18-19

The only matter to be addressed is that of the verb *kathistêmi*, translated by Piper as "appoint;" that is, humans are "appointed" either "sinners" or "righteous" by virtue of imputation, either that of Adam's sin or of Christ's righteousness. Murray opts for a similar rendering of "constitute."<sup>97</sup> The translation of words in individual contexts always depends on interpretation. Piper's translation thus suits his appraisal of Romans 5:12-19 as a whole, along with the doctrine of imputation he sees in other Pauline texts. Yet Cranfield proposes that *kathistêmi*, in the passive voice, may have been chosen by Paul as the true passive equivalent of the verb *ginomai* ("become"). If so, his point is simply that "all" have "become" either sinners or righteous, depending on their relationship to Adam or Christ respectively.<sup>98</sup>

##### 5. The Relationship between Christ's "Blood and Righteousness"

Under this heading, Piper revisits the verb *dikaioô* (with cross reference to the previously canvassed "imputation" passages in Paul), maintaining that it does not mean "forgive." Forgiveness, he writes, means to be found guilty and then not have the guilt reckoned to one, but let go. "So we should be careful that we not assume justification and forgiveness are identical" (p. 115).

Thereafter, he considers the usage of Psalm 32 in Romans 4. Contrary to those interpreters who take justification and forgiveness in 4:7-8 to be virtually synonymous, Piper reasons that such is not the case. He is concerned that we not assume that justification means only forgiveness of sins. When Paul speaks of being justified by Christ's blood, "we have no warrant for *equating* the totality of justification with sin-bearing, sin-removing work of Christ or with forgiveness" (p. 118-19, italics his).

One may grant that justification is not exhausted by sin-removal and forgiveness. Yet, apart from Romans 4:7-8, justification and forgiveness are brought into very close proximity in Romans 3:24-25. Whether semantically "identical" or not, justification and forgiveness coincide and, for all practical purposes, address the same issue: *reconciliation*

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Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 13-34.

<sup>97</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 1.203-4.

<sup>98</sup>Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.291, n. 1; cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 1.284; Wilckens, *Römer*, 1.328.

to God.<sup>99</sup> Piper's attempt to distinguish them so sharply in 4:7-8 involves a certain degree of mental gymnastics. The fact that Paul singles out "blessing" from the quotation of Psalm 32 hardly proves his point, since the "blessing" in question is embodied precisely in words like "forgiven" and "covered."

The attempt to fine tune the relationship of the various soteriological categories, such as making forgiveness the "constitutive element" of justification, so as to distance the former from the latter, reprises the old analytical, systematizing approach that attributes to Paul a methodology and set of assumptions that are conspicuously absent from his text. To a biblical theologian anyway, such over-refinement is practically pointless. It is surely striking that the Augsburg Confession (quoted above) equates the verb "justified" with "obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness."

#### 4. Concluding Reflections

If anything, this response to Piper's book has yielded areas of overlap and agreement and areas of tension and disagreement. In bringing this study to a conclusion, I want, first of all, to call attention to the agreement. We are in accord that the righteousness of the Christian believer comes from Christ and Christ alone. In fulfillment of Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16, the eschatological Israel has been endowed with the robe of the Lord's own righteousness. Although it is disputed that the modality of this endowment is imputation, we affirm without hesitation that it is "*in him*" (2 Corinthians 5:21) and by virtue of his person and work that we have become God's own righteousness. After all is said and done, Luther was right that the righteousness God requires is the righteousness he provides in Christ.

Such a conclusion naturally raises a couple of questions. If we are in accord on such a basic issue, then what is the debate all about? If it is only a matter of modality, then why is dialogue even necessary? These are fair questions, and they deserve fair answers.

(1) For one thing, stress on union with Christ rather than imputation places christology, rather than soteriology, at the forefront of Paul's theology (and that of the New Testament generally). The showcase of the apostle's thought is *not* justification, as time-honored as that notion is in Reformation theology. It is, rather, union with Christ or the "*in Christ*" experience. From this vantage point, Colossians 1:18 exhibits the very life blood of Paul's preaching—that *in all things he may have the preeminence*. One most certainly agrees with Piper that the glory of Christ is the most precious reality in the universe (p. 14); and it is precisely Paul's doctrine of union with Christ that underscores this, because the focus is on *Christ himself*, not most prominently a transaction performed by him. Of all the great mottoes of the Reformation, the most outstanding and important is *solus Christus*.

Hand in hand with the preeminence of the person of Christ is that union with him bespeaks a personal (covenant) relationship that is obscured when legal and transactional matters are given as much prominence as they are in traditional Reformed thought. "Imputation" is the transferal of a commodity from one person to another; but "union" means that we take up residence, as it were, within the sphere of the other's existence. I would particularly press the point, since throughout Piper's book justification by faith is equated with imputation, as though there could be no other mode of justification than imputation.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Note especially Romans 5:1-11. In the parallelism of vv. 9 and 10, there is a direct equation of justification with reconciliation. The same equation is evident in the "ABA" style of 5:1-11 as a whole. 5:1 commences the section with justification, and v. 11 concludes with reconciliation. See my *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 74-79.

<sup>100</sup> Needless to say, perhaps, I cannot endorse R. C. Sproul's claim that if imputation is *passé*, then so is

More than anything else, the New Testament, and Paul in particular, would have us know that the most supreme of Christ's benefits is *Christ himself*. Our life is hid with God in Christ (Colossians 3:3). Indeed, in two very telling passages, Paul moves, as it were, from the greater to the lesser: from Christ to his benefits: "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:3-4); and "our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Philippians 3:20-21). Paul's order is all important: *first* the savior and *then* the glorious redemption of the body.

(2) In the second place, the debate is necessary (and healthy) because it is vital to have *biblical* notions of the "righteousness of God." Because of its emphasis on the transactional character of the work of Christ, Protestantism has unduly constricted righteousness to its legal and forensic dimension. That this dimension exists, and is even primary, is not to be disputed. Nevertheless, it is my opinion—one that has been formulated over a period of some thirty years now—that the time has come to stop letting the conflict with Rome dictate the agenda of exegesis and allow Pauline texts such as Romans 2:1-16 speak to us in their intended meaning and with all their power. If it is "the doers of the law who will be justified" (2:13), then Paul means just that.<sup>101</sup>

These conclusions are hardly the place to debate the merits or demerits of the *ordo salutis*. Suffice it to say that Reformed scholars such as A. A. Hoekema and R. B. Gaffin have subjected it to careful scrutiny and have found it wanting.<sup>102</sup> When it comes to the relation of justification and sanctification in particular, I would simply reiterate what I have said elsewhere.<sup>103</sup> No support can be found for distinguishing between the righteousness of the beginning and the righteousness of the end, between the "righteousness of faith" and the "righteousness of life." Further, "justification" and (definitive) "sanctification" coincide, provided that the former is defined as the power of Christ taking over our life, so that justification is seen to be coextensive with new creation. Consequently, what is customarily termed "sanctification" is actually the extension of "justification," or, better, "rightwising."<sup>104</sup>

(3) Third, all of the above brings me to say that my main disagreement with Piper has to do with his insistence that justification has nothing to do with liberation from sin. To reiterate from above, justification and righteousness pertain to our conformity to God's covenant, not simply a forensic status. Granted, the former is the consequence of the latter, and the two are not to be reversed. Even so, it is justification that introduces us to the (new)

the gospel (from the back cover), as though the gospel consisted in imputation.

<sup>101</sup> See my *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 44-71; K. R. Snodgrass, "Justification by Grace—to the Doers: an Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986), 72-93; K. L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 105 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). It is a little known fact, but Luther also embraced a notion of eschatological justification, at least in seed form. See P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 237, n. 63.

<sup>102</sup> Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 11-27; Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*. 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 137-42; Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 158-61.

<sup>103</sup> Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 151-61.

<sup>104</sup> O. O'Donovan is correct that to obscure the organic connection of justification and sanctification can lead Protestantism back into "the very uneschatological moralism" from which it sought to deliver us: "The correlate of a 'justification' which has nothing to do with 'righteousness' is a righteousness which has nothing to do with justification, and this soon presented itself to Protestant thought under the heading of 'sanctification'" (*Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* [Leicester/Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity/Eerdmans, 1986], 254).

covenant, and in the context and environment of the covenant we begin to live out the righteousness of God.<sup>105</sup>

Like many Protestant exegetes, Piper has restricted the verb *dikaioô* to “declare righteous.” In my view, however, the overall best shorthand translation of *dikaioô* is “vindicate.” The verb gives voice to a declaration, but a declaration resultant from an activity (God’s saving righteousness). This declaration also opens the way into the life of the covenant, because the one acquitted in the Hebrew courtroom resumes his/her responsibilities and privileges within the community. When Israel is vindicated at the time of release from exile, the new covenant is established, and peace is the result of the nation’s renewed righteousness (Isaiah 32:16-17 = Romans 5:1).

These two perspectives combine to inform us that *dikaioô*, in the active voice, is “to righteous,” “to rightwise,” “to place in the right” or “to save” in the comprehensive sense. In the passive, it is “to be an object of the saving righteousness of God (so as to be well-pleasing to him at the judgment).”<sup>106</sup> As Martyn puts it, the subject Paul addresses in his use of *dikaioô* is that of God’s *making right what has gone wrong*.<sup>107</sup> Alistair McGrath points the whole nicely: *dikaioô* “denotes God’s powerful, cosmic and universal action in effecting a change in the situation between sinful humanity and God, by which God is able to acquit and vindicate believers, setting them in a right and faithful relation to himself.”<sup>108</sup> My plea would be that instead of “counted righteous in Christ,” we are “made righteous in Christ.”<sup>109</sup>

(4) Fourth, exegetical methodology is, in its own right, a notable issue. We are grateful to Dr. Piper for the exegetical approach he has taken to the subject of imputation. If the doctrine is to be established, it must be on the basis of texts. Yet it is just the assumptions underlying our respective attempts at exegesis that have surfaced in this interchange. Particularly troubling is Piper’s repudiation, or at least deprecation, of a biblical-theological framework of interpretation, called by him the “new paradigm.” As I read him, his preference is for a systematic-theological/confessional entrée into the Pauline passages.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> See B. Byrne, “Living Out the Righteousness of God: The Contribution of Rom 6:1-8:13 to an Understanding of Paul’s Ethical Presuppositions,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981), 557-81.

<sup>106</sup> Motyer, “Righteousness,” 48.

<sup>107</sup> Martyn, *Galatians*, 250.

<sup>108</sup> McGrath, “Justification,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 518. See also McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 355-453; Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, chapters 3 and 6; J. Armstrong, “The Obedience of Faith,” *Trust and Obey: Obedience and the Christian*, edited by D. Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 79-117; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 334-89; J. M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians*, *Studies of the New Testament and Its World* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 236; cf. S. McKnight, *Galatians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 119.

<sup>109</sup> Piper illustrates his convictions about imputation on pp. 63-64. On the promise that his son would clean up his room, he is allowed to go the game that evening. However, the promise is not kept, and so the father cleans up the room for him and then “credits” the clean room to the son’s account. To be sure, such may be “grace” or kindness, but to credit a clean room to one who did not in fact do the work is simply a legal fiction. It is no wonder that Protestantism has always been vulnerable to this charge. Contra Piper, if we are exonerated before the bar of God’s justice, it is because *in Christ* we have *truly* become righteous people, not because of anything intrinsic in ourselves, but because Christ has *actually* clothed us with the robe of *his righteousness*.

<sup>110</sup> This comes as something of a surprise considering the advantage to which Piper was able to use *Heilsgeschichte* in his study of *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

Reformed people have resisted the word “new” at least since the time of Spurgeon’s famous dictum that anything new in theology cannot be true. A case in point is the knee jerk reaction of many to the “New Perspective” on Paul in his relation to Second Temple Judaism. However, I would call attention to another famous dictum, that of one of Spurgeon’s theological forebears, the Puritan pastor, John Robinson. According to Robinson, new light is always breaking forth from the Word of God, and it is in that spirit that I would maintain that a great deal of light has been shed on the Bible since the inception of the biblical theological movement. Many conservatives have been suspicious of biblical theology as a discipline because of its academic roots in the Enlightenment.<sup>111</sup> Yet it is none other than biblical theology, or a salvation-historical methodology, that has given rise to numerous insights that would have remained in obscurity otherwise. As pioneered by the likes of Geerhardus Vos, and furthered by evangelicals such as Herman Ridderbos and George Ladd, biblical theology has been one of the gifts of God to the modern church.<sup>112</sup>

In the words of Vos, we may say that the Bible is “a historical book full of dramatic interest.” To quote the whole passage: “Biblical theology [a branch of exegetical theology] imparts new life and freshness to the truth by showing it to us in its original historic setting. The Bible is not a dogmatic handbook but a historical book full of dramatic interest. Familiarity with the history of revelation will enable us to utilize all this dramatic interest.”<sup>113</sup> Accordingly, the doctrines of justification and the righteousness of God take on a new life and a new excitement when viewed against the backdrop of God’s determination to remain true to his covenant in delivering his people from the house of bondage. His righteousness *is* his saving activity when he springs into action to defend, save and vindicate his own. Yet so much of this dynamic is lost with the *loci, ordo salutis*, systematizing approach. The Scriptures thus appraised are indeed reduced to a “dogmatic handbook.”

In closing, it must be placed beyond all doubt that imputation as a concept is hardly objectionable: what evangelical could, at least with any degree of consistency, protest the notion that Christ has become our righteousness in the gospel? But as pertains to a strict doctrine of imputation, exegesis of texts must be the deciding factor. It has been the contention of this paper that exegesis will steer us away from imputation to union with Christ.

It is just because fidelity to the text is of utmost importance that I must stress that the contemporary resistance to traditional notions of imputation is not an “attack” (as claimed by Wayne Grudem, on the back cover of the book); nor is it an “assault,” as Piper himself maintains (p. 80). Quite the contrary, it is an endeavor to hear the text speak on its own terms within its own context. It is particularly disturbing that Dr. Piper (p. 70, n. 16) equates the proponents of the “new paradigm” with those who “erode truth and clarity,” who “practice cunning” and “tamper with the Word of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). One hopes that he does not mean this literally, because later in 2 Corinthians, Paul says of these people: “such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15a). Is such language really applicable to those who take another view of imputation?!

In the spirit of “iron sharpening iron,” it is hoped that this interaction will begin to bring “Beroeans” together in a mutual quest for understanding “the mind of Christ.”

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<sup>111</sup> See G. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 13-28.

<sup>112</sup> As evidenced by the insights of a fresh volume of essays, *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, edited by S. J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).

<sup>113</sup> Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 17.