

IMPUTATION OR UNION WITH CHRIST? A REJOINDER TO JOHN PIPER

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1. Introduction

The ensuing pages comprise a rejoinder to John Piper's response to my "Imputation or Union with Christ: A Response to John Piper," *Reformation and Revival Journal* 12 (2003), 45-113.¹ That extended review article was a reaction to Piper's book, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002). Dr. Piper's response to my critique appears in same issue of *Reformation and Revival Journal* (pp. 121-27). Since the publication of Piper's book, there has appeared *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates?* eds. Mark Husbards and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove/Leicester: InterVarsity/Apollos, 2004). Within this symposium, two papers are especially pertinent to the present exchange: R. H. Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness" (pp. 17-45), and D. A. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Discourse" (pp. 46-78).

Because the prime purpose of this essay is to respond to Piper, the interaction with Gundry and Carson has been confined to the endnotes, some of which are rather discursive, particularly in regard to Carson. Because Carson quotes from an "unpublished letter" of Mark Seifrid containing criticisms of my views of sin and perfection, I have replied to Seifrid in the final segment of this paper. In numerous regards, Gundry's assessment of Piper's book runs parallel to my own, and no attempt has been made to reference all the areas of overlap. These are readily discernible to any reader of our respective treatments of imputation.² The disagreements with Carson are similarly numerous, but many of these have been addressed in the original response to Piper and in this rejoinder to him. Mainly, my answer to Carson pertains to his critique of my earlier reply to Piper.

2. Rejoinder to John Piper

I will follow Piper's lead by getting straight to Paul's use of Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3-5. In so doing, I would place a premium on the setting of Abraham's pilgrimage of faith that reaches a climactic point in the declaration that the patriarch was a righteous man, particularly as the Abraham narrative has a decided bearing on Paul's use of the Greek verb *logizomai* in Romans 4. In a nutshell, it is *the story of Abraham* that determines the meaning of Genesis 15:6, which in turn determines Paul's meaning in Romans 4.³

The story of Abraham in Genesis extends from 11:27 to 25:11. As a whole, this portion of Genesis may be fairly regarded as the recitation of a new creation. It is on this note that the stories commence, with the call of the patriarch. As depicted by Walter Bruegemann:

The one who calls the worlds into being now makes a second call. This call is specific. Its object is identifiable in history. The call is addressed to aged Abraham and barren Sarah. The purpose of the call is to fashion an alternative community in creation gone awry, to embody in human history the power of the blessing. It is the hope of God that in this new family all human history can be brought to the unity and harmony intended by the one who calls.⁴

The basic plot moves from tension to unexpected resolution, from the promise of Genesis 12:1-3 to its reiteration in Genesis 22:15-18. To make a long story very short, the tension/resolution motif surfaces at four strategic junctures in this implementation of the Abraham tradition.

(1) The story line commences with the breakaway of the new community from the old, thereby signaling the radical newness of what has happened with the call of Abraham. Abraham's trust in Yahweh is challenged as he is compelled to leave behind all that is familiar, and especially to forsake the most intimate and cherished of human relationships (12:1-9). At this point, the ideas of land, heir, and new beginning are introduced and made mutually interdependent. Abraham's faith-response is sealed by his willingness to leave his home and family and go wherever Yahweh commands. Joshua 24:2 embodies the tradition that the family of Terah "served other gods," before Yahweh took Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him into Canaan. *Jubilees* 12:1-5 picks up on this reference and places in Abraham's mouth a protestation against idolatry, which, however, his father and brothers choose to disregard. Shortly thereafter, Abraham burns "the house of idols" (vv. 12-14), prays that his seed may be established forever (vv. 16-21), and is then called into the land of promise (vv. 22-24). Joshua and *Jubilees* thus place Genesis 12:1-9 within proximity of Abraham's decision to turn from idols and serve the God of Israel.

(2) Chap. 15 reprises the centrality of Abraham's faith, this time as he is confronted with the reality of his continued childlessness. In order to assure the patriarch that he will not let his promise fail, the Lord swears a self-maledictory oath.

(3) Chap. 17 records the circumcision of the Abrahamic community, which henceforth serves as the sign of Yahweh's covenant. The irony of the situation is intensified by God's renaming of the barren Sarai, who from now on is to be known as Sarah (v. 15). After the promise of a seed is restated with reference to her (v. 16), Abraham laughs in temporary unbelief at his age and that of his wife and pleads that Ishmael might live in Yahweh's sight (vv. 17-18). God refuses, however, and confirms his intention to bring to pass his covenant promises through Isaac (vv. 19-21).

(4) Abraham is put to the ultimate test when he is commanded by Yahweh to sacrifice Isaac (chap. 22). The tension of promise and fulfillment is finally resolved when the angel of Yahweh declares that Abraham fears God, as evidenced by his refusal to withhold his only son (v. 12). The climax of "the generations of Terah" (Genesis 11:27) is thus achieved: Yahweh reiterates his promise to bless Abraham and make him the father of a multitude of descendants (vv. 15-18).

These episodes represent, so to speak, the four "mountain peaks" of the testing of Abraham's faith. The center of gravity of each is Abraham's family relations. In the first, the patriarch is compelled to leave home and kindred and strike out on his own. Given the importance of family solidarity in the ancient East, this was a move of no inconsiderable moment: it entailed nothing less than a repudiation of his own relations and their manner of life. From this time onward, Abraham is totally dependent on Yahweh for sustenance, protection, and the establishment of a new family unit. The second portrays the growing, though understandable, frustration of Abraham's continued childlessness. Genesis 15:3 gives voice to this frustration and intimates for the first time that Abraham would be happy to have an heir by other means than waiting patient on the promise. Even after the renewal of the promise, as accompanied by an oath, Abraham refuses to wait, choosing rather to produce offspring by Hagar the Egyptian (chap. 16). By the third episode, the frustration has mounted to the point of incredulity: How can an aged couple possibly parent a child? Abraham feels no choice but to cry, "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!" Finally, there is the threat that the long-awaited seed will be taken away—by Yahweh himself—and with him the hope for the future. It might appear, at least at first sight, that God intended to thwart his own purposes.

In sum, it is within the multilayered development of the promise/fulfillment tension of the Abraham story that Genesis 15:6 takes its place. The verse, falling within the second episode of the patriarch's trial of testing, is a thread of the fabric of Genesis 11:27-25:11.

Its interpretation, consequently, cannot be abstracted from the book's overall presentation of "Abraham our forefather" (Romans 4:1).

It is just this complex Old Testament background that Piper overlooked in his original treatment of Genesis 15:6 and continues to do so in his response. By approaching the text with a hermeneutical and (systematic-) theological agenda in tow, Piper assumes a meaning for the verb *logizomai*. The problem is compounded by his failure to appreciate the significance of the Hebrew idiom underlying Paul's Greek of Romans 4:3-5. In context, both literary and linguistic, the words "it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (*elogisthê autô eis dikaiosunên*) embody a declaration that Abraham, in Genesis 15:1-6, proves to be a faithful person, trusting Yahweh's promise after all, in spite of temporary doubts.

Piper's reiteration of the familiar view that Genesis 15:6, as employed by Paul, marked Abraham's "conversion" is necessary for him to sustain his exegesis of Romans 4. However, even a causal reading of Genesis precludes any such assumption. Abraham was already a believer by the time of Genesis 15:6. If further proof is need, it is provided by the explicit statement of Hebrews 11:8. Referring to Genesis 12, the author reminds his readers that: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going." To postulate, as some must, that the faith in question was something short of "saving faith" is a rather desperate expedient to evade the plain sense of the text. That Abraham was a believer before Genesis 15:6 is simply confirmed by the fact that he is marked out as a worshipper of Yahweh by virtue of his erection of an altar to the Lord and calling on his name (Genesis 12:8). Indeed, the entirety of the patriarch's deportment from Genesis 12-15 is befitting that of a faithful and obedient servant.

In the Old Testament, by far the most striking parallel to Genesis 15:6 is Psalm 106:31, the only other occurrence in the Hebrew Bible of the formula, "it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Psalm 106 as a whole is a reproach of Israel's idolatry in the wilderness. However, in the midst of this lengthy indictment there is one glaring exception to the rule:

Then Phinehas stood up and interposed,
and the plague was stayed.
And that has been reckoned to him as righteousness
from generation to generation.

The reference is to Numbers 25:13. The story of Numbers 25 opens on the note of Israel's fornication with the daughters of Moab, who "invited the people to the sacrifice of their gods, and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods" (v. 2). The episode reaches its dramatic height when Phinehas slays an Israelite man and a Midianite woman engaged in illicit sex. He, according to the historian, was zealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel. The wrath of Yahweh was thus averted by the removal of its cause. Because of his heroism, Phinehas became the prototype of those who in subsequent Israelite history were to be "zealous for the law." The author of 1 Maccabees in particular conceives of Mattathias, the father of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, as a latter-day Phinehas, turning away God's jealous anger by the execution of the unfaithful (1 Maccabees 2:26, 54; cf. Sirach 45:23-24; 4 Maccabees 18:12).⁵

The mention of Phinehas in Psalm 106 is especially pertinent to our look into Genesis 15:6, not only because of v. 31's verbally similar "it was reckoned to him as righteousness," but mainly because Phinehas is placed in conspicuous juxtaposition to the disobedient (idolatrous) of the wilderness generation. More precisely, v. 31 concludes that because of Phinehas' zeal for God righteousness has been reckoned to him from "generation to generation." Ziesler is right in classifying righteousness here as "covenant behaviour."⁶ When, therefore, Phinehas burned with zeal for the Lord and slew the

adulterous couple, he was regarded by Yahweh as a covenant-keeper by virtue of his abhorrence of the idolatry of the Moabites and his vengeance on the transgressors.

Apart from the factor of violence, which is irrelevant to Genesis 15:6, Abraham and Phinehas are a matched pair: both are *considered to be* “righteous” in that they are faithful to Yahweh and his revealed will; both, consequently, are said to be covenant-keepers, because, in point of fact, they are. To be sure, it was Phinehas’ *zeal* for Yahweh which was looked upon as covenant faithfulness, whereas it was Abraham’s *faith* which was reckoned to be righteousness. However, both zeal and faith have the same referent—the covenant of Yahweh. In point of fact, both are the two sides of the same coin: zeal is the product of faith. Nevertheless, it is precisely Abraham’s positioning before the law that enables Paul to make him the paradigm for Gentiles who come to faith in Christ.

Moving to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the document known as 4QMMT, “Some of the Works of Torah,” simply confirms the above data drawn from the Old Testament. This “Halakic Letter” was apparently written by a leader of the Qumran community explaining why the sect was splitting from the establishment in Jerusalem and withdrawing into the desert. Its author encourages his readers that he has written “what we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen [that] you possess insight and knowledge of the Law” (cols. 27-28). At the end of his letter, the writer challenges his readers with a pair of exhortations. First, “understand all these things and beseech Him to set your counsel straight” (cols. 28-29). Second, “keep yourself away from evil thoughts and the counsel of Belial” (col. 29). In other words, separate yourself from those who have infected you with their evil thoughts and teaching. The addressees and their associates were perceived to have expressed a willingness to “consort with the enemy.”

The purpose of the document can be paraphrased in these terms: “You and I know that the enemy are deadly wrong. Let us, who know and observe the Mosaic Torah, separate ourselves from these abominable sinners.” This separation from the unclean sinners and an adherence to the law will have two results. First, “you shall rejoice at the end of time when you find the essence [literally, “some”] of our words true” (col. 30). The messianic era, it is implied elsewhere (col. 21), was soon to arrive. Second, “*it will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him.*” Such is “to your own benefit and to that of Israel” (cols. 31-32). Here, the recipients of the letter will be considered righteous people if they conform themselves to the sect’s conception of godly behavior.

This provocative final statement has a familiar ring to readers of the New Testament: Genesis 15:6 and the paradigm of righteous Abraham as advanced by Paul in Romans and Galatians (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6).⁷ However, the Qumran author does not offer righteousness on the basis of “faith alone,” but rather “in that you have done what is right and good before Him” (col. 31). According to context, it is the “works of the Law” that fuel such a reckoning. In agreement with the above observations on Phinehas, Abegg maintains that it was not Abraham but Phinehas who provided the model for 4QMMT’s employment of the language of “reckoning righteousness.”⁸ No doubt, he is exactly right, simply because Phinehas and the entire zealot tradition (as spearheaded by Mattathias) was predicated on the premise of “zeal for the law.”⁹ By contrast, Abraham can be the father of all who believe because he had no connection with the law. In any event, the reckoning of righteousness, as confirmed by 4QMMT, pertains to an actual quality on the part of the readers which is looked upon as righteousness. The same is true of the numerous rabbinic references to Genesis 15:6 and Psalm 106:31.¹⁰

All in all, it is the Old Testament/Jewish materials that form the context and define the semantic significance of the reckoning of righteousness. In virtually every instance where the Hebrew and Greek forms of reckoning occur, a value judgment is made, a judgment based on the actual performance or non-performance of individuals.¹¹ But as I endeavored to stress in the original response to Piper, it is *in Christ* that one becomes the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21) and thereby is reckoned as righteousness. This

is the furthest thing from “self-achievement” or synergism, because righteousness is reckoned by faith alone in Christ, apart from “the works of the law.”

Returning to Romans 4, Piper complains that my reading of *logizomai* will not do because of the “business analogy” of vv. 4-5. If I may repeat my previous observation, “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.”¹² Note that I conceded the possibility that Paul *may* be drawing on the imagery of a commercial transaction. The difference is that Piper is quite sure that such is the case, whereas I merely conceded the possibility. In point of fact, Paul’s main focus is covenant relationships, not business. The Hebrew Bible is certainly not oblivious to the reality of wages paid in return for work; but even that, among fellow Israelites, transpires within the parameters of the covenant. It is very telling that Piper and others are much more inclined to invoke secular commercial categories than the Hebrew covenant as the framework of Paul’s thought. But at least it brings to the fore the main methodological difference between us: a dogmatic/confessional reading of the text versus a historical or biblical-theological reading.

The control-factor over Paul’s choice of words is Genesis 15:6. While Romans 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, just because of faith’s object.¹³ Piper consistently suppresses this datum. 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. The radical thing in Paul, however, is that peoples of all kinds can be looked upon as faithful obediently 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).

In keeping with the “business analogy” interpretation, Piper consistently renders *logizomai* as “credit.”¹⁴ However, both the RSV and the NRSV translate as “reckon.”¹⁵ The difference might appear at first glance to be hair-splitting—but it isn’t. To “reckon a wage” means that the wage is *calculated in certain terms*. The question is a qualitative one, as underscored by the preposition *kata*, “according to.” That is to say, On what basis is the wage to be paid? And the answer is: for “the one who works” the reckoning takes place “according to debt,” not “according to grace.” On the other hand, for “the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly” his faith is “reckoned as” or “considered to be” righteousness.

If it was not clear before, it must be clarified now that in principle Paul certainly does preclude any kind of “works,” Jewish covenantal (“covenantal nomism”) or otherwise, as the basis of present justification. The gift character of God’s righteousness was never called into question.¹⁶ But for the sake of historical exegesis, it must be added that in pursuing his objective in Romans 4, Paul predicates “ungodly” (*asebês*) of Abraham in the same sense that Jews of this period would have used the term, i.e., *uncircumcised and non-Torah observant*. By way of preaching Paul’s text, we may certainly say that “ungodly” depicts all those outside of Christ, in their idolatry and rebellion against God the creator. However, Piper and Carson have missed the irony of the historical situation: the same Abraham who was confirmed as a righteous person in Genesis 15:6 would have been deemed “ungodly” by many of his first-century descendants!¹⁷ But by a simple “back to the Bible” tack, Paul is able to bypass a considerable layer of tradition and assert that Abraham and the nations are in the same boat. Consequently, analogously to former, the latter need only put their faith in Christ. In blunt terms, Gentiles can forget about the Torah! This is the lead-item on Paul’s agenda in Romans 4.

It comes as no surprise that Piper reprises his illustration of imputation from *Counted Righteous* (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 and then “credits” the clean room to the son’s account. My reaction is the same as before: such “imputation” may be a form of “grace” or kindness, but to credit a clean room to one who did not in fact do the work is simply a legal fiction. 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* (Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16). What saves justification from “justification” is none other than union with Christ.¹⁸ We are declared righteous because we really are righteous, rather than being declared righteous when we really are not.

It is precisely at this juncture that I would press again for union with Christ, in distinction to imputation, as the actual mode of our becoming the righteousness of God. Piper wonders why I insist on making union with Christ an alternative to imputation. In response, it certainly did not go unnoticed that Piper affirms that union with Christ connects us with the divine righteousness (*Counted Righteous*, 51, 84). Rather than an alternative to imputation, he contends, union with Christ is the way it comes about (although it is equally noticeable that the latter received remarkably short shrift as compared to the former). Fair enough, but the premise stands only on the foundational supposition that imputation is demonstrable from Pauline texts. And that, of course, is exactly the issue under debate. I pose union with Christ as an alternative to imputation because there is abundant exegetical evidence for the former but none for the latter. Of course, Piper thinks otherwise; but readers will have to judge for themselves the merits of his case and mine respectively.¹⁹

Perhaps one point does require further clarification. Piper challenges my employment of the phrase “alien righteousness,” which, he says, is misleading because “alien righteousness” bespeaks imputation. This criticism may be legitimate, but with one notable qualification. I used “alien” in the strict sense of the term, i.e., “of another.” The righteousness in question is not intrinsically ours; it is Christ’s. He is the “other” who clothes us with his righteousness. If, however, readers were confused on this point, I am grateful for the opportunity to correct a possible misimpression. In any event, Piper’s allegation that I do not agree with the “historic Protestant view” is at best an oversimplification, because there is no ironclad uniformity among Protestants as regards the relation of faith and righteousness,²⁰ a consideration that should at least temper claims that the gospel consists in imputation.²¹

Speaking of clarifications, I did not use the word “impartation” in contrast to “imputation,” as attributed to me by Piper. He does correctly quote me as saying: “Paul...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.” “Disseminate” means only that Christ’s obedience or perseverance is replicated in all those who are in union with him. In distinction to Piper, it is true that my reading of Romans 5 is very much couched in non-imputational terms. But the intention was certainly not to evoke any notion of “infused righteousness” or “self-righteousness:” it was merely to say, as I did say, that Paul does not contemplate the obedience of Christ as an end in itself. *We also* have become obedient by virtue of the obedient one—Christ.²²

As represented by Piper, my understanding of the relation of justification to sanctification requires even further clarification. True, I did state that “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’.” It is also true that I think that air-tight distinctions between justification and sanctification, *à la* an *ordo salutis*, have been formulated in the interests of the conflict with Rome. However, it is inaccurate to assert, as Piper does, that, on the biblical-theological model, “justification includes sanctification.” It is more proper to say that justification opens the door to the

covenant, within which sanctification occurs. With the various refinements scholars might want to make to N. T. Wright's stance on justification and the covenant, the justification of the people of God cannot be abstracted from their identity as members of the covenant. And membership in the covenant entails *ipso facto* the holiness of the covenant and its God.

It is in assessing the relation of justification and sanctification that, once more, methodological issues arise. In my teaching days, I would tell students that if one embraces an *ordo salutis*, then one is obliged to distinguish sharply between justification and sanctification, simply because separate entities are in view. If, however, one follows an *historia salutis*, such a bifurcation is illegitimate because justification and *definitive sanctification* coincide at the point of conversion to Christ or entry into the (new) covenant. It still amazes me that students in the Reformed tradition are mostly unaware of John Murray's essay, "Definitive Sanctification," in which Murray demonstrates that the verbal forms of sanctification-language refer specifically to the passage from death to life.²³ Definitive sanctification means that we can never relapse into our former idolatry "in Adam." In my response to Piper's book, I also cited a passage from Murray's Romans commentary in which he comes remarkably close to the understanding of Romans 6:7 advocated by the proponents of the "new paradigm" (Piper's phrase), i.e., that justification entails liberation from sin.²⁴ It is disappointing that Piper does not even acknowledge this datum.

In his denial that justification comprehends liberation from the power of sin, Piper is right that there is more than one way "to construe the fact that justified people are obedient people." And given his set of assumptions, the justification/sanctification model is a viable one. Yet his further allegation that I champion the Roman Catholic understanding of Romans 2:13, "because it has been vindicated by the newer biblical-theological approach to justification," is very wide of the mark indeed. My exposition of that passage never promoted a Catholic understanding of justification or that of any other tradition. The purpose was exegesis and the drawing of appropriate conclusions, quite apart from the Catholic/Protestant debate.²⁵ The case presented was neither Catholic nor Protestant as such. It is certainly worthy of notice that two recent Protestant scholars, Kent Yinger and Simon Gathercole, have both interpreted Romans 2 in terms of an actual end-time justification.²⁶ But I hasten to add that I certainly do not embrace the classic Tridentine doctrine of justification, especially in view of A. A. Hoekema's exposé of its shortcomings.²⁷ In this regard, Piper's remarks decidedly convey the wrong impression.

I accept Piper's caveat that biblical theology is as much a system as systematic theology and that is just as complex and controlling. This is a timely warning, because all exegetes bring preunderstanding to the text. Rudolf Bultmann, no devotee of systematic theology, was right that exegesis without presuppositions is impossible.²⁸ Nevertheless, we all work with a paradigm, and it is a question of the most appropriate paradigm for the materials in question. As in my reply to Piper's book, I would reiterate here that the historical reading of Scripture is in keeping with *the Bible's own story line*.²⁹ At the end of the day, Old and New Testaments are not dogmatic handbooks, but a story reaching its climax in Christ.³⁰ Therefore, doctrines such as justification, sanctification, and perseverance must be read against the backdrop of the prophetic Scriptures, particularly in light of such motifs as return from exile and the vindication of the faithful people of God.

In fairness, Piper acknowledges that biblical theology serves as a kind of watchdog over what I would call a "runaway systematic theology." However, his contention that a biblical-theological paradigm comes from only one part of the Bible strikes me as curious. To be sure, some documents are composed in a mainly non-historical style, such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. But even these books, in which history recedes into the background, assume a place within the continuum of salvation history. There is nothing purely "topical" as abstracted from the mighty works of Yahweh in history. In a nutshell, the Bible *is* the book of the acts of God: it is story by definition. In practical terms, contra Piper, this means that a salvation-historical methodology, *rightly and consistently implemented*, will not produce incorrect interpretations of any portions of Scripture.

Our differing paradigms surface again in Piper’s criticism of my understanding of “redemption” in Romans 3:24. As expected, he is disinclined to view redemption against the backdrop of return from exile and the liberation of Israel from bondage. By way of rejoinder to me, Piper refers to Ephesians 1:7: “In him we have redemption through his blood, *the forgiveness of our trespasses*” (italics his). Then it is rather baldly stated that “forgiveness is not liberation,” along with Piper’s skepticism that the new exodus motif governs what Paul has in mind here. Yet while it is impossible in this forum to defend in detail the prophetic framework of Paul’s language, I would simply call to mind that the return from exile, according to Jeremiah 31:34, is envisaged precisely as the time when the definitive forgiveness of sins would take place: “I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.” This promise of forgiveness is contextualized in none other than Jeremiah’s majestic vision of the glorious future of the exiles returned from Babylon (Jeremiah 31-33).

This underlying salvation-historical hermeneutic pays very rich dividends, when the prophets of Israel are allowed their place as the most natural matrix of Pauline theology. Familiar doctrines like justification, sanctification, and redemption take on hues and colors, richness and complexities, and particularly *applications* lacking in the flat, one dimensional *loci* approach to Scripture. Since it is just Paul who explicitly roots his gospel in the “prophetic Scriptures” (Romans 1:2; 16:26; Ephesians 3:1-7), it is hardly arbitrary or artificial to read “redemption” against the background of return from exile. Forgiveness is no mere pronouncement, but the blessed condition of liberation from sin and its devastating power. Would that more preachers would dilate on forgiveness in all its *practical* salvation-historical ramifications!

In winding down, several other matters are in need of some response. For one, Piper thinks my treatment of “the righteousness of God” is too broad and neglects aspects of divine righteousness in both Testaments. He makes a certain point, given that it would require a volume in itself—and a rather large volume at that—to canvass righteousness in all its many occurrences and nuances.³¹ In my response to *Counted Righteous*, the immediate object was simply to press that righteousness is God’s “saving activity” in *certain texts*. What I said was this:

To cut to the chase, “righteousness” in *these passages* [from the Prophets and Psalms], 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. 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...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).³²

Perhaps I could add that elsewhere I have sought to address righteousness as “retributive justice,” especially as Mark Seifrid has endeavored to make this dimension of righteousness paradigmatic in opposition to righteousness as “covenant faithfulness.”³³

Second, Piper is dissatisfied with my take on the verb “justify” (*dikaioō*) because it is “too broad and puts a construction on the word that goes against its basic meaning and is not demanded by any of the New Testament texts.” This is hardly the place to reproduce the data already presented in my prior response to him. Suffice it to say that the presence of the verb in Acts 13:39 and Romans 6:7, especially as paralleled by “liberate” (*eleutheroō*) in 6:18, argues in the direction of a broader semantic range of *dikaioō* than merely “declare

righteous.”³⁴ Several commentators were cited as favoring the translation of *dikaioō* as “freed from sin” in these passages. Again, it is disappointing that Piper does not acknowledge this or even attempt to provide anything like an exegetical rejoinder.

Third, I do appreciate Dr. Piper’s agreement that the person of Christ is paramount. And he is right that imputation *ipso facto* does not distance one from Christ. If any readers have received that impression, I am happy to take this occasion to provide further elucidation. Moreover, he is altogether correct that *we ourselves* perform no “transactions”—that is entirely Christ’s doing. But even with this concession, it remains that the grace of God does empower us to do his will. There is what Gordon Fee calls “God’s empowering presence.”³⁵ The only danger is when “performance” is wrenched from its setting in the covenant and made the basis of an autosoterism, as is the case with the various cults. But when kept within the context of covenant, union with Christ, and the eschatological gift of the Spirit, the “works” of the believer are but the fruit of the Spirit that accompany perseverance (Luke 8:15; Galatians 5:22-24).

I would reiterate from my original response that my chief concern is not imputation as such. In the conclusion of that essay, I remarked that 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?³⁶ Rather, my problems are in those areas that lie adjacent to imputation: the preeminence of the person of Christ with whom we are in union, a salvation-historical hermeneutic as a control over exegesis, and justification as liberation from the power of sin. And once more, I would plead that the actual showcase of the apostle’s thought is *not* justification. It is, rather, union with Christ or the “in Christ” experience.³⁷

3. Reply to Mark Seifrid

Toward the end of his paper, Carson quite correctly observes that Paul does not think of sin and evil *primarily* in legal terms: the origin of evil is bound up with rebellion, idolatry, and the “de-godding” of God. “What draws down God’s wrath, above all things, is the obscenity of competition—for there is no God but God.” This is followed up with the comment: “Sin is more than the breaking of rules (though the ‘rules’ clarify and help to quantify the horrendous breach of idolatry).”³⁸

It is in this connection that Carson quotes a paragraph from an “unpublished letter” of Mark Seifrid:

I shall not here pursue his [Garlington’s] dilution of the demands of the mosaic covenant by appeal to a certain understanding of “perfection” except to note that he stands at odds with Paul, James, the author of Hebrews, Jesus, the prophets of Israel and Moses himself. Other than that, he is in perfect agreement with Scripture. He doesn’t understand that our acts of sin are expressions of unbelief and the desire to annihilate God. This desire resides in all our hearts. If it were not there, we would sin no more. The Law merely exposes us for what we are. He should let it do its work, because apart from it Christ’s work means nothing.³⁹

For Carson, this not too strong in light of my supposed “insistence that the Old Testament does not demand ‘utter righteousness, utter holiness’.”⁴⁰

If I may say, not only is Seifrid’s evaluation too strong, it is completely wide of the mark, so much so that it calls forth the following response. If there has ever been instance of not recognizing oneself in the portraiture of another, this is it. What impresses me straight-off is that Seifrid and Carson provide no documentation for such a reading of my materials. I can only surmise that the prime reference is to portions of my monograph on Romans, the essay on Galatians 3:10-13, and possibly the review of Seifrid’s contribution

to *Justification and Variegated Nomism*.⁴¹ Assuming that such is the case, I would like very much to set the record straight.

(1) Had Seifrid and Carson given *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance* a evenhanded reading, they would have taken on board chapter four: “The Obedience of Christ and the Obedience of the Christian” (pp. 72-109). Integral to this chapter is the proposition that man’s quintessential problem is idolatry, an idolatry committed by the first Adam that has bequeathed to all his posterity a condition of apostasy, as everyone “in Adam” is born into this creation devoid of the Spirit of God. Although I did not use the phrase, this is “total inability,” the doleful and hopeless plight of man outside of Christ. Consequently, individual sins are but symptomatic of the underlying problem of idolatry. Furthermore, chapter two of the book (pp. 32-43) applies the idolatry motif to Israel. One may agree or disagree with the precise thesis of that chapter, but the fact remains that I endeavored to trace Israel’s failure back to her repetition of Adam’s primal rebellion against God. In the case of Adam and Israel respectively, self-idolatry is the root of evil. I would add to the mix that the article on Galatians 3:10-13 labors to show that each of the Old Testament passages quoted by Paul has idolatry lurking in the background. All acts of sin stem from the worship of other deities than Yahweh.⁴² Therefore, on the basis of what I have actually written, I would beg to differ with Seifrid’s allegation that I don’t understand that our acts of sin are expressions of unbelief and the desire to annihilate God.

Seifrid does a similar thing in his *Christ, Our Righteousness*.⁴³ In responding to my treatment of Romans 7 in *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance* (pp. 110-43), Seifrid complains that the weakness of my work resides in its “failure to come to grips with the judgment of God upon fallen humanity in Paul’s thought.” For him, I embrace the “anthropological optimism of early Judaism,” so that, in my reading of Paul, Adam bequeaths to his descendants merely “a disadvantage,” namely, the absence of the Spirit, but not guilt. He continues: “Our ‘wretchedness’ is no longer our just condemnation, but our temporary lack of power to do what we otherwise would. The human being is basically free and good, but weak. What need is there then for the cross?” Romans 7, consequently, is for me “a narrative of struggle, rather than the recognition of the power of sin.” By the time Seifrid is through, my theology has been recreated in the image of Pelagius!

Seifrid’s misreading of my comments on sin, etc., revolves around one fundamental mistake, namely, the failure to discern my argument respecting Romans 7:14-25. In line with historic Reformed exegesis of the passage, I understand Paul to be writing of the Christian who struggles against indwelling sin, not generic humanity placed at a mere “disadvantage” by Adam (“disadvantage” is Seifrid’s word; I never used it). True, I don’t think that Adam’s guilt is imputed to his descendants, but Seifrid merges and confuses separate chapters of *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*. In the exegesis of Romans 7:14-25 (chapter five), “weakness” pertains to *the believer*, who is flesh and Spirit at the same time.⁴⁴ Seifrid has extrapolated these remarks directed toward man in Christ and has applied them illegitimately to man in Adam. But in light of chapter four of the book, Adam and Christ, to *impute* to me the position that “the human being is basically free and good, but weak” is to engage in hermeneutical jujitsu, no less! If I may be forthright, to transmute remarks about those who possess the Spirit into a declaration concerning those who don’t is an irresponsible handling of these materials. As for the “anthropological optimism of early Judaism,” this is a construction placed on the materials by Seifrid. Jewish writers were anything but optimistic about the nations;⁴⁵ and their assessment of themselves assumed the framework of the covenant; they were hardly Pelagians before Pelagius.⁴⁶

(2) There is the matter of my alleged insistence that the Old Testament does not demand “utter righteousness, utter holiness.” In part, this misreading of my intentions stems from Seifrid’s take on portions of *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, as addressed above. But since no documentation is provided, I can only assume that the other reference is to “Role Reversal and Paul’s Use of Scripture in Galatians 3:10-13.” In the essay, it is true enough that I maintain that the law of Moses never required perfect obedience. Yet it is

a proposition that forms part and parcel of a larger field of discourse. The thesis of the article is that Paul brings passages from the Torah (Deuteronomy 27:26; Habakkuk 2:4; Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 21:23 respectively) to bear on his opponents in Galatia. In brief, these texts, which speak of idolatry and apostasy from the covenant, apply to the Judaizers because they are latter-day apostates from God's purposes in Christ. In their very observance of the law the opponents have not kept it, because they have not "upheld" it in its eschatological design, i.e., to point Israel to Jesus of Nazareth as the one who has done away with the barriers of separation between nations.

In the pursuit of this thesis, it was necessary to deal with the common interpretation that, in Galatians 3:10, there is a suppressed premise, namely, the law demands perfect obedience, but no one can actually render that obedience. This tradition of exegesis supposes that if one would be justified by the law, one must lead a sinless existence. As such, the law of Moses is perceived to be a kind of "covenant of works." By contrast, I maintain:

The "reach of the law" [Peter Craigie's phrase] is not perfect compliance with its demands, or anything approaching it, but fidelity to the God who graciously gave it to Israel.... Obedience to the Torah in the Hebrew Scriptures themselves (as distinct from later theologies) is never portrayed as an unobtainable goal. Rather, according to Deut 30:11-20, it is a thing within Israel's grasp ("this commandment...is not too hard for you, neither is it far off," v. 11). One is able to say this because..."keeping the law," "obedience," and such expressions, speak of perseverance, not sinless perfection.⁴⁷

Further on, I assert that the key issue, in the Torah and in Galatians, is perseverance versus apostasy, not sinless perfection. As stated, "the Judaizers are not under the curse because they have failed to keep the law 'perfectly,' but because they have proven defective in the central matter: fidelity to the God of Israel."⁴⁸

Apparently, from such sentiments Seifrid and Carson have deduced that my intention was to lower the standards of the covenant, so that "utter righteousness, utter holiness" are made optional. Just two points of clarification. One, it is repeatedly stated in the exegesis of the Torah passages cited by Paul that doing the will of the covenant Lord is paramount and indispensable: the faithful Israelite must flee idolatry and keep Yahweh's statutes and commandments with all his heart. No one can give this portion of the essay a fair reading and not come away with this impression. Two, an unbiased approach to these materials would have grasped the point: although the standard of the law was always complete conformity to the revealed will of God, perfection was never required *to remain in covenant standing*. The sacrificial system existed for the very purpose of covering the sin and failure of the believer; and the only sin that could separate a person from the covenant was apostasy. In his excellent study of Old Testament ethics, Gordon Wenham conveys the root of the matter:

Obviously the behaviour of the chief actors [of the Old Testament narratives] in many instances falls miserably short of the ideal, and they often suffer in some way for their mistakes. Yet it is clear too that they are not deserted by God despite their sinfulness. So there is a paradox in Old Testament narrative ethics: on the one hand God is terribly demanding, he looks for nothing less than godlike perfect behaviour, yet on the other, despite human failings, he does not forget his covenant loyalty to his people, and ultimately brings them through the suffering that their sin has brought about. Old Testament ethics are therefore as much about grace as about law: they declare that God, the all-holy, is also God, the all-merciful.⁴⁹

The same is true of the new covenant: the Christian strives for complete conformity to the image of Christ. Nevertheless, if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father; if we sin, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Seifrid may find it “paltry comfort,” but I, for one, find it enormously comforting that “notwithstanding our many failures, there is no condemnation as long we as desire to remain within the covenant bond, true to Christ the Lord.”⁵⁰

As much as anything else, it is pastorally important to lay to rest the myth that the Torah of Moses functioned as a “covenant of works,” for whatever reason such a formulation has been imposed on it. While one certainly agrees that there is an “utter righteousness, utter holiness,” for which every believer strives, is it likewise true that “we all stumble in many points” (James 3:2).⁵¹ A pietism that burdens the conscience unnecessarily by majoring on the observance of commandments and minoring on persevering faith is to be resisted at all costs. The problem with the various Jewish enclaves was not that they were “legalistic” but *pietistic*. The strenuous law-keeping of these groups, that often went beyond what is written, was grounded in a pietism that too often has been replicated in the history of the Christian church. In principle, I would hope that Seifrid and Carson agree, especially as it is Carson who writes that “sin is more than the breaking of rules (though the ‘rules’ clarify and help to quantify the horrendous breach of idolatry).”⁵² If the essence of sin is idolatry, it follows that the essence of righteousness is fidelity. God forgives our weaknesses; it is only apostasy that makes it impossible to be restored to repentance (Hebrews 6:4).⁵³

(3) There is, to be sure, a biblical doctrine of “perfection,” as per “Paul, James, the author of Hebrews, Jesus, the prophets of Israel and Moses himself.” The problem is that Seifrid and Carson function with a conception of perfection that is not really the biblical conception. I will leave it with a portion of my review of Seifrid’s essay in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*:⁵⁴

It is regrettable that Seifrid does not define “perfection” in biblical terms, leaving the impression with the general reader that the term is to be understood more or less as it is in English. But the fact of the matter is that in the Jewish milieu, as P. J. Du Plessis has shown, “perfection” is principally a “cultic” and “quantitative” term, indicating “wholeness, entirety and intactness.” “Perfection,” according to Du Plessis, is wholeness in one’s relationship to God.⁵⁵ D. Peterson adds that the concept is not formal or abstract. While conceding that perfection in the Old Testament is not essentially a moral concept, it does involve “*loving obedience to God* as the one who, in his mercy, has initiated the relationship with man.”⁵⁶ Therefore, to walk in perfection in all God’s ways is hardly “sinless perfection,” but rather a wholehearted commitment to honor the entirety of the Lord’s revealed will. Otherwise put, perfection is simply a David-like desire to seek God and follow his commandments with all one’s heart (Psalm 119:2, 10, 34, 69, 145).

As a final word, if I may speak frankly, the cause of Christ is not advanced by Christian teachers fixating on imaginary enemies and constructing straw men out of the honest endeavors of fellow believers to know his mind. In the end, to *impute* to other students of the Word unsound ideas, perhaps with whisperings of heresy, is a failure to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). I should think that “utter righteousness, utter holiness” demand, at the very minimum, *speaking the truth* and speaking it *in love* (Ephesians 4:15).⁵⁷ As we all endeavor rightly to divide the Word of truth, the bottom line is that theological tradition, even very fine tradition, is not Lord—only Christ is. *Sola Scriptura*.

¹ The piece is reprinted in my *Exegetical Essays*. 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 375-431.

² There are actually two areas of *disagreement* with Gundry. One is that I side with Piper and Carson in believing that it is specifically Christ's righteousness that becomes ours by virtue of union with him (see n. 36 below). The other is that Gundry maintains that 2 Corinthians 5:21 affirms the imputation of our sins to Christ ("Nonimputation," 18). My own understanding of that verse is stated in "Imputation or Union," 58-59, and will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that an exchange has taken place: Christ became what we are, in order that we might become what he is (M. D. Hooker, "Interchange in Christ," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 [1971], 352). Paul does not specify by what modality Christ was "made sin," though he is explicit that we have "become" the righteousness of God because of union with Christ. But perhaps unwittingly Gundry has provided a clue. He informs us that the verb *kathistêmi*, in Romans 5:19, means to "establish" by way of appointment, ordination, or making ("Nonimputation," 26). Thus, it is through Adam's disobedience that human beings "were counted" sinful, whereas through Christ's obedience they are "counted as righteous" (see n. 22 below). It may be, then, that there is an implicit Adam christology lurking behind 2 Corinthians 5:21. That is to say, on the cross Christ was looked upon and treated as the first Adam in his apostasy. That he endured death in a representative capacity is the least we can say (M. E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994], 1,441-42). But his representation and substitution take on a specifically Adamic character as he assumes the role of his predecessor and bears the curse placed on the first man when he fell away from the living God. Having made this association, I recalled (happily) that J. D. G. Dunn had already said the same thing decades ago (*Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* [London: SCM, 1980], 112-13).

³ The new book of F. Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), has demonstrated amply that Paul, in his letters, is retelling the story of the Pentateuch.

⁴ Bruegemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox), 105.

⁵ See M. Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A. D.* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 171-77; D. Garlington, *The Obedience of Faith: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/38 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), 113-14.

⁶ J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, Society for New Testament Monograph Series 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 181.

⁷ Carson ("Vindication," 56) cites a couple of passage from the *Mekhilta* (a midrash or commentary) on Exodus as evidence that in "Jewish exegesis" Genesis 15:6 was connected with Genesis 22, as providing a basis for Abraham's merit. From that, Carson postulates that Paul certainly knew of these traditions and was interpreting Genesis 15:6 in quite a different way to his upbringing. He then claims that I cite some Jewish texts to argue that what *Paul means* is precisely what *they mean*, i.e., in his words, "Abraham's faith is imputed to him as righteousness precisely because his faith showed him to be faithful to covenant and thus endowed with covenant righteousness." According to Carson, this reading domesticates Paul by attributing to him the meaning found in the Jewish texts and thus fails to take seriously the profoundly *polemical* context of Romans 3-4 (*ibid.*, n. 26, italics his). To Carson, I run the risk of "parallelomania" (the term coined by the Jewish scholar, Samuel Sandmel). Several matters arise here.

(1) Two passages in same document, the *Mekhilta*, hardly establish a trend in "Jewish exegesis." Martin Abegg cites several other rabbinic texts that allude to Genesis 15:6—and

none them presses a case for Abraham's merit, which, in any case, is not what Carson supposes it to be (Abegg, "4QMMT, Paul, and 'Works of the Law,'" *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature, ed. Peter Flint [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 209-12). Abegg's evidence is to the effect that the most prominent association of Genesis 15:6 is not with Genesis 22 but Psalm 106:31 and the zeal of Phinehas. For these authors, Abraham and Phinehas are a matched pair.

(2) Carson's texts, with whose traditions Paul was supposedly familiar, are later than Paul. That such traditions could have existed in his day is a distinct possibility. But the fact remains that the two texts cited by Carson postdate Paul, and one simply cannot be so sure that he was *au fait* with them. The texts to which I appealed (Sirach 44:20; *Damascus Document* 3:2; 2 *Baruch* 57:2) are much closer to Paul's actual lifetime and are concerned not to promote merit but the proposition that Abraham kept the law of Moses before Sinai.

(3) Carson ascribes to me just the opposite of what I argued from the Jewish texts. To begin, I certainly did not say that "Abraham's faith is *imputed* to him as righteousness." The whole point of the essay is to maintain that there is no imputation as such! What I said was that Abraham was regarded as (*logizomai eis*) a covenant keeper because of his perseverance in faith: he was looked upon as a righteous person because he was righteous (from the time of Genesis 12:1 onward). Most importantly for the argument of Romans 4, the genius of Paul's use of Genesis 15:6 is that he predicates righteousness of Abraham before his circumcision and the giving of the law. The Jewish materials, by rather stark contrast, make the patriarch out to be righteous by virtue of his devotion to the Torah. Paul thus uses Genesis 15:6 in a manner that radically distances him from the contemporary understanding of the relation of Abraham's righteousness to the law of Moses. Such being the case, I would maintain that I do indeed take seriously the polemic of Romans 3-4, just because that polemic is to the effect that righteousness is now detachable from circumcision and Torah-observance, i.e., "apart from the law" (Romans 3:21). Might I be so bold as to suggest that Carson's employment of the Jewish materials comes closer to "parallelomania" than my own?

(4) Rather than domesticating Paul, the intention is to *contextualize* Paul. Everyone agrees that Paul is to be understood on "his own terms." But the question is, What are Paul's "own terms?" For some of us anyway, Paul's "own terms" are only fully explicable in light of his actual life setting. Certainly, the texts cited by me do not make Paul conform to his inherited tradition(s). Quite the contrary: Paul is 180 degrees away from his contemporaries' assessment of Abraham's righteousness in relation to the Torah.

⁸ Abegg, "4QMMT, Paul, and 'Works of the Law,'" 208-9.

⁹ See Hengel, *Zealots*, 149-228.

¹⁰ Abegg, "4QMMT, Paul, and 'Works of the Law,'" 210-12.

¹¹ Carson maintains that in some instances the Hebrew idiom *hashab l'* is used in such a way that non-X is reckoned to be X. In Genesis 31:15, we read (Rachel and Leah speaking): "Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us?" In another case, Leviticus 7:18, a sacrifice uneaten by the third day will not be "credited to" the worshipper. According to Numbers 18:27, 30, the "tithe of the tithe" of the Levites will be reckoned to them as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fulness of the wine press. By way of reply, a few matters arise.

(1) The several passages cited by Carson are not the most germane to the discussion. While they do contribute to overall semantic range of *logizomai*, O. P. Robertson, as quoted by Carson, certainly makes a quantum leap from Leviticus 7:18 to Romans 4 by claiming that the text "envisions a situation in which righteousness could be 'reckoned' to a person, even though the individual concerned is admittedly as sinner" (Robertson, "Genesis 15:6 New Covenant Expositions of an Old Covenant Text," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 [1980], 266). If anything is foreign to Leviticus 7, it is the notion

of the imputation of righteousness, and it is highly questionable that the appearance of *logizomai* here provides a base for an imputational understanding of Romans 4. Robertson would have us buy into an “apples and oranges” comparison. Besides, the actual point is to the opposite effect claimed by Robertson: the sacrifice of the peace offering will not be credited to the offerer *because of his own actions!*

(2) Although it is true in Genesis 31:15 that non-X is reckoned to be X in a certain qualified sense, the complaint against Laban falls into line with the dominant meaning of *logizomai*. Rachel and Leah are, in Laban’s eyes, regarded and treated as foreigners because of his diminished regard for Jacob (Genesis 31:2). In a dream, Jacob is told to return to the land of his birth (v. 13); and because Rachel and Leah are his wives and will leave with their husband, they have become virtual foreigners to their father, now with no inheritance. That this reckoning on the part of Laban is the result of some process of “imputation” is certainly what the text does not say. In his view, his daughters now belong to Jacob’s household exclusively and are no longer his. Laban’s attitude is based on a value judgment regarding the status of Rachel and Leah. In this case, the distance between non-X and X is not as expansive as Carson seems to think; in fact, it hardly exists.

(3) Previously, I cited the Septuagint of Leviticus 7:11-18; 17:1-9; Numbers 18:25-32; 2 Samuel 19:20; Proverbs 27:14; Psalm 106:31 in support of a non-imputational understanding of *logizomai*, generally translated “regard as” (“Imputation or Union,” 103, n. 4). To these I now add 4QMMT cols. 31-32 (Hebrew text, not Septuagint). Carson thinks it strange to bring these texts into play, because, in his words, in them “there is *not* a strict equivalence as supporting a ‘non-imputational’ reading of *logizomai*” (“Vindication,” 58, n. 32, italics his). I am not precisely sure what this sentence means, but after a rereading of these texts, I would still retain them, including Leviticus 7:11-18; 17:1-9; Numbers 18:25-32. Even these passages do not provide a launching pad for imputation in the traditional theological sense: non-X is regarded as X only in a qualified sense. In the case of Numbers 18:27, 30, the tithe of the Levites is counted as the entire harvest, a quantitative, not qualitative, reckoning; as it were, an “apples and apples” comparison, not “apples and oranges.” In God’s eyes, the tithe represents the whole, not that an “imputation” has taken place, transforming one entity into another. Moreover, when a worshipper is not credited with a sacrifice (Leviticus 7:18), or a person is credited with bloodguilt (Leviticus 17:4), or the Levites’ tithe is reckoned as the grain of the threshing floor and the fulness of the wine press (Numbers 18:30), it is because of actions performed or not performed by them. This is just the opposite of imputation. A crediting does take place, but the credit is applied or withheld depending on the conduct of the individual.

(4) Most importantly, Carson’s tack does not take into account the panorama of the Genesis story as it bears on Romans 4 and Paul’s use of Genesis 15:6. The fallacy of the Piper/Carson/Robertson type of approach is that it zeroes in on isolated texts in which *logizomai* can mean “credit” and then disregards the fact that Genesis 15:6, with *its employment* of the verb, is but one of the steps along the way of Abraham’s pilgrimage of faith. Within the story line of Genesis, Abraham is considered and declared to be righteous because of his continued trust in Yahweh’s promise of a seed. The same Abraham who obeyed God’s call to leave his home (Genesis 12:1-4 = Hebrews 11:8) renews his faith(fulness) when the expected seed seems to be slow in arriving. Carson seems to have forgotten his own counsel in *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 66. A similar instance of narrowly focusing on linguistic data to the exclusion of a biblical theology is Mark Seifrid’s attempt to detach righteousness from covenant fidelity (“Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, eds. D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien and M. A. Seifrid [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 415-42).

It is surely telling that the only other place in the Hebrew Bible where righteousness is said to be reckoned to someone is Psalm 106:31, where Phinehas is regarded as righteous because of his zeal on behalf of the purity of the covenant. Instead of forming a contrast to

Abraham, the example of Phinehas confirms that the reckoning of righteousness is the recognition that one is already righteous. If there is any difference between the two, it is that Abraham was righteous before the era of the Torah, which is why Paul cites him in the first place. How “sinners” can be reckoned righteous needs no further elaboration at this point in time.

(5) In light of all the above, Carson’s allegation that I prejudge the meaning of *logizomai* by labeling it as “non-imputational,” and thus “distort the flow of Paul’s argument,” can be turned on him. By labeling the verb “imputational,” or at least as providing a basis for imputation, he too can be accused of prejudgment for the sake of enforcing a conclusion. As much as anything, it is the “flow of Paul’s argument” that is in dispute. If one conceives of that “flow” as a polemic against works-righteous legalism, then Carson has a point. But if the intention is to level the playing field for Jew and Gentile alike (“there is no distinction”), then it is Carson who has distorted the flow of Paul’s argument by turning it a dispute over “legalism” versus “grace.”

¹² Garlington, “Imputation or Union,” 50.

¹³ While commending my acknowledgment that faith’s object that is crucial in Paul’s argument, Carson thinks that I want to have my cake and eat it too (“Vindication,” 68, n. 46). This criticism misspeaks on several counts. (1) My “gratuitous reference to boundary markers, which are scarcely central to Paul’s concerns in the opening chapters of Romans,” is not so “gratuitous” after all. While the boundary markers hardly exhaust the law of Moses, they are part and parcel of “the works of the law” that do indeed play a central role in the opening chapters of Romans. As Ben Witherington puts it, the law was a “package deal, and one cannot separate out one portion of its commandments from another. All must be obeyed if one is under the Law” (*Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 353). Moreover, the preeminent boundary marker, circumcision, stands out rather conspicuously in the early going of Romans. Romans 2:25-3:1 makes quite a point of it; and the polemic of Romans 4:9-12 revolves precisely around circumcision: Abraham was considered to be a righteous person before his circumcision and the advent of the law.

(2) Carson maintains that it is far from clear that Paul accepts faith “in place of allegiance to the law of Moses” because “faith shuts out the law, which condemns.” Precisely. Righteousness is now revealed apart from the law (Romans 3:21), and it is just Abraham who proves the point, because he exercised faith(fulness) toward Yahweh long before the advent of the Torah. The law that condemns is none other than *Moses’* law. This is why Israel must come to see that Christ is the end of the law and must submit to *God’s righteousness* that is now localized in him, not the Torah (Romans 10:3-4). Undergirding the entire discussion of faith, righteousness, and law in Romans is a teleology of the law. It has had its day and must now recede into the background because of the advent of the one to whom it pointed. Now that he has come, our faith is “reckoned as” or “considered to be” righteousness because of faith’s object.

(3) According to Carson, I define faith’s “quintessential meaning” as “conformity to the will of God.” In the process, I surreptitiously make this faith essentially the righteousness which is then rightly imputed to believers as righteousness. Such, language, he says, is “notoriously slippery.” He continues: “Like most who take this line, Garlington has not come to terms with Paul’s insistence that the faith he has in view is not in any sense properly seen as something intrinsically the believer’s and so ‘good’ that it earns this imputation as righteousness. Rather, it is categorized as a ‘gift’ (Romans 4:4), which is given to the ungodly.”

This assessment creates a whole subset of problems. (a) I did not define *faith’s* “quintessential meaning” as “conformity to the will of God.” Rather, I said that the “quintessential meaning” of *righteousness* is “conformity to the will of God.” This is what I actually wrote: “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)” (“Imputation or Union,” 51). Rather obviously, Carson did not read carefully enough.

(b) I never wrote of faith as “essentially the righteousness which is then rightly imputed to believers as righteousness.” Throughout, my contention is that nothing is *imputed*, as such, to the believer. That my language is “surreptitious” and “slippery” is a judgment-call on Carson’s part, stemming from polemical ambitions, not the actual import of my words, especially as Carson has substituted “faith” for “righteousness” in my sentence regarding “conformity to the will of God.”

(c) To allege that I, and others, have not come to terms “with Paul’s insistence that the faith he has in view is not in any sense properly seen as something intrinsically the believer’s and so ‘good’ that it earns this imputation as righteousness” is not fair or accurate in the least. Neither I nor anyone else I know imagine that believers do anything to “earn imputation as righteousness.” To couch the issue in such terms is to contort my actual statements beyond recognition. Abraham was certainly not inherently righteous apart from the grace of God; but *as empowered by that grace*, he clung in faith to God’s promise of a seed. For that reason, says Paul, “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Note Romans 4:20-22: “No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. *That is why [dio] his faith was ‘reckoned to him as righteousness’.*”

¹⁴ The same is true of Carson (“Vindication,” e.g., 59-63), in disregard of the Semitic underpinning of *logizomai eis*.

¹⁵ See the assemblage of passages by Gundry, “Nonimputation,” 18-22. Gundry’s consistent rendering of *logizomai eis* as “counted to be” is tantamount to my translation, “regard as.” In the previous response, reference was made to Gerhard Von Rad, “Faith Reckoned as Righteousness,” *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: SCM, 1984), 125-30. However, I neglected to mention Hans-Wolfgang Heiland, *Die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchungen zur Begriffsbestimmung von hasab und logizesthai*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 18 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936); id., “*logizomai, logismos*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 4.284-92.

¹⁶ Nobody would disagree with Carson that the object of Abraham’s faith is the God who graciously promises (“Vindication,” 66). Nevertheless, in the Abraham narrative of Genesis, God’s gracious promises are complemented by the patriarch’s steadfast “obedience of faith,” without which the promises would not have been realized. Carson and Piper fail to remind us that it is Yahweh himself who insists that Abraham walk before him and be blameless (Genesis 17:1). It is frequently overlooked that by the time Paul finishes Romans 4 he stresses none other than the persevering quality of Abraham’s faith (vv. 20-25). By way of analogy, a neglected text is 1 Kings 3:6 (2 Chronicles 1:8) (Solomon speaking): “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, *because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you*; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today.” See also Psalm 103:17-18.

¹⁷ Carson’s generic reading of *asebês* (“Vindication,” 60-61) disregards the historical significance of the word and is out of touch with the polemic of Romans 1-4. In the two centuries or so before Paul, “ungodly” was applied to those outside the parameters of the covenant with Israel, either pagans or apostate Jews. See my *Obedience of Faith*, 84-86, passim (consult the subject index). The equivalent term “sinners” is unpacked by J. D. G.

Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 71-77.

¹⁸ “Justification,” as Gundry points out (“Nonimputation,” 35), is an unfortunate—though, I would say, ironically humorous—typographical error occurring in E. P. Clowney’s essay, “The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and World*, ed. D. A. Carson (London/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1992), 49.

¹⁹ Carson and P. T. O’Brien similarly contend that I have constructed a false dichotomy (Carson, “Vindication,” 56, n. 26). To be sure, if there were a textual basis for imputation, then the alternative of imputation *versus* union with Christ would be illegitimate. But it is just such a textual basis that is lacking.

²⁰ See my “Imputation or Union,” 52-54.

²¹ For example, on the part of R. C. Sproul (from the back cover of Piper’s book).

²² Gundry observes that the verb *kathistêmi*, in Romans 5:19, means to “establish” by way of appointment, ordination, or making (“Nonimputation,” 26). In line with my own interpretation of the verse, Gundry proposes that through Adam’s disobedience human beings “were counted” sinful, whereas through Christ’s obedience they are “counted as righteous.” This being so, the categories of imputation and infusion are simply irrelevant to Paul’s argument. Moreover, Gundry is quite right that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23; 5:12) has reference to the lack of distinction between Jew and Gentile in the matter of sin, not to the imputation of Adam’s guilt to his posterity. On the experiential level, Paul says nary a word about imputation. Rather, “all have sinned” means that “under the influence of sin all have sinned for themselves, not that they sinned in the original sin of Adam” (“Nonimputation,” 28).

²³ Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2.277-84.

²⁴ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament. 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 1.222. Even more explicit is T. R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 319.

²⁵ Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 79 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994), 44-71, 144-63.

²⁶ Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 105 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 146-82; Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 201.

²⁷ Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 163-69.

²⁸ Bultmann, “Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?” *Existence and Faith* (New York: World, 1960), 342-51.

²⁹ I would refer again to my essay on the biblical-theological method, *Exegetical Essays*, 1-15. The article appeared originally in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy and Practice of Biblical Theology*, ed. M. G. Haykin (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2003), 25-42.

³⁰ See notably N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

³¹ 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.

³² Garlington, “Imputation or Union,” 57 (italics original). See Gundry, “Nonimputation,” 36-38, for numerous texts that place “righteousness” and “salvation” in parallel.

³³ Garlington, *Exegetical Essays*, 340-74.

³⁴ In the first response to Piper, reference was made to my study of *dikaioô*, in which I endeavored to establish that the semantic range of the verb does indeed transcend “declare righteous” (“A Study of Justification by Faith,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 11 [2002], 55-73 = *Exegetical Essays*, 285-99).

³⁵ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).

³⁶ The heart of Gundry’s thesis is that it is *God’s* righteousness, not Christ’s, that has become ours when our faith is counted as righteousness. On the practical level, for him, imputation is objectionable because it can impede holiness (“Nonimputation,” 43-44, quoting Mark Seifrid and John Wesley). His concern for “sanctification” as “godly living” is certainly valid if imputation is used as a pretext for a lack of growth in grace (the concern of both Seifrid and Wesley). My assumption, however, is that this is not necessarily, or normally, the case with those who espouse imputation.

On the other side, in agreement with Piper and Carson (“Vindication,” 72-77), I should think that Gundry has artificially distanced God from Christ in the matter of whose righteousness is made ours. In strict terms, Paul does speak of “God’s righteousness” or a “righteousness from God” (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:8-9). Yet there are counterbalancing factors. For one, Philippians 3:9 expresses Paul’s desire to be found “in him.” The righteousness he longs for comes “from God;” yet it is none other than a righteousness that is “in him.” How can a righteousness “in Christ” somehow be distanced from Christ himself? For another, Paul is not to be read in isolation from the rest of the New Testament. Particularly the Gospel temptation narratives and the Letter to the Hebrews make it abundantly clear that Jesus is the man of faith who fulfills the obligations of the covenant (Matthew 3:15—“all righteousness”).

Gundry is correct to challenge the growing consensus that Paul’s own phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” (*pistis Iêsou Christou*) ought to be rendered “the [covenant] faithfulness of Jesus Christ” (“Nonimputation,” 19, n. 2). Even so, R. B. Hays has still demonstrated that underlying Galatians is a Jesus-narrative as derived from the Gospels (*The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, Biblical Resource Series, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]). If Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30), then by definition God’s righteousness is Christ’s righteousness, especially given that the Lord whose righteousness clothes the eschatological people of God (Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16) is actually the Lord Jesus. In a recent paper, “The *hasde dawid* of Isa 55:3—A Response to Hugh Williamson,” Peter Gentry has argued cogently that the “sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 55:3) are David’s own acts of covenant fidelity and righteousness. David is thus the paradigm of Jesus the Christ, whose faithful deeds are granted to Israel (Acts 13:34). I am most grateful to Professor Gentry for a draft of his article.

³⁷ The phrase “in Christ” has at least a threefold significance for Paul. (1) The *historical*. To be in Christ is to belong to that era of world history inaugurated with his coming. This is the complex of new covenant/new creation as contrasted with what has gone before. Paul thinks of Christ as the new realm God is now establishing in the world. (2) The *personal*. To be “in Christ” is to know him and the power of his resurrection (Philippians 3:10), to “live in” him (Galatians 2:20), be a member of his body (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 6:15; Ephesians 1:23; 4:13; 5:30) and to be conformed to his image (Romans 8:29). (3) The *messianic*. Paul’s use of “in Christ,” “body of Christ,” etc., is to be understood in terms of membership within the royal family, the “Messiah-people.” See further my *An Exposition of Galatians: A New Perspective/Reformational Reading*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 80-81.

³⁸ Carson, “Vindication,” 71.

³⁹ Carson, “Vindication,” 71.

⁴⁰ Carson, “Vindication,” 71.

⁴¹ Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*; “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. The article is reprinted in *Exegetical Essays*, 213-47, which will be cited in the ensuing discussion. The review of Seifrid is likewise in *Exegetical Essays*, 340-74.

⁴² Garlington, *Exegetical Essays*, 222-32.

⁴³ Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 2000), 136, n. 21.

⁴⁴ Still brilliant and relevant is J. D. G. Dunn’s “Rom. 7,14-25 in the Theology of Paul,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 31 (1975), 264-73.

⁴⁵ 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.”

⁴⁶ See my *Obedience of Faith*, e.g., 31-33.

⁴⁷ Garlington, *Exegetical Essays*, 224. “Doing the law” is hardly an expression of some program of self-justification. Rather, to do the law is to maintain covenant faithfulness with God. The interplay of covenant faithfulness and such terms as keeping Yahweh’s statutes (tantamount to keeping the covenant) or doing the law is evident in Deuteronomy. Crucial is an appreciation of the centrality of the Torah in Israel’s self-consciousness of being the chosen people. It is the book of Deuteronomy that gives the classic statement of the role of the Torah in the life of the people. The heart of the book (chaps. 5-28) consists of a restatement of the covenant made at Sinai. Deuteronomy 29:1 sums up the whole of that block of material: “These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.” Throughout the book, the emphasis of covenant life is sustained and reinforced in numerous restatements of the promise (and warnings): “This do and live” (Deuteronomy 4:1, 10, 40; 5:29-33; 6:1-2, 18, 24; 7:12-13). This promise does not originate in Deuteronomy, because Leviticus 18:5 had already said: “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.”

⁴⁸ Garlington, *Exegetical Essays*, 235.

⁴⁹ Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narratives Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 4. Wenham adds that Isaac’s deathbed blessing of Genesis 27 is an episode that is most revealing in the way it brings out the viewpoints of the different actors. “It is also one of many in the Old Testament which show the depth of its moral insight and its avoidance of simple black-and-white judgements. It deals with a world where there are few perfect saints and few unredeemable sinners: most of its heroes and heroines have both virtues and vices, they mix obedience and unbelief” (ibid., 15).

⁵⁰ Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 163.

⁵¹ See Dunn’s timely counsel, “Rom. 7,14-25 in the Theology of Paul,” 272.

⁵² Carson, “Vindication,” 71.

⁵³ See the excellent study of Scot McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions,” *Trinity Journal* ns 13 (1992), 21-59.

⁵⁴ Garlington, *Exegetical Essays*, 361.

⁵⁵ Du Plessis, *TELEIOS: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959).

⁵⁶ Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 24 (italics mine). Hence, “perfect” is tantamount to “blameless” (cf. Luke 1:6; Philippians 2:15). 4 Maccabees 7:15 makes the righteous Eleazar’s loyalty to the law “perfect,” i.e., “complete,” by his martyrdom (cf. Peterson, *Hebrews*, 25).

⁵⁷ As P. T. O’Brien aptly comments, the claims of truth and love should not be held in tension. “The truth as proclaimed should not be dissociated from love or promoted at the

expense of love, while a life of love should embody the truth of the gospel” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 312).