

**Paul's Theology and Thought, Part 1:
God, Covenant and Creation, Sin and its Solution**

Redefining God

It is frequently noticed, but must be highlighted again here, that Paul takes the *kyrios* of the Septuagint, in passages where he is very well aware that in context it referred to YHWH himself, and understands it as a reference to Jesus. Perhaps the most famous passage where Paul refers to Jesus as *kyrios*, in a context where he was certainly thinking of a Septuagint passage, is Philippians 2.6–11. It is now, I think, largely recognized that this passage does indeed express a very early, very Jewish and very high Christology, in which Paul understands the human being Jesus to be identical with one who from all eternity was equal with the creator God, and who gave fresh expression to what that equality meant by incarnation, humiliating suffering, and death. The 'therefore' of verse 9 is crucial: Jesus is now exalted to the position of supreme honour, sharing the glory that the one God will not share with another, because he has done what only the one God can do. The logic of the poem forces us to acknowledge that Paul knows perfectly well, in quoting Isaiah 45.23 in the closing verses, just how enormous a claim he is making. In that passage, one of the most fiercely monotheistic statements in the Old Testament, YHWH declares that he is God, and there is no other; to YHWH and him alone every knee will bow and every tongue swear. (Paul quotes the same passage in Romans 14.10, in the context of the universal sovereignty and coming judgment of God through Jesus.) What he has done in Philippians, in addition to a great many other things (not least, as we saw in the previous chapter, upstaging Caesar), is to write a poem whose roots are deep in Jewish monotheism, and to place Jesus in the middle of it. (Wright, 92-93)

The same is true in another well-known passage, 1 Corinthians 8.6. But the regular beliefs of pagan polytheism were, for him, decisively challenged by the Jewish claim about the one true God. Who was this one God, and how did Israel most characteristically acknowledge him? He was the God who revealed himself to Israel's ancestors not least at the time of the Exodus, and he was worshipped and acknowledged supremely in the daily prayer, the Shema: Hear, O Israel, *yhwh* our God, *yhwh* is one – or, in the Septuagint, *kyrios ho theos hēmōn*, *kyrios heis estin*. Within his monotheistic argument, to make a monotheistic point, Paul quotes this, the best-known of all Jewish monotheistic formulae, and once again he puts Jesus into the middle of it. For us, he says, there is one God, one Lord. More specifically, 'for us there is one God, the father, from whom are all things and we to him, and one Lord, Jesus the Messiah, through whom are all things and we through him'. He has quoted the Septuagint formula, glossing *theos*, that is, *elohim*, with a phrase about the Father as the supreme creator and goal of all, and glossing *kyrios*, that is, *yhwh*, with a phrase about Jesus the Messiah as God's agent in both creation and redemption. Looking outside the immediate impact of this, we observe that he has thereby done with Jesus what was sometimes done with the figure (personified or personal?) of Wisdom, the one through whom the creator made the world, the true content of God's self-revelation in Torah. What follows from this explosive redefinition of the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8.6 is equally remarkable in its own way. Once Jesus is established at the heart of the vision of the one true God, serving and following this God will involve living according to the pattern of love. Contrast between mere 'knowledge', *gnōsis*, and love itself. This, too, is why he now goes on, in the rest of the chapter, to insist that self-sacrificial love for one's neighbor is the primary consideration when working out how to live within a pagan environment. (Wright, 94)

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Galatians 4.1–7. Paul has developed in the previous chapter the picture of God keeping Israel as a young child under the somewhat fierce tutelage of the household slave, the official babysitter, namely the Torah. But what does Jewish tradition say about Israel, the heir to God's promises, being kept in slavery under pagan rule? Israel tells, of course, the story of the Exodus, and so does Paul, precisely at this point. When the right time arrived, the time of fulfilment, God set his people free. He did this, more specifically, by first sending his own son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law, and to make them his true children ('Israel is my son, my firstborn; so let my people go'). Here we see that interplay of themes between the messianic son and God's redeemed people as his 'sons', and with the precise new meaning that the messianic 'son' is the one who expresses and embodies God's saving intention. This leads to the decisive verse 7: 'because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts crying "Abba, Father"'. So you are no longer slaves but sons, and if sons, then heirs through the Messiah.' (Wright, 97)

In Romans 8 again Paul draws heavily on the motif and the language of the Exodus. God's people, set free from slavery, must not think of going back to it, but must rely on the presence and leading of God as they go on to their inheritance. Within the original Exodus-story, of course, the people were given the tabernacling presence of God, despite their rebellion and sin, as their guide and companion. In Paul's retelling of the story, the Spirit takes the place of the Shekinah, leading the people to the promised land, which turns out to be, not 'heaven' as in much Christian mistelling of the story ('heaven' is not mentioned here or in any similar passages), but the new, or rather the renewed, creation, the cosmos which is to be liberated from its own slavery, to experience its own 'exodus'. (Wright, 98)

Covenant and Creation

The main point about narratives in the second-Temple Jewish world, and in that of Paul, is not simply that people liked telling stories as illustrations of, or scriptural proofs for, this or that experience or doctrine, but rather that second-Temple Jews believed themselves to be actors within a real-life narrative. The main function of their stories was to remind them of earlier and (they hoped) characteristic moments within the single, larger story which stretched from the creation of the world and the call of Abraham right forwards to their own day, and (they hoped) into the future. (Wright, 11)

Monotheism of the Jewish style (creation, providence, final justice), which Paul re-emphasizes as he refashions it, generates just this sense of underlying narrative, the historical and as yet unfinished story of creation and covenant, to which the individual stories such as those of Abraham and the Exodus contribute, and whose flavor they reinforce, but which goes beyond mere typology into strong historical continuity. This was, after all, the point of much of the exilic and post-exilic literature. God did not abandon his people when he packed them off to Babylon. Much of the second-Temple literature is precisely concerned to tell the story again and again to show how the plot was progressing and, perhaps, reaching its climax. Unless we recognize this and factor it into our thinking about Paul and his Jewish world from the very start we will have no chance of grasping the fundamental structures of his thought. (Wright, 12)

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The covenant is there to solve the problems within creation. God called Abraham to solve the problem of evil, the problem of Adam, the problem of the world. Israel's calling is to hold fast by the covenant. Through Israel, God will address and solve the problems of the world, bringing justice and salvation to the ends of the earth – though quite how this will happen remains, even in Isaiah, more than a little mysterious. But, second, creation is invoked to solve the problems within the covenant. When Israel is in trouble, and the covenant promises themselves seem to have come crashing to the ground, the people cry to the covenant God precisely as the creator. Israel goes back to Genesis 1, and to the story of the Exodus, in order to pray and trust that yhwh will do again what, as creator, he has the power and the right to do, and what as the covenant God he has the responsibility to do, namely, to establish justice in the world and, more especially, to vindicate his people when they cry to him for help. Paul constantly goes back to the Old Testament, not least to Genesis, Deuteronomy, the Psalms and Isaiah, not to find proof-texts for abstract ideas but in order to reground the controlling narrative, the historical story, of God, the world, humankind and Israel. (Wright, 24)

One of the great slogans in which all this theology of creation and covenant is summed up, one with of course enormous significance at the heart of Paul's thought, is *tsedaqah elohim*, the 'righteousness' or 'justice' or 'covenant faithfulness' of God. There is no such word in English. One might say 'faithfulness', but it hardly carries the sense of 'justice', of putting things to rights. One might say 'righteousness', but people inevitably hear it today either in the sense of 'ethical uprightness' or in the (to my mind mistaken) familiar Reformed understandings of it as the status which God imputes to the faithful. The word 'justice' itself evokes that element of what Paul, and the texts on which he drew, was talking about which is all too often forgotten today, namely that because God is the creator he has the obligation to put the world to rights once and for all, but unless we constantly remind ourselves that in the Jewish context, and in Paul himself, this 'justice' springs not from some abstract ideal but from the creator's obligation to the creation and from the covenant God's obligation to be faithful to his promises, it will lose its flavor and force. (Wright, 25-26)

In 1 Corinthians 15, one of the key guiding principles to understanding the whole passage is that it is, at a fundamental level, an appeal to Genesis 1–3 in the light of the events concerning Jesus. As soon as the argument gets going in verse 20, Paul evokes Genesis 3: since death came through a human being, the resurrection has come by a human being; for as in Adam all die, so in the Messiah all shall be made alive. This is a statement of new creation through the Messiah, and it is developed by means of a detailed argument, in verses 23–28, drawing on various Old Testament texts not least Psalm 8, itself an evocation of Genesis 1. This leads Paul, after a short excursion (vv. 29–34), to address the question about what sort of a thing the resurrection body will be. Adam was from the earth, and earthy, whereas the new body which Jesus now possesses is a fresh gift from heaven. The end result is the creation of a new type of human beings, once more in the image of God but now, more specifically, in the image of the risen Messiah. This is how the problem within the existing creation, namely sin and death,[6] has been dealt with through the Messiah. This in turn is of vital importance for understanding what 1 Corinthians 15 is all about: not the abandonment of creation, but its renewal. (Wright, 28-29)

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In Romans 1.18—4.25, the first major section of the letter, Paul launches in with an exposition of God's goodness and power in creation, as a way of calling the human race to account for not recognizing God and giving him the praise and honor that were his due. As a result, image-bearing human beings have become corrupt; violence and hatred fills the world. To this scenario, in which Paul hardly differs from many of his Jewish contemporaries, the Jew would answer – Saul of Tarsus himself would have answered - with a statement of the covenant: God has called Israel to be the light to the nations, the teacher of the foolish, the guide to the blind. That is what the covenant was there for. But Paul turns it, too, on its head (2.17–29): the covenant people have become part of the problem, not the agents of the solution. Israel is no better than the nations, as is proved by biblical texts which speak of exile. This creates a crisis for God himself, a crisis exactly parallel to the crisis which 4 Ezra saw so painfully: how is God to be both faithful to the covenant and just in his dealings with the whole creation? And, beginning in 3.21, he provides a fresh answer to the question, an answer not available to writers like 4 Ezra: God has unveiled his *dikaiosynē* in the faithful Messiah, Jesus, the one in whom at last we find an Israelite faithful to God's purpose, the one through whose death sin has been dealt with, the one through whom God has now called into being a renewed people among whom Jews and Gentiles are welcome on equal terms. Creation and covenant then come together with great force in chapter 4, for which Genesis 15 as a whole is foundational: Paul is recalling Abraham, neither as a random proof-text for justification by faith, nor as an example of a Christian before Christ, but precisely as the one with whom God made the covenant in the first place, the covenant which has now been fulfilled in Jesus. But this covenant fulfilment, through which Jew and Gentile come together as the true children of Abraham is also, implicitly, the renewal of creation after the disaster outlined in chapter 1. (Wright, 30-31)

In Romans 7, Paul expounds what happened when the Torah arrived in Israel, and what happens still as Israel lives under the Torah. the more you embrace Torah the more it does indeed show up your secret faults. But Romans 7 is then answered, of course, by Romans 8, which is Paul's most spectacular piece of creation-theology, a bursting out of a fresh reading of Genesis 1—3, coupled with the Exodus narrative of liberation from slavery and the journey to the promised inheritance: creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay, to share the freedom of the glory of God's children. And the fulcrum around which the argument turns is Romans 8.3–4. God has done what the Torah, weakened by the flesh, could not do: that is, God has accomplished the goals for which the covenant was put in place, while dealing simultaneously with the fact that the covenant people themselves were part of the problem within creation. Through Jesus and the Spirit there is therefore covenant renewal, which results, as you would expect once you locate Paul within an overarching Jewish narrative of creation and covenant, in new creation. (Wright, 31)

Paul then articulates, in a spectacular and commonly misunderstood passage, the covenant renewal which has taken place. In 10.6 – 10 he expounds Deuteronomy 30, the passage which spoke of return from exile, of restoration after covenant judgment. Paul expounds this statement of covenant renewal in relation to what God has done in Christ and by the Spirit and

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the result is that now, instead of the return of ethnic Israel to the Holy Land, as envisaged in Deuteronomy, the message goes out to all people. As in Romans 8, the whole world has become the Holy Land, claimed through the gospel of Jesus the Messiah on behalf of the creator God. The apostolic mission simply follows the line of the original gospel, the good news of the first creation itself. Covenant renewal has resulted in the reclaiming of the created order. (Wright, 32)

In 2 Corinthians 3—5, the theology of new covenant in chapter 3 works its way through to new creation in 5.17 ('if anyone is in the Messiah – new creation!'), and to the claim in 5.19 that God was in the Messiah reconciling the world to himself. Similarly, Galatians 3 and 4, in which as in Romans the promises to Abraham are explored in relation to their fulfilment through Jesus the Messiah, lead Paul to declare in 6.14–16 that because of the cross of Jesus the world has been crucified to him, and he to the world, since now neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters, but only new creation. (Wright, 33)

He believes that Israel's God, the creator, has acted decisively to fulfil the covenant promises and so to renew both covenant and creation. Paul thereby understands himself to be living at a different moment in the story, though there are partial parallels within the inaugurated eschatology we find at Qumran. The new age has already begun, though the old age continues alongside it. That in turn generates both Paul's vision of the church and the problems he addresses within it, but of that we must speak elsewhere. (Wright, 34)

Sin, Evil, and the Solution

The noun "sin" (hamartia) occurs forty-seven times in Romans alone. But we need to note two features about these usages. First, the singular of the noun "sin" occurs far more often than the plural. Not much attention is given to the morality of this or that deed as if one could mark on a chart the number of times one committed acts or harbored thoughts called "sins."

Correspondingly, the noun "forgiveness" (and the verb "forgive") is strikingly absent from Paul's letters, except in the citation of a single Old Testament text (Rom 4:7). Rather, sin is seen more often as a ruthless power that can exercise dominion (5:20) and enslave people (6:6, 20; 7:14), preeminently the power of the old age. Second, the discussion of sin in Paul's letters never is used as a rhetorical weapon to humiliate readers or to arouse in them a sense of unworthiness, even as a preparatory step to preaching to them the gospel. (Cousar, 117)

In Romans 3:9 the reader encounters the first use of the word "sin" in the passage. "All, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin." The reader suddenly becomes aware that the decision to worship idols rather than worship God has left human beings in the clutches of a power from which they cannot free themselves. They are trapped. Sin, on the one hand, is a voluntary act of disobedience, a matter of opting for this instead of that, but on the other hand, it becomes an oppressive power that ensnares and dominates the lives and actions of people. Though the analogy is not perfect, one can note the experience of addiction, which usually begins with decisions that could be changed, but turns into habitual and compulsive practices that can only be reformed by intervention. So it is with sin. (Cousar, 119-120)

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When we begin with creation, and with God as creator, we can see clearly that the frequently repeated warnings about sin and death, referred to as axiomatic by Paul, are not arbitrary, as though God were simply a tyrant inventing odd laws and losing his temper with those who flouted them, but structural: humans were made to function in particular ways, with worship of the creator as the central feature, and those who turn away from that worship – that is, the whole human race, with a single exception – are thereby opting to seek life where it is not to be found, which is another way of saying that they are courting their own decay and death. (Wright, 35)

All this contextualizes one of Paul's key technical terms, *sarx*, normally translated 'flesh'. As is well known, Paul does not mean by 'flesh' simply physical substance. For that he normally uses *sōma*, usually translated 'body'. For him, the word 'flesh' is a way of denoting material within the corruptible world and drawing attention to the fact that it is precisely corruptible, that it will decay and die. From that point Paul's usage expands one more level, to include the moral behavior which, consequent upon idolatry, is already a sign of, and an invitation to, that progressive corruption: hence 'the works of the flesh'. (Wright, 35)

When God fulfils the covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit, thereby revealing his faithful covenant justice and his ultimate purpose of new creation, this has the effect both of fulfilling the original covenant purpose (thus dealing with sin and procuring forgiveness) and of enabling Abraham's family to be the worldwide Jew-plus-Gentile people it was always intended to be. He is not simply assuming an implicit narrative about how individual sinners find a right relationship with a holy God. (Wright, 37)

Within Romans 9–11, it is often not noticed that Paul's large-scale argument consists of a retelling of the story of Israel, from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through Moses and the Exodus to the prophets and the exile . . . and then, with a glance at the remnant, to the Messiah. *Telos gar nomou Christos* in Romans 10.4 ('the Messiah is the . . . end? goal? of the law'). The same can be said of Galatians, where the long argument of chapters 3 and 4 again presents (despite what many commentators suppose) a sustained argument involving a retelling of the story of Israel. God made the initial promises to Abraham; subsequently, he gave the Law through Moses; but this was always a strictly temporary stage, designed to keep Israel under control, like a young son, until the moment of maturity. And this moment of maturity is described in terms of the coming of the Messiah, who both represents Israel and brings its history to its ordained goal. (Wright, 43-45)

There have been two main schools of thought concerning Paul's understanding of the death of Christ. One line of thought emphasizes the notion of Christ's death as a sacrifice offered in atonement for sin; the other argues that more important to Paul is the idea of Christ's death as something in which the believer participates. The participationist understanding would go something like this: human beings live "in Adam," that is, in the sphere of sinful humanity, under the reign of sin and death. The only escape from this realm is death. Christ became a human being, sharing the fate of those in Adam, dying on the cross, was raised from death by God, to become the first-born son of a new, redeemed humanity. In baptism, believers die with

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Christ; they too die to sin and to their old life in Adam. In Christ they become part of the new creation, freed from the power of sin. In short, then, the two interpretations offer different answers to the question of how (in Paul's view) Christ's death deals with sin. From a sacrificial perspective, Christ's death provides atonement for the transgressions of humanity and opens the possibility of forgiveness and justification; from a participationist perspective, people are freed from sin by sharing in the death of Christ, by dying to sin and its power. (Horrell, 85)

Romans 3:24-25, a key passage for the sacrificial interpretation, is often suggested to be a pre-Pauline tradition (cf. also Rom 4:25 where Paul seems to use a concise and well-known formula). (Horrell, 87)

Through the saving work of Christ, people who were previously slaves to sin have been "redeemed", bought back, by God (cf. 1 Cor 6:20); they can now be reconciled to God, where previously they were enemies because of sin (2 Cor 5:19-20). "In Christ", Paul proclaims, "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19). Paul also declares that the whole of creation is yearning to be set free from its bondage to decay: the result of the redemption and reconciliation of humanity will be redemption and liberation for the whole of creation (8:20-23). (This passage, unsurprisingly, has been a particular focus for those seeking a biblical perspective on contemporary questions about Christian responsibility towards the environment).

Metaphors for the Atonement. We highlight the terms as metaphors and not as illustrations. A metaphor is a way of saying what cannot be said directly, a way of seeing "this" as "that." It has generative power and opens new doors of understanding. Since Paul employs several metaphors for the death of Christ, they each need the space to prod the reader's imagination.

1. Justification. Actually the noun "justification" occurs very rarely in the letters; it is the verb "justify" that we will consider. The Greek verb translated "justify" (*dikaioo*) derives from the same root as the noun "righteousness" (*dikaiosis*). In Paul's letters God's righteousness is God's salvation-creating power at work in the world. The task is to find a verb that conveys the nature of that divine activity. Today the word occurs most frequently when a person provides a rationale for taking a particular course of action, or for not doing so. The action, however, involved in the Greek verb is more the notion of setting or making things right. Keck suggests "rectify," to put things that are out of kilter into a right relationship. Galatians 2 makes clear that justification by God is not a solo event. The context is a social setting – Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians sharing table fellowship. The point Paul seeks to score with Peter and his Galatian readers is that being set right with God entails by its very nature realigned communal relationships. God's justifying of my neighbor is not just a parallel case like my own. Inherently it binds us together as the ungodly who are rectified.

2. Redemption. There are three Greek words that appear in the letters, regularly translated "redemption" or "redeem" or "buy." They conjure up images of a slave or prisoner released from confinement by the paying of a ransom of some sort, no doubt reflecting both the first century system of Roman slavery and the story of the exodus of slaves from Egypt. Paul uses the language of the social and political world to designate what God has accomplished. The Christ event has liberated people from the tyranny of sin (Rom 3:24; cf. 3:9) and from the

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control of the law (Gal 4:5). Secondly, in at least some of the uses, the stress falls on the change of allegiance (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23). Freedom from sin for Paul does not result in an independent autonomy, a life of self-determination, but entails a shift to a new lord whose service is true freedom. Thus the expression "slave/servant of Christ" (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Gal 1:10).

3. Expiation (or as the NRSV renders it, "a sacrifice of atonement"). Rom 3:25 is the only occurrence of the term in the Pauline letters. Others prefer the English "propitiation," describing an action aimed at satisfying divine wrath. But the problem with "propitiation" is that it raises the specter of pagan religions in which the deity had to be appeased by some sort of sacrifice. The idea of placating the gods is simply not common in Judaism. The best case can be made for the translation "expiation," an action aimed not at God but at the offenses themselves, at making amends for sins. In this instance, the background of the term may be seen in the Jewish cultic system. Jesus' death is the death of one in behalf of others, and it serves to redress the wrongs committed by others.

4. Reconciliation. In two key Pauline texts God's action in the Christ event is described as reconciliation – Rom 5:9-10 and 2 Cor 5:14-21. In Rom 5:9-10 God's initiative in removing hostility and in making those who were enemies into friends happens "through the death of his Son." Three special dimensions of God's reconciling activity stand out in 2 Cor 5:14-21. First, at the heart of the passage is the phrase "not counting their trespasses against them", perhaps reflecting Ps 32:2. Unlike everyone else, God keeps no account of sins. Second, in the text the objects of God's reconciliation are "us" and "the world". For Paul, a solidarity between "us" and "the world" protects us from assuming a superior stance, as if we are somehow better than "the world." Third, God's reconciling activity includes a commission to be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation (5:18).

(Cousar, 123-126)

More recently, serious questions have been raised with the Reformation understanding of Paul. Krister Stenahl and Markus Barth both published articles in the 1960s arguing that the statements of justification in the Pauline letters do not address the matter of how sinful people find acceptance from a holy and righteous God. Unlike [Martin] Luther, Paul appears to have had a robust conscience and not to have been burdened by feelings of guilt. When he reflects on his achievements as a Jew, he pronounces himself "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Sins (in the plural), repentance, and forgiveness are not major topics in the letters. When the language of justification by faith occurs, it is in the context of the admission of believing Gentiles into the Christian community and their treatment. The issue it addresses is how Christians of Jewish and non-Jewish heritages are to relate to one another in the people of God. (Cousar, 84)

Paul makes what most would agree to be an important statement: "we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16; cf. Gal 2:17; 3:11, 24; 5:4; Rom 3:20, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9). It is obvious, however, that we need to know what Paul means by this statement in order to understand what he is asserting. The ideas seem to emerge most prominently in contexts where Paul is arguing with opponents over the Jewish Law, and specifically over whether Gentile converts must obey this law and be circumcised. (Horrell, 100-101)

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Another challenge to the Reformation reading of Paul has come from the historical work of E.P. Sanders. Sander's contribution has been to question what Jewish historians had been questioning for some time, namely the view that Judaism from the second century B.C.E. through the second century C.E. tended toward petty legalism and self-serving casuistry. It was a massive misunderstanding, Sanders argues, to say that the Jews thought that they became God's people by their obedience to the law or that they could in any sense earn their salvation. Such a view may have been a convenient foil for the Reformation notion of justification by faith, but it fails to represent accurately and fairly the convictions of Judaism. To be sure, adherence to the law was important, but not as a means to merit salvation or to gain rewards from God. Obedience was rather the proper response to a gracious God, the way an Israelite could indicate his or her intent to be included in the people of God. A relationship with God was maintained, but not acquired, by conforming to the law. Furthermore, perfection in keeping the law was not expected, because the law itself provided ways and means of atonement. (Cousar, 85)

Our understanding of righteousness language in Paul, associated again with Luther, is that to be "justified" means to be "declared righteous"; in other words, God pronounces the verdict "righteous", "in the right", acquitted and innocent, over the person who has faith in Christ. Justification by faith is seen as the central theme of Paul's gospel and is interpreted in primarily legal or forensic terms; the imagery is that of the law court. On this view the believer remains a sinner, but is declared by God to be righteous. In Luther's words, they are simul justus et peccator – "at the same time justified and a sinner." This view of the meaning of righteousness in Paul is traditionally termed "imputed righteousness": by his pronounced decision God "imputes," or attaches, the status "righteous" or "justified" to someone who is actually still a sinner. It has long been objected, however, that it is problematic, even for God, to declare something which is plainly not the case. Moreover, it may also be argued that this interpretation hardly does justice to Paul's thought, in which the believer clearly is changed, or at least is meant to be changed, by dying to sin and beginning a new life in Christ. An alternative view has therefore also been argued, namely that Paul's verb dikaion should be translated "to make righteous." This view interprets Paul's view of righteousness not as merely "imputed" – a legal fiction – but as "imparted"; God actually bestows righteousness upon the believer, who is really changed. It may again be objected that this something of a fiction – a moral fiction – since Christians plainly do not become perfect or sinless through being justified (though Paul clearly expects real moral change on the part of his converts; see Rom 6:1-14; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Thess 4:1-12, etc). However, those who adopt this view of righteousness language in Paul argue that the terms do not describe the ethical or moral behavior of the "justified" person, but rather their relationship with God: someone who is justified is someone who has been put into a right relationship with God. Sanders argues that when Paul uses the word dikaion, he is almost always referring to a process of being changed, or transferred, from one realm to another. By dying with Christ and beginning a new life, a person may be "righteoused", or incorporated into the people of God (participation in Christ). These two alternatives of course begin to link up with the two views of the death of Christ – the sacrificial and the participatory. Many recent interpreters would agree that Paul's justification language is not so much concerned with how a guilty individual finds mercy, but about how the people of God are to be defined: who is a

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member, and on what basis? If this is right, then being “justified” (or “righteoused”) is not so much about being declared “not guilty”, nor about being made morally perfect, but about being “in” the people of God. (Horrell, 103-106)

Are we made righteous by “faith in” or “the faith of” Jesus Christ? English translations render this positive phrase, “but through faith in Jesus Christ”. Yet the King James Version has “But by the faith of Jesus Christ”, in this case a quite literal rendering of the Greek. The crucial words in Greek, found a number of times elsewhere in Paul, are *pistis Christou*, literally, “the faith of Christ.” (Along with Gal 2:16, the key texts are Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:20; 3:22; Phil 3:9). Compare the following phrases:

- a) He was inspired by the love of God.
- b) She did it for the love of God.

Both are ambiguous: in each case, the phrase “the love of God” might mean the love which God has for other people, for creation, or whatever (that is a subjective genitive: God is the subject, the one who loves), or it might mean the love which the person has for God, their love of God (that is an objective genitive: God is the object of their love).

The phrase *pistis Christou* is in most English translations taken as an objective genitive. However, in recent years a number of scholars have been arguing that it should be interpreted as a subjective genitive, that is, as the faith which Christ himself has. Particularly influential is the work of Hays in *The Faith of Jesus Christ*. In considering this proposal we need to bear in mind that the noun *pistis* can mean “faith” in the sense of belief, or (more often) trust (its usual meaning in Greek of the period), but it can also mean “faithfulness”, as in Rom 3:3: “the faithfulness (*pistis*) of God” (KJV has “the faith of God”). The possibility of being “righteoused” comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, that is, through the faithful obedience of Jesus to the will of God (cf. Phil 2:8). If this is correct, it does not mean that Paul sees no need for Christians to have faith, for their faith is often mentioned alongside the crucial phrase “the faith of Christ” (eg. Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16). What it would mean, however, is that the emphasis shifts from saying that justification comes about through a person’s faith in Jesus Christ to saying that the creation of a righteous people (if that is how we should interpret the idea of justification) was achieved through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, who (unlike Adam) was obedient to the will and purpose of God.

It may be going too far to see this as a major change in our whole understanding of Paul’s gospel, but it certainly shifts the focus, and leads to a very different reading of the key texts such as Gal 2:16; now the stress is not on the believer’s response but on the action of Christ, or, more precisely, on what God has done in Christ. (Horrell, 107-108)

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