

Romans: The Universality of Judgement & Justification, Part 4b

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<http://lifemessenger.org/romans-the-universality-of-judgement-justification-part-4b/>

EXPOSITION: Chapter 3:1-31

In v. 1-8 the apostle continues to address the Jews, although, he now rhetorically poses the potential conclusions (v. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8) from the previous passage (2:17-29), asserting that they are fallacious (v. 2, 4, 6, 9). He has so radically redefined the Jew that it begs the question of: 1) their advantage above the Gentiles; 2) the value of circumcision; 3) God's faithfulness; 4) God's justice; and 5) antinomianism (license). All five issues are covenantal in nature.

In v. 9-20 he shifts the focus from the Jews back to all humankind, demonstrating their individual and universal sinfulness from the OT.

In v.21-31 the apostle arrives at the covenant foundation of his Gospel and, indeed, the whole biblical revelation. Having established the problem – universal sin and judgement – he now proceeds to the solution, God's justice and justification in Christ by faith alone. Covenant status is now restored.

[3:1-8: The Justice of God & the Judgement of the Jews](#)

[3:9-20: All Humankind Under the Judgement of God](#)

[3:21-31: The Justice of God & Justification by Faith Alone: 'The New Perspective on Paul'](#)

[3:21-26: Justification and the Righteousness of God](#)

[v. 25-26: Propitiation Contended & Defended](#)

[3:27-4:25: "By Faith Alone"](#)

3:1-8—The Justice of God & the Judgement of the Jews[^]

1 *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?*—The apostle has so radically redefined their Jewish identity, and so dismantled their false boasting – their ethnic and religious exceptionalism – what *can* they boast in? What advantage do they have, if any, and does circumcision still retain any value?

2 *Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.*—"Much in every way [*polupolo kata panta tropon*]" may also be rendered, *much in the whole mode*. If this rendering is accepted, rather than highlighting the individual particulars (which "much in every way" connotes), Paul is emphasising the *whole* mode or way of God's dealings with Israel. In other words, he is not enumerating or listing all the specific advantages of Israel, but rather the dominant paradigm – or if you like, the genius – that affords them their uniqueness. With this accepted, it then bears upon the meaning of, "To begin with [*proton*]", which can refer to "first" in time, place, order, or *importance*; it can equally refer to the first item of a list or to the first of *significance*—the *foremost*; it is used in the NT to refer to leaders as the dominant people of a community. This explains the use of *proton* as the dominant element of the atom's nucleus; with its positive charge it provides the governing force by which electrons orbit the nucleus, and, thus, provides the cohesion of the material universe. This being the case, it explains why Paul does not follow up the "first" advantage with any others. He was not intending to provide a list of advantages but rather state the dominant – the chief or foremost – principle that distinguished Israel from all others; and, thus, provided them with their governing cohesive force.

So, what was that *proton*—that governing force? They were "entrusted with the *oracles* of God". The word "oracle [*logia*]" was used in antiquity to designate the inspired and authoritative utterances of the gods and also the person through which they came. It is used three other times in the NT, each referring to the divine utterance and revelation, in both Moses and Christ (Acts 7:38; 1 Pet 4:11; Heb 5:12). In the OT (LXX) it is used in referring to God's "word" (Dt 33:9; Ps 119 [24 occurrences]). Over and above the *general* revelation of God to all mankind (1:19, 20; 2:15), Israel was unique in that it became the depository of *special* revelation, divinely inspired and authoritative utterances. These were inscripturated, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, through Moses and the prophets (15:4; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20, 21); and, hence, the Gospel, as the apostle asserted at the beginning of his epistle, was "promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (1:4). The

oracles are the Scriptures, supernaturally foreshadowing the Gospel; and, additionally, providing the Jews with God's laws and ways – a charter for living – that would eventually also teach the nations (Lev 18:5; Dt 4:1-8; Is 2:2-4; Mt 28:18-20).

Later in the epistle Paul does enumerate more specifically the privileges of Israel: "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises" (9:4); all of which are elements of the whole mode: God's *special* revelation. This then begs the question as to the functional mode or paradigm of God's revelation to Israel. God sovereignly and graciously revealed himself to Abram, called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and made *covenant* with him (Gen 12; 15; 17; Neh 9). This covenant provided the structure of God's relationship with Israel (refer to [Part 1](#) for covenant structure), and was progressively advanced and administered through Moses, then David, finally culminating in the son of David, the Messiah—the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, predating even Abraham, beginning in the first Adam and culminating in the last Adam (the second man), there is one covenant – grounded in the oneness of God – with various administrations. God's oneness (or unity) undergirds all his dealings with mankind and especially Israel; there is one mind and one purpose driving forward redemptive history through its various iterations to its climax in Christ; it guarantees the unity of revelation, and thus of Scripture and the covenants. God is not in conflict with himself, and so neither are the covenants or the Scripture in conflict within themselves—they form one system of truth. Augustine's old maxim regarding the relationship of OT and NT remains true: *the New is in the Old contained, and the Old is in the New revealed*.

The Jews were "entrusted [*pisteuo*]" with the oracles of God. Two points of note must be made: *First*, the verb is an *aorist* (tense) *passive* (voice) *indicative* (mood), indicating a punctiliar point (i.e. action viewed as a single, collective whole, even though it may have happened over a period of time) in the past (aorist tense) when Israel received (passive voice) the oracles of God as facts (indicative mood). Thus, signifying that the sovereign God of redemptive history has interposed, graciously revealing himself factually and holistically (i.e. in a whole system) through past events. These events and oracles – that is, the OT Scriptures – have been received from the mouth of God in history; they are concrete and factual, forming a whole system of revelation; unlike the pagan philosophies and religions, they are not abstract or mythological. They are thus inscripturated, and as Murray asserts, "divine oracles have fixed and abiding form" (Murray, p. 93). Hence, the Scriptures are not only infallible from the mouth of God in their original autographs but also reliable through the supervening hand of God in their transmission.

Second, as the ESV accurately translates, it means *to be entrusted with a thing* (1 Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11). Paul views his apostolic ministry, and the Gospel itself, as a trust from God to whom he must give account—it is a stewardship. Likewise, Israel was entrusted with the oracles of God which required faithfulness.

3 *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* **4** *By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."*—This is the question: does Israel's *faithlessness* (covenant-breaking) annul God's *faithfulness* (covenant-keeping)? Tragically Israel proved to be unfaithful to the oracles of God—to the covenant. While God "en-**trusted** [*pisteuo*]" (v. 2) them (i.e. put *faith* in them), they in turn refused to "**trust**" in him, thus to be "*faithless* [*apisteo*]" (v. 3). They violated the covenant time-and-again as witnessed by the prophets right up to the ministry of Christ and the apostle Paul. The Scribes and the Pharisees constantly sought to catch Jesus out on technicalities and likewise Paul. The close argumentation of this very epistle was demanded by the attack of the Jews on the apostle's teaching of the Gospel of grace. And so, Paul poses the rhetorical question as to whether their "faithlessness nullifies the faithfulness of God" – that is, abrogate the covenant – with the immediate riposte: "By no means! [*me genoito*]"—*May it never be!* (NASB) or *Of course not!* (Phillips). Frequently used by Paul in this epistle, it is a negative oath declaring that the argument put forward is *out-of-court*—that is, there is no case to be answered as it is antithetical to Scripture (3:6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11). Through the use of this oath, at key points of his argument, the apostle powerfully prosecutes the covenant-lawsuit against Israel, and thereby dismantles their fallacious defence.

The proposition that Israel's failure nullifies God's faithfulness – and thus the covenant – is summarily dismissed by the apostle based on God's truthfulness: "Let God be true though everyone were a liar...". God is not only self-revealed but also self-determined. His will and its performance are not determined by anything external to himself. He cannot deny himself; that is, do anything contrary to his own nature: "God is not a man that he should lie..." (Num 23:19a). Lying is undeniably true to man's nature but not God's—he *cannot* lie (Tit 1:2; Heb 6:18). God must be true to himself; he cannot be inconsistent—with him is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas 1:17). Israel has broken the covenant but God is a covenant-keeper. And so, as Paul declares to Timothy:

if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

2 Tim 2:13

When he declares a thing he will be faithful to it—he will do it:

Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Num 23:19b

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Is 55:11

It is highly significant that Paul in posing his rhetorical question regarding the faithfulness of God states it thus: "What if *some* [*tines*] were unfaithful?" And again in 11:17 he refers to "some [*tines*]" of the branches that were broken off from the olive tree (the true Israel). He is using *tines* as a form of meiosis or euphemism to seemingly underplay the significance of Israel's defection (Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon). Calvin supplies his view of this downplay by claiming, "had he said that a large part of the nation of the Jews rejected the covenant of God...such language would have grated on their ears...he [thus] diminishes its severity by restricting his censure to a few." Nonetheless, later in the epistle, explaining more fully the status of ethnic Israel, he appeals to the principle of a believing "remnant" (9:27; 11:5), indicating Paul's appreciation of the true situation but nevertheless stating it plainly:

27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay."

Rom 11:27-28

Consequently, one must search for another solution to Paul's apparent downplay of Israel's wholesale defection from the covenant. The believing remnant of Israel is extant as Paul writes, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that "the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay". The apostle is among that remnant and is significant in fulfilling its purpose.

And so God, who cannot lie, declaring his purpose through the prophets, is now accomplishing it in the new epoch through Paul's apostolic message, as a member of the Jewish remnant:

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life, which **God, who never lies, promised** before the ages began 3 **and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted** by the command of God our Savior;

Tit 1:1-3

God, faithful to his word, has retained for himself a remnant of believing Jews through whom the Gospel of grace is now going out to the Gentiles for the ingathering of the nations as the true Israel of God. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness God's promises concerning Israel *are* being fulfilled in Christ and his church (4:13-17; 9:7, 8; Gal 3:16, 28; Eph 2:11-22; Col 3:11). And they are being fulfilled in such measure that in the climax of history the remnant becomes the majority of mankind as the Gospel harvests the nations. This is why Paul states that only "some" are unfaithful. Despite the overwhelming apostasy of Israel under the old economy, culminating in the execution of Mashiach, they are the minority in the larger scheme of history. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul is seeing the larger purview of God's purposes when "*all* Israel will be saved" (11:26) and—

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and *all* the families of the nations shall worship before you.

Ps 22:27

In God's economy a remnant – God plus one – forms a majority!

Finally, to validate from the OT his assertion that Israel's unfaithfulness does not nullify God's faithfulness, he cites Ps 51:4—"That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged." The apostle's point is that even David's heinous violation of God's righteousness in his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah serves to justify, or vindicate, God and his word. Israel's sin – personified in its king – rather than nullify the covenant, serves to vindicate God and his word. As the psalm declares, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you..." (Ps 76:10a). Man, in rebellion against God and at enmity with him, plays into God's purpose for history. Even the negative sanctions of the covenant – the curses on Israel for disobedience – are a fulfillment of God's promises and word (2:9; 11:22; Dt 28; Neh 9:32-33; Lam 1:18). Israel's sin puts on display God's virtues of faithfulness and justice – as a covenant-keeper – to the cosmos. His covenant faithfulness is proven in his judgement of Israel.

5 *But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* **6** *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?* **7** *But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* **8** *And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*—In v. 5-8 the apostle rhetorically poses a potential conclusion from his assertion in v. 4 that human sin vindicates the justice and judgement of God. That being the case, how can God be just in bringing us under his judgement and wrath (v. 5)? Surely we are doing God a service? Our unrighteousness (covenant-breaking) only serves to display the righteousness (covenant-keeping) of God (v. 5); and through our *lie* (i.e. putting the lie to God's covenant promise) God's *truthfulness* (i.e. true to his covenant promise) and glory abound (v.7), effectively reiterating v. 5. Therefore, let us do evil so that good can result (v. 8).

The apostle's response to this "human way" of speaking (or thinking) that "suppresses the truth in unrighteousness" (1:18) is to again censure it as inadmissible: "By no means!" (see comments v. 4; this oath is applied again by the apostle in 9:14 against Israel's fallacious defence that God is unjust). The imprecation is reinforced in the next breath by the question: "For then how could God judge the world?" (v. 6). The absolute justice of God over the world was a given for the apostle's Jewish audience, rooted in Gen 18:25—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" God's judgement of Israel is consonant with his judgement of the world, and indeed, must begin with the house of God (2:9; 1 Pet 4:17).

Lastly, the accusation of *antinomianism* (anti-law) – of licence – was not new against Paul (v. 8). Indeed, to reiterate our comments in the Introduction ([Part 1](#)), a secondary purpose in addressing the Romans was to launch a pre-emptive strike against the "some people" of v. 8—the Judaizers, those "who create obstacles contrary to the doctrine" (16:17); that is, requiring Gentile believers to rely on the Jewish boundary markers of circumcision, food laws, and sabbaths in addition to their faith in Christ. Their identity is indicated by Paul's request for prayer to be delivered from the "unbelievers in Judea" so that he will be free to visit them (15:30-32); they are the "circumcision party" that also disturbed the Galatian believers (Gal 2:12). The Judaizers have, in fact, dogged Paul's heels all the way from Judea around to Corinth where their plotting precipitated his early departure and return to Jerusalem to deliver the Macedonian gift, terminating his 3-month sojourn in Greece (Acts 20:3; Rom 15:25).

Knowing that their modus operandi was to follow his labours, sowing discord and confusing the Gospel, Paul wrote to Rome to set forth and establish the proper relationship of Israel and the law to God's purpose for the Gentile world (ch. 2-4; 9-11). As already argued above (2:13), he specifically confronts the Jewish abstraction of the law, separating the law of God from the God of the law, from the intimate and personal knowledge of God (10:2-8), as a means of self-justification. But he also pre-empt any Gentile boasting (ch. 11) and antinomianism (i.e. anti-law position that claims, 'we are no longer under law but under grace' [6:14], misconstruing the relationship of Law and Gospel), reinstating the law as an agency of covenant obedience to the living God (3:31; 7:7-16; 8:3-8; 13:8-10). In fact, Paul echoes his imprecatory "By no means!" in 6:2, 15 to confront the antinomian argument against the Gospel.

As the climax of this section the apostle prosecutes the covenant-lawsuit against Israel by exposing the false accusation of

injustice and antinomianism as a "slandorous [*blasphemeo*] charge" (v. 8). It not only maligns Paul, the apostle of Christ, but also blasphemes God by imputing injustice to him and thereby promoting lawlessness. To blaspheme the "name" of the Lord is to attribute to him – to his character (name) – that which is contrary to his self-revelation—to the oracles of God, to Scripture. The rabbinical and judaistic arguments are found wanting and – speaking of justice – are "justly condemned" by the court of heaven (v. 8; see Lev 24:10-16). Ironically, the very ones who accuse Paul of antinomianism are guilty of the same. Through their autonomous use of the law they abstract it from the living God and his covenant to establish their own righteousness (10:3). Despite their legalism, they are thus rendered lawless.

3:9-20—All Humankind Under the Judgement of God[△]

9 *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.*—In v. 9 Paul transitions from his closing prosecution of the covenant-lawsuit against the Jews, despite their "advantage" (v. 1-8), to finalise his indictment of *all* mankind "under sin" (7:14 [also Gal 3:22] - "sold under sin") – there being no exemption for the Jews (v. 9). He lists the charges from the OT (v. 10-18) prior to the final judgement of the law – the covenant sanctions – upon the whole world, asserting there is no escape through self-justification, that is to say through any autonomous use of the law (v. 19-20). Only then can the apostle move on from the *problem* to the *solution*: justification by faith alone (v. 21-31).

10 *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* [v. 10-12 cited from Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3] **13** *"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive."* [Cited from Ps 5:9] *"The venom of asps is under their lips."* [Cited from Ps 140:3] **14** *"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."* [Cited from Ps 10:7] **15** *"Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known."* [v. 15-17 cited from Prov 1:16; Is 59:7-8] **18** *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."* [Cited from Ps 36:1]—In v.10-18 Paul presents a catena of quotes from the OT as witness to the prosecution to prove his charge of v. 9, "that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin". The universal, all-inclusive reach of sin with its noetic (intellectual) and conative (volitional) effect is emphasised in v. 10-12, sins of speech in v. 13-14, sins of violence in v. 15-17, ending with an inclusio in v. 18, a literary device bracketing the list by a similar thought to its beginning (v. 10). The list follows a logical sequence, beginning in man's relationship to God (v. 10-11), moving out to man's relationship to man (v. 12-17), and ending back in man's relationship to God (v. 18). The apostle represents the nature of sin as taught by our Lord:

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

Lk 7:21-22

See commentary on 1:20-23—The Incontrovertible Prejudice of Man, [Part 3](#), for the noetic effect of sin (v. 11 above).

19 *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under [en] the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20* *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*—The apostle has been building his case from 1:18 to culminate in v. 19-20 that Jew and Gentile are proven beyond doubt as guilty—as under sin and liable to God's judgement.

The challenge in v. 19 is to understand the term, "under [*en*] the law". As distinct from "under [*hupo*] the law" of 6:14, which means *to be under the power or authority of* – the same as "under [*hupo*] sin" of 3:9 – "under [*en*]" of v. 19 literally means *in*, referring to those who are "in the law", that is, within its sphere and thus referring to the Jews. This is confirmed by the context of the passage from 2:17-3:18, showing that the Jews are uniquely within the sphere of special revelation, having received the oracles of God, the Scriptures/law (v. 2). This also tells us what the "law" is in v. 19—the "law" as Scripture, the OT, including the commandment. Murray explicitly states:

There can be no question but here is the note of all-inclusive universality... Paul includes the Gentiles who did not have the law in the sense of the Old Testament or of specially revealed law (cf. 2:14). The Gentiles are therefore regarded as "in the law", that is to say, in the sphere within which the law of which Paul had quoted samples had relevance. This establishes the all-important consideration that although the Gentiles did not have the Old Testament law and in that

sense were without law, yet they were not outside the sphere of the judgment which the Old Testament pronounced. (Murray, pp. 106, 107)

Clearly, Gentile nations and peoples are required to obey the law of God and are judged by it. Throughout the Law (Ex 19:5-6; Dt 4:6), the Psalms (Ps 2; 22:27-28; 47:2; 67:2, 4, 7; 86:9; 89:15-18; 94:10, 12, 20-23; 96; 138:4; 148:11, 13; 119:46) and the Prophets (Is 2:2-4; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 60:3; Jer 1:9-10; 25:12 ff; Dan 5:22-28; Jonah 1-4) the nations and their kings are commanded to obey the Lord. They were also judged by the same standard as Israel, God's revealed, holy law (Ps 9:8; 96:10, 13; 58:11; 98:9; Prov 14:34; 16:12; Amos 1:3-2:3; cf. Hab 2:12 & Mic 3:10); otherwise, Canaan would not have been vomited out of the land as was Israel (Lev 18:24-27; Dt 8:19-20), nor would have Sodom and Gomorrah been destroyed (2 Pet 2:6-8). Furthermore, the nations were to be taught the law of God through Israel (Gen 12:3-4; Ex 19:5-6; Dt 4:6; 2 Sam 7:19; Ps 2; 94:8-11; Is 42:6; 49:6; Mic 4:2).

Contrary to certain antinomian tendencies in the church today, the "whole world" is "under the law". The apostle categorically states that the law of God applies to the world, bringing it under judgement. The question is this: is this only in the final assize, or also in history? If men, universally, are to be judged according to their works at the final judgement, does not this demand that God's law is applied to history, that daily our thoughts and actions are being measured by the court of heaven, by the plumb-line of God's law? If this is not the case, the Gospel is made a nonsense; it is not needed, for the Gospel – in its atoning power – is contingent upon the moral judgement of the law. Accordingly, if God applies his law to history, should not we also? This begs the question as to the role of God's law in society, as to how a culture derives its ethic, which the apostle explicates later in the epistle (ch. 13).

Returning to the text and the penultimate point of the apostle's argument, with the whole of mankind – Jew and Gentile – "in the law" he is "held **accountable** [*hupodikos*] to God" (v. 19). This is the only occurrence of *hupodikos* in the whole of the NT and has great significance for Paul's argument. The word carries powerful forensic (legal) connotations, showing the apostle's continued prosecution of the covenant-lawsuit (see Part 4). According to Morison it means that the whole world is *liable to judicial prosecution, hence liable to punishment, liable to pay penalty in relation to God* (Morison, pp. 147-148). Not only so, some assert that it refers to the one who has lost their case for the defence, declared guilty, and is now under sentence; although Morison opines that while this is theologically correct it is pressing the philology. Nevertheless, the verse itself indicates that the law "stops every mouth" – that is to say every argument for the defence – so that they may be held *hupodikos*—liable to penalty, they have lost the case and are under sentence. Additionally, the term provides another perspective, seeing God as not only Prosecutor and Judge but also as the injured party of the case—his rights have been violated (Moo, p. 205).

Arriving now at v. 20, the climax of this section, the apostle drives home the theme introduced from the start in 1:17-18 of the revelation of God's righteousness and of God's wrath against the ungodliness of men, and the means by which he may be justified in God's sight (see comments on [1:17-18](#) for covenant significance of "justification" [*dika* group of words]). God's righteousness – his nature as a covenant God – has moved him to wrath, provoked by man's rebellion as a covenant-breaker. How then, can man be justified (*dikaioo*), reinstated to covenant status? As a covenant rebel he is at enmity with God and incapable of pleasing him no matter what he does; he is under wrath and under sin (v. 9). In rebellion against God he therefore seeks to justify himself through *autonomous* use of God's law: either through its mere *possession* or its *performance*. But God has the last word—he has given the law "so that every mouth may be stopped" (v. 19), every *self-justifying* argument, because "by *works of the law* no human being will be justified [*dikaioo*] in his sight, since *through the law comes knowledge of sin*" (v. 20). The law, through which man perversely sought to take dominion over God, because of sin, has ironically, instead, taken dominion over him, because of sin (v. 9, 19; 6:14; 7:14).

A comment must be made concerning the phrase "works of the law" before we can pursue Paul's teaching on the purpose of the law further. This is its first occurrence in Romans, recurring in v. 28 and also found in Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10. It is strategic to the understanding of Paul's Gospel and is the focus of much recent debate ('New Perspective of Paul' discussed in 2:13, [Part 4a](#), and assessed further in the next section v. 21-31). The "works of the law" has historically been understood as anything done in obedience to the law as a subset of "good works" used as leverage for one's standing with God, for justification; consequently, this verse (v. 20) has been viewed as a refutation of the notion that God's approval may be gained by anything that a person can do (Moo, p. 206).

Nevertheless, while this approach is true, as far as it goes, we argue that the term "works of the law" has been confused and conflated with the term "law of works" (v. 27) and thus interpreted pejoratively. We agree that the latter denotes

'legalism'—*autonomous* use of the law either by virtue of its possession or performance (see comments [2:13](#)) for the purpose of covenant status (i.e. either gaining it ["getting in"] or keeping it ["staying in"]), whether it be ritual law (circumcision, sabbaths, etc.) or otherwise; whereas, we contend that the former – "works of the law" – can refer to legitimate law-keeping as an act of covenant-obedience done out of a heart of faith and trust in the Lord, in fact, what Paul refers to as the "obedience of faith [*hupakoē pisteōs*]", as the goal of his apostleship to the nations (1:5; 16:26)—that is, "believing obedience", which provides his polemic against the Jews and the programme for his epistle (see D. B. Garlington, *The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans Part I [Rom 1:5; 16:26]*, WTJ 52:2, 1990). In other words, "works of the law" are those works that the law stipulates that need to be done, as the apostle explains momentarily, "...we uphold the law" (3:31). Nevertheless, if those "works of the law" are abstracted from God and his covenant by an unbelieving heart as an *autonomous* means of covenant status (i.e. justification) the "law of works" is then operative, rendering them as abhorrent to God, as "filthy rags" (Is 64:6). Clearly, this is a principle of salvation through human works; albeit in the Jewish instance – and potentially Gentile, if not taught the truth of the Gospel – through God's law; thus Paul's subsidiary purpose in addressing the Romans is to pre-empt the Judaizers and their misuse of the law (see [Part 1](#)).

Man's self-salvation began in the Garden and is generic to the human condition – Jew and Gentile – providing a religious ground-motive in all he does, whether manifested through the secular-humanist state, ancient Israel, or the contemporary church. Mankind's first parents accepted the satanic proposition that their independent choice – that is to say, man's *autonomous* law – would make them to be "like God" (Gen 3:5). So, as Paul rightly states, "by works of the law [i.e. *autonomous* use of God's law] no human being will be justified". This was the Jewish problem—abstracting the *law of God* – the Scriptures – from the *God of the law*, thus using them as an *autonomous* means to eternal life:

37 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. **His voice you have never heard**, his form you have never seen, 38 and **you do not have his word abiding in you**, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. 39 **You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life**; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 **yet you refuse to come to me** that you may have life.

Jn 5:37-40

Consigned to death in Adam through the command of God (5:12; Gen 2:17; 3:19), man's rebellion precipitates his exile from the Garden, barring his *autonomous* access to the tree of life – that is, *eternal life* – by fiery sword and cherubim (Gen 3:22-24), prefiguring the covenant consequences (curses) for God's people – and indeed for nations – not only in eternity but in history; they are "vomited" out of the land because of their apostasy—*disobedience* always leading to *dispossession* (Lev 18:24-30; 20:22-24; Dt 28:36-37, 49-52, 63-64; 2 Kgs 17:6-23; Rev 3:15).

Despite being dispossessed, exiled from the Garden and the tree of life, he is still sent to cultivate the ground – now cursed because of his disobedience (Gen 3:17-18) – so as to provisionally fulfil the dominion/cultural mandate (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15), awaiting the One who would come as the "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45) and the "second man" (1 Cor 15:47); the One who would establish a new heavens and a new earth, who would both *terminate* Adam's disobedience and *inaugurate* a new humanity—one that would obey the living God and his commands, thereby extending Eden to the whole earth. Being covered by the Lord with animal skins, Adam's need of redemption is met sovereignly, graciously, and provisionally through the shedding of blood (Gen 3:21; Heb 9:22), anticipating the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Furthermore, God's original commands to Adam were situated within his gracious and sovereign relationship as Creator to creature. By virtue of God's grace and initiative, Adam was already in covenant with God; the commands were not therefore conditions to earn covenant status. Likewise, man's relationship to God in Christ. Consequently, God's command (i.e. the law), rather than as an *autonomous* source of eternal life (redemption/justification), in view of Adam's disobedience, is one of eternal condemnation and death (Gen 2:17; Rom 7:5) which only Christ's mediatorial work can solve. Nevertheless, God's command still serves as a tool for dominion, as a charter for living (Lev 18:5), a means of *provisional* life (sanctification) in contrast to *eternal* life (justification), of how to live and obey God in his world. In other words, the command of God (i.e. the law), and its corollary, the "obedience of faith", (1:5; 16:26) is integral to the Gospel.

The Gospel is the restoration of God's original command—the dominion/cultural mandate (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15); that is to say, the cultivating of a godly social order *in* history, progressively subduing every enemy of God and his Christ *until* the climax, when, having succeeded in his mission of extending God's kingdom to the entire cosmos, Christ triumphantly delivers it back to God the Father (Ps 110:1; Dt 4:1-8; Is 2:2-4; Mt 5:17-19; 28:18-20; Rom 3:31; 1 Cor 15:24-26; Rev 11:15). See the

comments on v. 7 concerning "eternal life" and the purpose of Christ's coming.

The role of God's law as a tool for dominion is illustrated through the five-fold covenant structure (see [Part 1](#), Ancient Near Eastern [ANE] suzerainty treaties); the law fulfils the *ethical* component of the covenant between the victorious king and his vassal—the *stipulations* of the covenant. Having already received the victorious king's sovereign grace by virtue of the covenant arrangement, the vassal extends the king's reign throughout the kingdom by obedience to the covenant stipulations. Likewise, the role of God's law is not for *covenant status*; rather, it is for *kingdom extension*.

Consequently, Israel's problem was that God's law was never given as a means of *justification* but rather *sanctification*—as a charter for living, not as a means of covenant status (Lev 18:5; Ezk 20:11, 13, 21). Thus Paul's explanation to Timothy: "Now we know that the law is good, *if* one uses it *lawfully*" (1 Tim 1:8). The law is only to be used according to the purpose for which it was designed: to show man how to live a life pleasing to God in obedience to the dominion/cultural mandate in the power of the Gospel.

This is confirmed by returning to our text (v. 20) and its immediate context. In v. 9-18 he has just concluded his evidence for the prosecution by use of his catena of OT scriptures, showing the all-inclusive impact of sin on man, ranging from his relationship to God to his social relationships, declaring that "None is righteous, no not one" (v. 10). Sin is so all-powerful and all-encompassing, brought to high definition by God's righteous law, that no one can be declared just in the sight of God. This, according to Paul, is actually the purpose of the law: "since through the law comes knowledge of sin". Later in the epistle he will explain more fully in 7:7-11 this sin-defining and sin-enlivening function of the law (also 4:15; 5:13, 20; Gal 3:15-4:7). The law of God, as the revelatory outshining of God's own nature, forms the objective moral standard – the balance – by which man is forensically measured – weighed – and found wanting. And so, as already stated, the law was never designed by God for *justification* but rather *sanctification*, as a blueprint for living, showing man how to live and please God. And this, man cannot do because of sin. His attempt to procure reinstatement to full *covenant status* (justification) through *covenant obedience* (sanctification) is rebellious, both reversing and perverting the order of God.

Conflating sanctification and justification, one then *becomes* justified through a progressive vital state rather than *declared* justified by a gratuitous legal decree (see [1:17](#) for the meaning of justification), effectively robbing one's assurance of salvation. Notwithstanding the *Joint Declaration On The Doctrine Of Justification* issued by the the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church in 1999, providing a significant rapprochement, this was the core confusion of the historic Roman Catholic doctrine of justification that precipitated the Reformation of 1517 (and is being repeated by the 'New Perspective on Paul' today) and was eventually solidified by the Council of Trent (AD 1545-63). This is not to demonize a church, nor deny the genuineness of an individual's faith; rather it is to critique the doctrinal system. Unfortunately, despite grace receiving some emphasis in their formula of justification (a semi-Pelagian synergism of faith plus works [albeit as a product of grace], see comments [2:13](#)), these errors reiterate the Jewish problem: justification by works of the law, and that, deferred to the last judgement. There is no present assurance of salvation.

As a covenant-breaker, man universally – without exception, Jew and Gentile – stands under the wrath of God, condemned—judgement has been declared and sentence passed. No amount of *autonomous* law-keeping (legalism/ritualism) can reverse it: "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight".

This is the human plight.

3:21-31—The Justice of God & Justification by Faith Alone[^]

From 1:18-3:20, Paul has prosecuted the Lord's covenant lawsuit, not only against apostate Israel but the whole of mankind as apostate, Jew *and* Gentile. He has indicted man as a covenant-breaker, as under sin and under God's wrath; building his case first against the whole of man (ch. 1), then focussing on the Jew (2:1-3:8), climaxing with a litany of sinful behaviours through a catena of OT citations, establishing beyond doubt the universal sinfulness of man. Man is therefore without defence – he is guilty – demanding God's justice—judgement and condemnation (3:9-20).

In this next section (3:21-26), the apostle returns to the revelation of the righteousness of God introduced in 1:17, here referring to God's "righteousness" four times in six verses (v. 21, 22, 25, 26). Everything is preliminary to this point, Luther claiming it as "the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle" (Margin of the Luther Bible, on 3:22ff.). An admirable sentiment but a disastrous exegesis. While Paul's argument has been building to this point, with the remainder of the epistle

informed by it, it is not the epicentre of the epistle (see my comments 5:12-21). Nevertheless, the passage is pregnant with the solution to the human plight. It demonstrates how the righteousness of God has been brought to light, displayed through a new economy of God and a new epoch for mankind.

But before we can move on in our commentary we are obliged to address what, after much consideration, we can only describe as a false gospel with far-reaching ramifications.

'The New Perspective on Paul'

Over the last twenty years or more the 'New Perspective' has gained significant traction and popularity across evangelicalism. It is not coincidental that this strategic passage (3:21-31) is disputed in modern scholarship. The enemy of God and of our souls – the devil – has a vested interest in confusing such a key text for God's purposes. Not only has the term "works of the law" in v. 20 (see further comments at v. 27-28) been narrowly redefined by the 'New Perspective on Paul' (see comments 3:20; 2:13) as referring to very specific Jewish law-keeping (circumcision, food laws, sabbaths) as "boundary markers" between Jew and Gentile, but also the terms "covenant", "righteousness of God", "faith", and "justification", receive new meanings, determining their view not only of Paul, but more significantly of the Gospel. As N. T. Wright has become the most influential populariser of the 'New Perspective' we will focus predominantly on his writings.

A flawed presupposition

First, "covenant" is viewed, and rightly so, by Wright as the meta-narrative of the Bible and that it is also gracious in nature. Nevertheless, because he accepts E. P. Sanders' thesis as "established" and foundational to his scheme – a flawed presupposition in the light of wider scholarship (see D. A. Carson [ed.], *Justification & Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*) – that first-century Judaism was gracious and not legalistic (Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 20), and therefore, Paul was not refuting a legalistic works-righteousness problem among the Jews he must have been addressing something else. The Jews, the argument goes, were not saved through their own works but through membership of the covenant people which was theirs by grace and divine election. Even so, while they were "in" the covenant by grace, they "stayed in" by their continuing obedience to the law (i.e. E. P. Sanders', "covenantal nomism"). And this was done, adds J. D. G Dunn, through wearing the "badges" (signs and seals) of covenant membership: circumcision, food laws, and sabbaths. And these were worn with nationalistic pride, using them also as the "boundary markers" between themselves and the Gentiles. The sin then, of the Jews, was not legalism but nationalism. Consequently, they claim, this was Paul's controversy with the Jews, that they remained separated from the Gentiles despite Christ's removal of the "dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14).

Building on this, Wright argues that God's plan through Abraham – and hence Israel – was to bless the world and to set it to rights—his version of covenant. "Covenant" then, for Wright, in his writings about Paul, becomes shorthand for this plan through Israel (*Justification*, p. 67), and thus, his generous reassessment of first-century Judaism and his negotiating around the covenant lawsuit prosecuted against her not only by the prophets, but also now by Jesus and Paul (Wright, *Jerusalem In The New Testament* [Originally published in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. P. W. L. Walker, ed., pp. 53–77. (2nd edn. 1994.) Carlisle: Paternoster. Grand Rapids: Baker]).

Rather than God's covenant inherently exposing man's autonomy and the sinner's individual standing before God (having conflated the Adamic covenant with the Abrahamic, hence truncating the biblical story of sin in Adam, man's enmity with God, and personal moral guilt), which Wright incorrectly treats as a medieval imposition on the text, the crux of the covenant becomes a renewed cosmos through God's plan for Abraham's family. The point of the Gospel is then to secure one's membership of that family through whom God will bless the world. Paul's controversy, therefore, with the Jews was not their unbelief and rebellion against God – and thus, their moral guilt and autonomous works-righteousness – but their exclusion of the Gentiles from membership in the covenant people, which Jesus had now secured. And through the Gospel, this membership is now accessed not by circumcision – the Jewish "boundary marker" of covenant membership – but by baptism. And so, through God's promise to Abraham, the one covenant family – in whom there is now neither Jew nor Greek – becomes the means of cosmic renewal.

While restoring the cosmos is certainly the big picture – and asserted as a corrective by this commentary – it is not the full story. The world will certainly be set to rights, in history, through the power of the Gospel but only as it first regenerates and justifies the individual as a sinner who has broken God's covenant through his or her personal pretension to godhood (autonomy) and moral enmity against him—including the Jew, as Paul has been at pains to argue in Rom 1:18–3:20. Only then will the institutions and structures of the world – indeed, the cosmos – be reformed and renewed through the Gospel, including

the church. As C. S. Lewis aptly states, "You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first".

Righteousness reinterpreted

Second, "God's righteousness" (see 1:17 for lexical definition) as integral to the Gospel, is consequently, no longer viewed as God's moral and ethical purity *imputed* to the believer's account through grace by faith, granting right standing before God, but rather, reinterpreted as God's faithfulness to his covenant; and hence, "man's righteousness" is viewed as covenant membership of God's people. While the scholarly consensus allows a diversity of meaning to the *dik* group of words (righteousness, justice, justification, justify), depending on context, the 'New Perspective' opts for God's "covenant faithfulness" as the dominant, overarching rendition (*Gospel Clarity*, p. 1141, 142). This is despite the fact that an overview of the OT use of the word never shows its use as "covenant faithfulness" (M. Siefried, *Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism*, JVN, Vol. 1, p. 423). What is the result? Having evacuated "God's righteousness" of ultimate ethical and moral categories – and the corollary, man's personal moral guilt as a covenant-breaker before a righteous God (i.e. sin, both Adam's and mine) – it is reduced to a community concern only, and thus, God's righteous requirements to merely a social construct. Extrapolated, sin is reduced to social injustice and the Gospel becomes an offer of salvation through politics—through communitarianism and ultimately statism.

Faith reinterpreted

Third, "faith" rather than "faith *in* Christ" becomes the "faith (or faithfulness) *of* Christ". Wright, in tune with various scholars over the last thirty years (e.g. L. T. Johnson, R. B. Hays, M. D. Hooker, B. W. Longenecker, I. G. Wallis et al.) has rendered the genitive *pistis Christo?* in Rom 3:22, 26 (Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9) not as objective but subjective. Hence, rather than being the object of our faith, Jesus becomes the one exercising *his* faith or faithfulness; and this, in regard to the covenant. Additionally, "faith", set off against circumcision, becomes an identity marker or "badge" to show one's membership of the covenant people, the church.

However, while, as Cranfield admits, "neither 'the faith of Christ' nor 'the faithfulness of Christ' can be simply ruled out as incompatible with the thinking of the early church as it is reflected in the New Testament [e.g. Rom 3:3]" (*On Romans*, p. 81), he rightly asserts *pistis* can denote several different things in Paul, among which is the sense of *fides qua creditur* ('faith by which it is believed'), which in regard to the texts in question (as above), "was in Paul's mind as strongly associated with the situation of the sinner who knows that he has no ground on which to stand before God except God's own sheer grace in Jesus Christ..., then this would suggest that it would not be likely to come at all naturally to him to speak of Jesus Christ's *pistis*. It would also suggest that we should be wise to hesitate about trying to construct a theology in which Jesus Christ's faith has an important place" (*ibid*, p. 96-97).

So, while, in fairness, *pistis Christo?* cannot be ruled out as the "faithfulness *of* Christ" (and/or God) in relation to the covenant, it must be remembered that Paul in Rom 3:22 is not describing who Christ *is* but rather what he has *done*. Hence, if taken exclusively in the subjective sense (i.e. "faith *of* Christ") faith is no longer the instrumentality (i.e. justified *by* faith) of justification but merely the "badge" of covenant membership (Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 160). In other words, faith shifts from the realm of soteriology (doctrine of salvation) to ecclesiology (doctrine of church); the locus has moved from the individual to the communal, which sits well with the current cultural milieu—but nonetheless, by default, absolutizes the church and minimizes the kingdom, robbing salvation of the necessity of personal faith *in* Christ. Sacramentalism and ritualism are the end result.

Justification reinterpreted

Fourth, "justification" as a once-for-all act of God's free grace, a legal declaration of the sinner's righteous standing before God by faith, becomes a *process toward* God's declaration (i.e. justification), on that final day, of one's membership in the covenant family and the vindication of them over against their enemies (*ibid*, p. 33-34, 158). Furthermore, with the redefinition of "faith", "justification by faith" becomes "justification by God's faithfulness" (i.e. we're "in" by grace) but additionally by one's "own faithfulness" (i.e. "staying in" by works). Because final justification is dependent on "staying in" the covenant through law-keeping, albeit through God's gracious help, the believer's salvation is no longer assured. As explained in our commentary of 2:13 this is a *synergistic* salvation, consisting of God's grace plus man's works. This is in stark contrast to the traditional reformed-protestant understanding of *monergistic* salvation, of God's sovereign grace in election, regeneration, and justification.

Summary and assessment

In summary and assessment, the misconstrual of covenant (suppressing the full implications of the Fall and man's personal moral guilt before a holy God), reinvents righteousness, faith, and justification. And this whole construct being founded on a flawed presupposition that first-century Judaism was not a works-righteousness religion, and that, therefore, Paul must have had another issue with the Jews, the solution found in their nationalistic separation from the Gentiles. With their generous reassessment of Judaism, the Gospel's exclusive locus is thus found in Abraham and the instituting of one family of God. With this and the recalibration of justification to a more Roman Catholic perspective (as per the Council of Trent) the 'New Perspective' is clearly a post-Protestant, post-Holocaust project to resolve the Protestant/Catholic and Jewish/Christian divides. With these overriding agendas, despite some helpful contributions, the discipline of exegesis is compromised and distortion of the Gospel has resulted.

The Gospel is reinvented as a communitarian catalyst in sync with the contemporary cultural milieu of 'inclusivity' and its schizophrenic disdain for individualism. With religious and racial unity as the primary driver, the Gospel and the people of God are cleverly reduced to a humanistic agenda—to accelerating the current slide into social hegemony, to political correctness, cultural-marxism and ultimate tyranny. The refusal to confront sin as *human autonomy* will result in *human tyranny*—dictatorship by an elite. By short-circuiting the full biblical story of sin, and thus, the true genius of the Gospel, the 'New Perspective' is reductionist and spiritually impotent, consigned to merely massaging the current cultural mindset. In fact, in its name, the *Gospel of God* has been traded for the *Gospel of Man*. To borrow a Spurgeonian imprecation, "Far hence be it driven!"

Over the last twenty years there has been copious literature from both the 'New Perspective' and in response. While the above outline is a fair representation of the basic structure, the movement is far more diverse and nuanced from scholar to scholar, with many variations on a theme. Nonetheless, taking this diversity into account, one of the most accessible, measured, and clear-sighted analyses, for the non-academic reader, is provided by Ligon Duncan and William B. Barclay in *Gospel Clarity: Challenging the New Perspective on Paul*.

3:21-26—Justification and the Righteousness of God[△]

21 *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it*—"But now" signals the epochal shift of the new economy in Christ, as God's present intervention in history to rescue mankind from his plight that Paul has taken great pains to progressively illustrate and prosecute to this point 1:18–3:20, that "by *works of the law* no human being will be justified in his sight" (v. 20) due to his utterly sinful state and legal standing under the condemnation of God. There is nothing that man can do to merit God's favour, not even obeying God's law.

This then conditions the apostle's next statement that God's righteousness has now been "manifested *apart* from the law". Sadly this has been misinterpreted by many, resulting in various measures of *de facto* Antinomianism and Marcionism. Failure to adequately discern the nuances of Paul's use of the word "law" (*nomos*) results in a distortion of the Gospel. An accurate apprehension of the relationship between Law and Gospel is crucial to Paul's thought, and thus, for the economy of God in the new epoch. Many, including Moo (p. 223), see Law and Gospel as a marked discontinuity in the redemptive-historical shift from old covenant to new: Law is OT and Gospel is NT. This is not at all Paul's thought. Verse 20 precedes verse 21, and, as already stated, conditions his statement "apart from the law", which flows from his conclusion of v. 20 that "works of the law" cannot justify. He is not referring to "the law" as divinely revealed commandments. He is quick to correct any misconception in the next breath, "...although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it". The "righteousness of God" has not changed from the old economy, the old flows over and supports the new. This is rapidly reemphasized when he rhetorically poses the very question of discontinuity between Law and Gospel: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." (v. 31). Furthermore, in v. 28 he settles beyond doubt any confusion of his meaning by asserting: "For we hold that one is justified by faith *apart from works of the law*."

What *has* changed in the new epoch is that there is now a new "economy" (from *oikonomos*, [compound of: *oikos* - household & *nomos* - law; i.e. literally 'the law of the house', or 'household management']), rendered "administration" by the NASB in Eph 3:9: "and to bring to light what is the *administration* of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things".

The new covenant is a new "administration". This is crucial to understanding the covenants and how they work. Paul refers to the *covenants* as plural – "covenants of promise" (Eph 2:12) – and the *promise* as singular. Because God is "one" (Dt 6:4), and

does not change, there is only one purpose flowing through history. And that is the "promise" of the *proteuangelion* of Gen 3:15 that the "seed of the woman" would crush the serpent's head, which then flows through to God's promise to Abram of a seed (Gen 15), being ultimately fulfilled in Christ as the "one" seed (Gal 3:16). With the *one promise* there is *one purpose* and therefore *one covenant* but *various administrations*. We can therefore speak of *the covenant*. This then shows *continuity* as the dominant dynamic of God's covenant purpose in history. Discontinuity is the exception, not the general rule, and only ever the exception when the NT explicitly specifies. For example, Hebrews clearly teaches that sabbaths, sacrifice, and temple are types and shadows (8:5; 10:1), as does Paul (Col 2:17; 1 Cor 10:6, 11), pointing to the substance and fulfilment in Christ.

Because "...the *path of the just* is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day" (Prov 4:18), revelation – the light of God – shines progressively brighter, finally culminating in Christ. The *path of the just* is a progressive revelation through the covenants, beginning in Adam, through to Abraham, Moses and David, and climaxing in Christ; each covenant, building on the others, brings an advanced administration of the promise, facilitating with each covenant an increase of the Kingdom of God (Is 9:7).

And so, in the climax of the covenant the righteousness of God has been "*manifested* apart from the law". Rather than the administration of the law *inscripturated* through Moses on tables of stone, the law-word of God is now *manifested* – displayed and demonstrated – indeed, *incarnated* through the Son (Heb 1:1-2; Jn 1:1-4, 14). With the shift from the old covenant to the new, *incarnation* has been added to *inscripturation*—the path of the just shines progressively to the full light of *the "Son"*. The written Word is not dispensed with because Christ has come. Hence, the law-word of God flows through into the Gospel—continuity rather than discontinuity. This is why Paul can claim, "*All* Scripture [including all OT commandments] is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Accordingly, this new administration does not manifest God's righteousness through "works of the law"; it is categorically "apart" from human merit.

The "righteousness of God" in this verse (v. 21) is revisiting the righteousness of 1:17—they are one and the same. Paul is now driving home the thesis he stated from the beginning:

For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for [to] faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

See the commentary on [1:17](#) for the full meaning of "righteousness"; suffice to say that it is God's judicial declaration of one's righteous status in his sight; of conformity to the covenant.

22 *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* [For there is no distinction: Please note this author has inserted parentheses to the text of v. 22b-23 to highlight what is clearly a parenthetical thought of the apostle, with the main thought picked up again in v. 24. "All" is qualified and amplified by the parenthetical comment: all mankind – Jew and Gentile – is on the same footing, there is no distinction—all have sinned and are condemned, as Paul has so eloquently proven (1:18–3:20), but equally *all* who believe are justified. The righteousness of God is operative unto justification whenever and wherever there is faith.

The "righteousness of God" in this verse (v. 22) is identical to v. 21 and 1:17.

For a full explanation of "faith in Jesus Christ" see above, third point under "The New Perspective on Paul". In short the righteousness of God is transacted through personal faith *in* Christ—he is the object of our faith; it is not a reference to the "faith [or faithfulness] of Christ".

23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*—"all have sinned [*hamartano*]", properly, "fallen short of the mark". The tense being aorist active indicative shows that all mankind has definitively sinned in the past, it is not a future possibility. As he explicates later in ch. 5, all have sinned representatively in Adam but also in their own right. So, all the sins of mankind are bulked up as it were in one collective past offence. Nonetheless, he is "falling short [*hustereō*] of the glory of God", present tense passive voice, meaning, *to lack*. Consequent to his sin he is constantly and presently lacking God's glory, God's manifest presence and character; he is falling from God's full and glorious image.

24 *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*—Paul now picks up again the main

thought of v. 21-22a. All those who believe "are justified [*dikaioo*]"—For the first time in the epistle Paul uses the verb "to justify", not meaning, "to make righteous" (ethically), nor "to treat as righteous" (although not), but rather, "to declare righteous" as a legal reality, not only acquitted but declared to be in the right—as righteous. Unlike Judaism and the 'New Perspective on Paul', this declaration is not deferred to the final judgement but rather the very moment one believes—the determinations of eternity are active in the present. Not only so, this legal declaration is "by his grace [*charis*] as a gift [unmerited]"—*charis*, properly, "that which affords joy, pleasure, delight" and "pre-eminently of that kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the ill-deserving" (Thayer). Justification is not only through faith but also a gift, freely given and hence unmerited, by which both the Giver and the receiver are afforded joy and delight. Man, who only merits God's judgement, is in a hopeless plight apart from God's sovereign and gracious intervention. As Pascal so aptly said, "Grace is indeed needed to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts it does not know what a saint or a man is" (*Pensées*, #508).

And this is through "the redemption [*apolutrosis*] that is in Christ Jesus". As part of the *lútron* word-group, *apolutrosis* in the NT carries the typical meaning of the group (Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 42), which throughout the LXX "consistently denotes the payment of a ransom price substitutionary in character" (*ibid*, p.33) with the "general sense of release" (Kittel), hence Conybeare's rendering as "ransom". The redemption in Christ Jesus is pre-eminently substitutionary, as shown by the OT equivalent *kopher* as the ransom paid to redeem a forfeited life (Ex 21:28ff; 30:12; Job 33:24; Is 43:3-4). Moreover, with the background of the ransoming of prisoners of war and of slaves the term, in its Christian application, conveys the liberation of the one who puts their faith in Christ from the slavery of sin, although, there is no suggestion that the ransom is paid to Satan, as some have held (Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 179). Nor does God in the OT usage pay a ransom to men (Morris, *op. cit.*, p.19), rather when God is the subject, the one redeeming, it denotes the bestirring of Yahweh on behalf of his people to deliver, and that because of the covenant (*op. cit.*, p.24; Dt 7:8). So, Jesus has come to give his life as the ransom (*lútron*) for many—to pay the price in their stead (Mk 10:45).

The Doctrine of Propitiation^u

25 whom God put forward as a propitiation [*hilasterion*] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness [*dikaiosuno*], because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.—Paul now changes gear from how the believer receives salvation – justification and redemption – to how God has provided it, to the engine-room that produced it. This Christ Jesus, the Redeemer, "God 'put forward' [*proétheto*] as a 'propitiation' [*hilasterion*] by his blood... ." God has "put forward" [*proétheto* verb form of *protithemai*], can be rendered as "displayed publically" (NASB), or alternatively, "appointed" (PHILLIPS), "designed" (NEB), both the latter carrying the sense "to set before the mind, to purpose" (Morris, *ibid*, p. 179), which is shown in Eph 1:9—"making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he 'set forth' [*proétheto*] in Christ". While the latter brings out the predetermined plan of God from eternity, which fits the content theologically, the former, as the primary (though not exclusive) meaning, fits contextually with v. 21 "manifested" and v. 25, 26 "to show"—God is making an open and public display of Christ.

In fact, *protithemai* means, "to expose to public view, in which sense it is the technical term with profane authors [Homer, Plato, Thucydides et al.] in speaking of the bodies of the dead (to let lie in state)" (Thayer).

Hence, Paul declared to Herod Agrippa:

For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, **for this has not been done in a corner.**

Acts 26:26

God's Public Display

God the Father made a public display of Christ in four ways: his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection.

First, his birth: the angels singing and heaven opening and the shepherds describing what they had seen and heard (Luke 2:8-16), and the wise men coming from afar, most probably Babylonia (Matthew 2:1-2), and the stars in the heavens leading the way (Mt 2:9-11).

Second, the public announcement of the ministry of our Saviour: all Israel was shaken with the preaching of John the Baptist

(Mt 3:1-12) who lifted his voice and proclaimed, "Look, behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). And his ministry itself was intensely public: multitudes surrounded our Lord in both his teaching and healing ministry; so much so, that he had to retreat to a boat to speak to the thousands on the shore (Mt 13:2). When he crossed the Sea of Galilee into the desert of Gadara there were five thousand men who followed him and he fed them. This means at least ten to fifteen thousand men, women, and children were there, vast multitudes followed the ministry of our Lord (Mt 14:21).

Third, his crucifixion: this was a judicial execution enforced by the Roman governor, the great imperial power of the day (Mt 27:1-2, 11-14), and furthermore, expedited by the leaders of the nation of Israel, the Sanhedrin (Mt 26:57-68); he was crucified in the most public place known to the people of Israel, on the high road to Damascus just beyond the city gate (Jn 19:20, Heb 13:12). Moreover, it happened during the Passover season when there were multiplied thousands of pilgrims from across the empire in Jerusalem who would have gazed upon the Son of God as he hung on the tree. His death was accompanied by creation itself travailing: at noon the sun was darkened, lasting for three hours, and when he gave up his spirit not only was the curtain in the temple torn in two but the earth shook and the graves of many of the saints were opened. Even the Roman centurion who stood guard, at his last breath exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mt 27:45-54; Mk 15:39-41).

Fourth, when he was raised from the dead "many infallible proofs" publically attested to it (Acts 1:3). An earthquake accompanied the resurrection and an angelic visitation that struck the guards at the tomb to the ground, some of them fleeing to the city reporting to the chief priests and the Sanhedrin what had happened (Mt 28:1-15). The apostles were not the only ones who saw the risen Jesus. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James were the first (Mk 16). Paul also lists witnesses in 1 Cor 15:3-8—Jesus appeared to Peter and the twelve, to five-hundred others at one time, then to James and last of all to Paul. More than adequately fulfilling the Law of Moses which required at least two or three witnesses for a matter to be established (Dt 17:6). And fifty days later many thousands were again gathered from around the empire for the festival of Pentecost when, witnessing to the ascension of Christ, the promised Holy Spirit fell with supernatural manifestations: the sound of a rushing mighty wind, visible flames of fire, and those who were filled with the Spirit praised God and told of his mighty works in the languages of the multitudes gather from the nations (Acts 2:1-13). And Scripture then records the spread of the Gospel, the saving of the Gentiles, and within several centuries history records that the whole empire is overrun by the Christian faith, Europe becomes Christianized and the missionary movement to the nations born. The works of God are done in the public arena, in full view of man, there is nothing hidden.

So, on the cross God the Father has formally and publically put on display the body of his Son before men and angels "as a propitiation [*hilasterion*] by his blood". However, this truth is highly contended. For example, the rendering of *hilasterion* as "expiation", as does the NEB, NABRE, and RSV, designedly weakens the meaning, informed by the arguments of scholars such as C. H. Dodd against the notion of the wrath of God (Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, [First published, Hodder & Stoughton, 1932; Fontana, 1959], p. 78-79). While expiation means "atonement for sin", propitiation is far more powerful, meaning "the removal of wrath" (Morris, *ibid*, p. 180). Although expiation of sins is necessary for propitiation to occur, they are distinct. The latter implies the former—that is to say, the wrath of God is removed only when sins are atoned for, expiated. Not only so, propitiation logically demands expiation, otherwise expiation has no rationale. In other words, 'Why does sin need to be expiated, atoned for?'—Because God is offended and angered by sin. It is well recognised that there is a link between the two in Hebrew thought.

Propitiation Contended

We might well ask why the doctrine of propitiation is contended by so many?—For two reasons:

Propitiation contended as pagan

First, the doctrine of the wrath of God is one that our age is not only coy about but openly rejects as pagan and foreign to the Christian religion. For example, N. T. Wright claims that:

... we have paganized our soteriology, our understanding of "salvation" (substituting the idea of "God killing Jesus to satisfy his wrath" for the genuinely biblical notions we are about to explore). Wright, N. T., *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (p. 147). HarperCollins, 2016. Kindle Edition.

At the center of the whole picture we do not find a wrathful God bent on killing someone, demanding blood. Instead, we find the image—I use the word advisedly—of the covenant-keeping God who takes the full force of sin onto himself. (*ibid*, p. 185).

... the real danger in expounding the meaning of Jesus's death is to collapse it into a kind of pagan scenario in which an angry God is pacified by taking out his wrath on Jesus. The first Christians ... at the heart of what they believed about Jesus and his death, ... affirmed, explained, insisted on, and turned into brilliant poetry the insight that what happened on the cross was the self-expression of the love that made the world. (*ibid*, pp. 257-258).

Indeed, in his acceptance of this caricature, he not only defames the purity of the wrath of God but also reduces its power. And in doing so, Wright must also reduce the significance of sin, which he does by reinterpreting it as simply a "force":

When humans sin, they hand to nondivine forces a power and authority that those forces were never supposed to have. ... These "powers" need to be overcome ... But behind all specific "powers" or "forces" many Jewish and Christian thinkers have recognized a darker, more nebulous power that drives ordinary people to do horrible things. ... Sometimes the Bible refers to this dark force simply as "sin" (singular) as opposed to the "sins" (plural) that humans commit when they behave in a less than fully human fashion. (*ibid*, pp. 101-102).

This transfers sin from a moral category to a metaphysical one, a "force" to be overcome. Sin is no longer seen as ethical rebellion against God. Consequently, man is reduced from the *imago dei* as an accountable moral being; indeed, he is recast as a victim under the 'powers'. This skews one's understanding of the atonement, deflecting it from the 'propitiatory' to the 'powers'. And these are both metaphysical and physical: abstract and concrete. On one hand, as it relates to man individually, sin is reduced to the speculative and conceptual (metaphysical), but on the other, as it relates to man corporately, it is transferred definitively and concretely to societal structures (physical). The focus shifts from personal evil to institutional. This is the nub of both cultural and economic Marxism. Hence, the contemporary popularity of the *christus victor* view of the atonement, of victory over the evil powers—a snug fit with the spirit of the age.

Furthermore, C. H. Dodd's argument against the wrath of God is undergirded by an implicit naturalism that controls his exegesis and view of Scripture, and hence assumes an evolutionary development of religion from paganism to the Jews to Christianity:

Professor Rudolf Otto, in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*, has done much to clarify our thought upon the primitive basis of religious emotion and religious ideas. He finds the raw material of religion in the sense of the 'numinous'—a shuddering awe before the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* which meets man in the midst of his experience of the world. The negative side of this feeling, where it is sheer desperate terror, is for the primitive evoked largely by such things as thunder and earthquake, regarded, of course, not as 'natural phenomena' ... but as manifestations of the Mystery, in its menacing or destructive form. ... such phenomena are explained on the analogy of the irrational passion of an angry man: they are anger of the gods.

Thus in the oldest parts of the Old Testament the anger of Jehovah displays itself in thunder, earthquake, pestilence, and the like. The prophets took up this idea, but rationalized it by teaching that disaster is not an outbreak of irresponsible anger, but an expression of the outraged justice of God. Thus the 'wrath of God' is taken out of the sphere of the purely mysterious, and brought into the sphere of cause and effect. At the same time they taught that Jehovah was loving and merciful, and desirous of saving His people from disaster, by saving them from sin which is the cause of disaster. Of course they did not rationalize away the 'numinous' sense of the Wrath of God, but they brought into relief the personal relation of love and mercy in which God stands toward His people, and which transcends wrath. ... Wrath is the effect of human sin: mercy is not the effect of human goodness, but is inherent in the character of God. ...

Thus the way is open for a further development in which anger as an attitude of God to men disappears, and His love and mercy become all-embracing. ... there is something impersonal about 'the Wrath of God' from the beginning, and something incapable of being wholly personalized in the development of religious ideas. ... The idea of an angry God is a first attempt to rationalize the shuddering awe which men feel before the incalculable possibilities of appalling disaster inherent in life, but it is an attempt which breaks down as the rational element in religion advances. In the long run we cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest human ideals of personality and yet attribute to Him the irrational passion of anger." (*op. cit.*, p. 49-50).

From time immemorial men in their pagan darkness and fear of the natural elements – not to mention the spirit world –

have irrationally sought to propitiate the gods to make them favourable towards them. Rather than locating this in man's primeval rebellion against God in the Garden and God's consequent wrath revealed from heaven against man's unrighteousness, Dodd finds it in man's primitive religious state and fear of the arbitrariness of the physical elements and hence "the wrath of the gods", which by the time of the early OT has developed into "the wrath of God" – which he claims is not inherent to God's character – and is later rationalized by the prophets as the justice of God administered through cause and effect. By the time of Jesus and Paul this has further evolved into a completely depersonalized principle inherent to the moral universe: "He [Paul] has therefore succeeded in disassociating the fact of retribution from any idea of an angry God visiting His displeasure upon sinful men, even though he retains the old expression 'the Wrath of God.' The whole process is part of the divine government of the universe, and in this sense it is God who brings the Wrath upon men' (as in 3:5), but it is not thought of as the direct expression of God's attitude to men." (*ibid*, p. 55).

And thus, Dodd reinvents God and the universe: the former as deistic and the latter as mechanistic. The personal creator-God has been successfully exorcised from his world – and hence from history – all for the sake of a false theodicy (defence of God's goodness); one that pitches God's wrath against his mercy, replacing one with the other. Rather than holding them in balanced tension, mercy trumps wrath and opens the way for an antinomian gospel – for hyper-grace – in which there is no objective moral standard or direct and personal governance of God in the affairs of men. The 'Gospel of Man' has trumped the 'Gospel of God'.

Deism inevitably morphs into pantheism. The former results in the total separation of God from the world and the latter total identification with it; the universe – material and moral – becomes god. And so, with the doctrine of God misconstrued, immanence then trumps transcendence, man and the cosmos are divinized and merge into one, playing out in history as a determinist and evolutionary process. But because transcendence, as a category, doesn't just disappear it re-emerges with man as god – as transcendent, his own ultimate reference point – manifesting in social hegemony, as today's cultural-marxism and tyranny by the elite. The end result: 'The state walking upon earth as god' (Hegel). Caesar is reinstated as lord. Ironically, the categories Dodd sought to escape – particularly their pagan iteration – are merely transferred; in the post-Christian neo-pagan dystopia we are forced again to propitiate the wrath of the gods—the state and its all too-willing thought police. The blood of the martyrs not only seeds the church (Tertullian) but also perversely propitiates the new gods.

Hence, the Gospel is the 'Gospel of God' in antithesis to the 'Gospel of Man' (see comments 1:1-2). This is why the epistle is in the style of a formal imperial letter. The apostle is speaking into Rome, the centre of empire—the City of Man. He is, in fact, proclaiming to the human colossus of Daniel 2 that Christ is Lord of the cosmos; that it is he who justifies and saves man, not Caesar. Thus Peter's proclamation of Christ's Gospel of salvation and sovereignty in the face of the false gospel – the Emperor cult – declaring that "there is salvation in no one else [i.e. Caesar], for there is no other name [i.e. Christ's] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). If the church doesn't proclaim the ultimacy of Christ as Lord over the totality of human existence the state will; that is, proclaim itself as lord in the name of autonomous man. Hence, in the name of a woman's rights over her own body (autonomy) the state sanctions the murder of her defenceless child, or in the name of gay-rights (autonomy) religious freedoms are struck down by the state.

Because we have reduced the Gospel to a religious commodity, to 'eternal fire insurance', a truncated 'personal salvation', it has lost the true significance of salvation *in* history. To both the Hebrew and Roman minds, "salvation" – for different reasons – connoted, not so much salvation in eternity but in history: for the Jew it spoke of God's covenant with his people, saving them for himself as against the tyranny of the nations, so as to establish his Kingdom on earth; and for the Roman it spoke of the Caesar cult's claim to statist sovereignty and salvation, of a new order of peace and justice for the world. Both are claims of lordship in history, hence, Paul's grounding of the Gospel in the promises of the "holy Scriptures" and "the prophets" (1:2; 3:21), as the realization – in Christ – of the promised Kingdom of God on earth. Salvation is historical and cosmic. Any deferment of this by God's people through their eschatological schemes evacuates the world of lordship and the power of salvation, handing them over to autonomous man and the state. The state then, as lord and covenant mediator, 'justifies' (declares lawful) and 'saves' (social-security) those who 'worship' the image (lordship) and 'propitiate' its wrath through 'blood sacrifice' (genocide [eugenics], infanticide [abortion], suicide [euthanasia], and war).

Propitiation contended on philological grounds

Second, propitiation, as appeasement of God's wrath, is contended on philological grounds. Again, Dodd's scholarship has been

influential here, rejecting "propitiation" for "expiation" as the true import of *hilasterion* in the LXX. While Morris, in particular, categorically affirms Dodd's conclusion that the OT's representation of propitiation and of God's wrath has no similarity whatsoever with the parallel pagan notions, Dodd goes on to claim that the wrath of God is "an archaic phrase" suiting "a thoroughly archaic idea" (*ibid*, p. 47), to which Morris responds:

'If the LXX translators and the New Testament writers did not mean propitiation, why did they choose to use words which signify propitiation and are saturated with propitiatory associations?' Such a procedure, one would think, is the surest way of being misunderstood: and if Dodd is right, their choice of words has, in fact, caused them to be misunderstood right up to our own day." (Morris, *ibid*, p. 148-149).

Despite misunderstandings, there has been significant agreement as to the *hilaskomai* word-group denoting "propitiation" in classical Greek (*ibid*, p.145), which is Morris's point; from classical, to LXX, to NT writers there is consistency as to its usage. Not only so, both Leon Morris and Roger Nicole have highlighted a methodological flaw in Dodd's analysis of the word-group's usage in the LXX, leading to his erroneous conclusions (*ibid*, p. 155-156). We refer you to their research. In conclusion, we reaffirm the full import of *hilasterion* in 3:25 as appeasing the full force of the wrath of God, as overwhelmingly substantiated throughout the whole of Scripture, especially in the OT cultus, characterized by substitutionary atonement.

Far from the pagan notion of appeasing capricious and angry gods, the God of the Bible is revealed as "full of compassion" and "slow to anger" (Ex 34:6; Ps 103:8; Jas 5:11). But nonetheless, displays his mercy and love as a holy aversion to all that violates the perfections of his own pure nature; it is a deep but controlled moral anger, a resolve against that which is destructive of the image of God in man, of sin. In fact, any diminution of the wrath of God is a diminution of the seriousness of sin. Hence, from the beginning God laid down that sin is requited by death: "...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 3:17). Consequently, a divinely appointed means of propitiation is provided. It never was about the pagan notion of man earning favour with the gods through his sacrifices; rather God appoints not only the means – substitutionary sacrifice – but also the sacrifice. When man fell in the Garden his sin was covered; he was clothed by God in animal skins, necessitating the shedding of blood – the death of a substitute – without which is no remission of sins (Heb 9:22). And hence, Abraham was also provided with a substitute, the lamb in the thicket (Gen 22:8, 13).

This brings us to the apostle's next phrase: *a propitiation 'by his blood'*. In v. 24 we have already noted the substitutionary nature of the "redemption" in Christ, who came "to give his life as a ransom [*lútron*] for many" (Mk 10:45), paying "life for life" (Lev 24:18, 21). Because "the life is in the blood" (Lev 17:11), when Jesus shed his blood on the cross it signalled his death as a substitutionary payment, and thus, a propitiation of the divine wrath: "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (5:9).

Propitiation and Substitution

This substitutionary and propitiatory significance of Christ's blood is reinforced by the only other NT use of *hilasterion* in Hebrews 9:5, referring to the "mercy seat", the lid of the Ark of the Covenant (Lev 16). Significantly, it was here once a year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice for the sins of the people, providing "a copy and shadow of heavenly [spiritual] things" (Heb 8:5), foreshadowing Christ as "our Passover lamb" (1 Cor 5:7), a substitutionary atonement. The imagery of the Ark of the Covenant is both eloquent and powerful (Ex 25:17-22). As its lid, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat covers the law of God lying within; and above at each end facing one another are the two cherubim, wings arched above overshadowing the ark, faces gazing downward, but not on the law that condemns to death but rather upon the blood that propitiates and justifies. And it is there – between the wings of the cherubim – above the mercy seat that the *shekinah* glory manifestly dwells in the midst of the covenant people (Ps 80:1; 99:1). And so, God's presence in the midst of his people is contingent upon expiation of their sin and thus propitiation of God's wrath, and this, through the blood of a substitutionary sacrifice. Any suggestion that Paul could not be alluding to the mercy seat in addressing the Gentile Romans, as they were not versed in the OT, is ill-founded. As indicated in the Introduction, the church was within the Pauline sphere of influence, and being so would have been well taught from the OT. Furthermore, many of the Gentile believers were Jewish proselytes and thus taught the OT in the synagogues.

'He shall bear their iniquities'

Seven centuries previously this substitutionary nature of Christ's death – as sin-bearer – is poignantly prophesied in the

Messianic chapter of Isaiah 53:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the **Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all**. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, **stricken for the transgression of my people? Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him**; he has put him to grief; when **his soul makes an offering for guilt**, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and **he shall bear their iniquities**. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because **he poured out his soul to death** and was numbered with the transgressors; yet **he bore the sin of many**, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

'The Cry of Dereliction'

Psalm 22, as a Messianic prophecy, also foreshadowed the substitutionary nature of Christ's death. As our sin-bearer on Calvary's cross Christ paid the penalty of death for sin. It was there, on Golgotha's hill, that God the Father "laid on him the iniquity of us all". And as he did so, the "only beloved Son" uttered through the words of the psalm his soul-rending 'cry of dereliction':

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Mt 27:46

At that moment God the Father "for our sake made him to be sin who knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21a); and so, in the holiness of his nature, unable to countenance sin, he turned his face from his darling Son and delivered him to death. Feeling the full force of God's wrath and the utter abandonment of the Father with whom he had enjoyed sweet communion from eternities past, he ejaculates: "My God, my God, *why* have you forsaken me?"—"so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21b). Christ on the cross, as the divide of history, became the focus of the curse in unmitigated concentration (Dt 21:23; Gal 3:13) and the centre of a cosmic transaction, a divine exchange: *our sin became his and his righteousness became ours*. He bore on our behalf the due penalty for our sin. His death has once-and-for-all expiated man's sin and propitiated God's wrath; thus, Christ's cry as he gave up his spirit, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30). And hence, through the "blood of the covenant" we are now justified (1 Cor 11:25; Heb 9:18, 20; 10:29; 12:24; 13:20); by faith our covenant status has been reassigned by heaven's court: previously condemned to death as covenant-breakers, we are now declared to be in the right as covenant-keepers.

At this, in one dramatic act, God took the veil in the temple and tore it from top to bottom, not from bottom to top, as men would do, demonstrating that salvation is *of* the Lord, the New Jerusalem comes from above not below (Mt 27:51; Rev 21:2). The *hilasterion* was now open to view, the veil is gone and there is now freedom to enter with boldness: "For through him we both [Jew & Gentile] have access [freedom to enter] in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18; Heb 9-10). The promised restoration of David's tabernacle – the only OT dwelling of God with no veil – has been fulfilled in Christ, and this for the "ingathering of the Gentiles" (Acts 15:16-17). With the veil removed, God's redemptive purpose for the nations can now go forward.

Propitiation and the 'Gospel of Man'

And thus, propitiation is the engine-room of justification. God's work of substitutionary atonement – of expiation and propitiation – is why justification according to v. 24 is "by his grace as a gift" and v. 25 "to be received by faith". Unlike the gospel of autonomous man – of self-righteousness and works – the 'Gospel of God' is all of grace; we are now justified by his grace as a gift, not as something earned or merited. Because Christ, as our substitute, has paid the penalty for sin by his death there is nothing more to be done. The 'Gospel of God' is truly good news in that there is no death – apart from Christ's – that can atone for human sin or appease divine wrath. Christianity is consequently an aroma unto life. This is antithetical to the 'Gospel of Man' (see comments 1:1-2), a gospel of works, indeed of human sacrifice offered to the god of human ultimacy, of state-sanctioned murder through its policies of death, of abortion and euthanasia. And yet this gospel perversely looks to the messianic and paternal state for "grace as a gift"—not only for legal justification of immorality but for 'handouts': for education,

medical care, for welfare ad infinitum. The state, as god walking on earth, is now not only the source of justification – declaring one to be righteous – but also of providence. The ground motive of the secular-humanist state is unarguably and profoundly religious.

The Vindication of God

This propitiation in Christ's blood "was to show God's righteousness [*dikaiosune*], because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (v. 25). The significance of this phrase is rooted in the opening verse of this paragraph, "But now" (v. 21), referring to the intervention of God in Christ. Hence, the "former sins" are those committed prior to the Christ event under the old dispensation that "in his divine forbearance he had passed over" (2:4; Acts 14:16; 17:30). These sins were merely "passed over"; they were not fully addressed, the sacrificial system pointing forward to Christ. In other words, God had postponed the full penalty of sin until the cross (Heb 9:15). This therefore "was to show God's righteousness [*dikaiosune*]", his judicial righteousness, that is, his justice—to demonstrate in the cross that he is ultimately just, and that his judgements though seemingly slow, are certain and true. Any accusation against God's justice because of the old dispensation is refuted.

26 *It was to show his righteousness [*dikaiosune*] at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*—Picking up from the previous verse the same thought of God demonstrating his righteousness [*dikaiosune*], he now applies it to the "present time". God "put forward Christ to show his righteousness" (v. 25) in the new dispensation, to demonstrate that he is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus". This is both an *attribute* (just) and an *action* (justifier) of God; he will not – and indeed cannot – do anything that is contrary to his own nature. Hence, even in the *action* of justifying (legally declaring as right) a sinner who has faith, God demonstrates, through propitiation on the cross, that it is harmonious with his *attribute* of being just. In other words, – keeping in mind the rabbinical teaching that grace must be deserved – justifying a sinner is not unjust, because the just penalty for sin has been paid. It is not just a matter of forgiveness but of justice. God's infinite justice has been met by an infinite restitution—indeed, by the only one qualified to do so, by the one who was truly God and yet truly man. Any accusation against God's justice because of the new dispensation is, thus also, refuted. God, as the just Judge, is vindicated on the cross.

Implications for Gospel and Culture

Gospel

The consequences of the Gospel's vindication of God's justice are manifold. *First*, the Gospel is inherently judicial; as the *euangélion* of Christ the Emperor-King it proclaims his law throughout his domain. Like any government, the government of God functions through a constitution and the rule of law; the former located in the covenant and the latter in the OT law, as the ethical stipulations of the covenant. *Second*, rather than abrogating the law – as many falsely claim – Christ came to re-establish the law, but additionally providing the ability to obey it. *Third*, without the continuity of the law into the new covenant economy the Gospel would be rendered impotent and indeed made a nonsense. The whole rationale and viability of the Gospel is judicial, based on law, as Romans 1-3 has demonstrated. If the moral nature of God and his judicial decrees based on his laws – as inscripturated in the OT – are not immutable, we are neither condemned nor justified. *Fourth*, because of the foregoing, the Gospel is not only personally but culturally arresting and transforming, it provides the laws and wisdom of God for living to the glory of God; for the governance of man both personally and in his social relations and, is thus, culture-building. Indeed, the Gospel is the proclamation of God's government for the earth as his fulfilment of the original dominion-cultural mandate of Genesis 2:15 and of the *protoeuangélion* of Genesis 3:15. Because God is both Creator *and* Redeemer these are complimentary aspects of the Gospel; in the postlapsarian world, God's dominion in creation – and hence, culture – can only occur through his dominion over the Serpent (Gen 3:15; Rev 12:9-11). And both of these are achieved through his mandate for man: through the "seed of the woman", the God-man, Christ Jesus and the new humanity that is in him.

Henry Van Til, in fact, defined 'culture' as "religion externalized". The word 'culture' is rooted in the Latin *colere*, 'to inhabit, care for, till, worship' and *cultus*, 'A cult, especially a religious one.' Hence, the direction of a nation's worship – that is, their ultimate reference point – whether the true and living God or a false-god, determines the shape of that culture. So, when a nation changes its God, so goes the culture, including its laws. And every culture makes a choice between two directions for their worship: either toward the Creator or the creature. Just as the first human parents adumbrate the choice of every individual, so too for every human community; that choice is between standing in obedience under God's communication as a covenant-keeper, or standing in judgement over God and his communication as a covenant-breaker. The former honours the Creator-creature distinction, while the latter violates it, as the creature – man – becomes a would-be god (Gen 3:5). And so, man becomes autonomous, his own ultimate reference point. This is thus the religious ground motive of *humanism*, the absolutization of man—"Man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras). The choice then for a culture is either: theonomy (God's

law) or autonomy (man's law).

Culture

The implications of this for culture are also manifold. *First*, because the sovereign God created the universe and upholds it by the word of his power we enjoy the uniformity of natural law, of "seedtime and harvest" (Heb 1:3; Gen 8:22). For the atheist there is no escape from the world that God created and ordered; the laws of nature do not discriminate, applying equally and consistently to all – regardless of belief – as a constant revelatory reminder of the creator-God and of man's creatureliness. Now here is the rub, the inescapable nature of the physical universe is the case also in God's moral universe. All claims to atheism or amorality will not change the facts of the moral universe as created and governed by God. Hence, all the moral and ethical categories known to man exist by virtue of who God is. As Dostoyevsky concluded, 'Crime and Punishment' *are* realities in a moral universe: choices *do* have consequences. Any claim to the contrary, like Nietzsche's, 'Beyond Good and Evil', is merely autonomous man's fiat as a would-be god, seeking to create his own reality—in fact, a fantasy, leading only to irrationality and insanity. With our culture's rejection of its ultimate reference point in the creator-God, and thus, of God-interpreted categories it loses touch with reality, not only in the loss of morality and ethics but also rationality. A culture believing itself to be wise, has, in fact, become a fool (Rom 1:22). *Second*, because God-created ethical categories are inescapable, wherever 'justification by faith' is usurped by unbelief, elitism and tyranny result. How does this work? 'Justification', as a God-created category, will not disappear but re-emerge from the creature, from the false gods. For example, like the first-century Judaism that Paul confronted, or Nazi Germany, race and birth provide the 'justification' for status over others, whether religious or political an aristocracy emerges; or like the Romans, military force, citizenship, or wealth may 'justify' status. An elite arises over the masses. Plato's philosopher-kings emerge – in fact, a new priesthood – to legislate for the rest of society. With the rejection of God in Christ, the state and its elites adopt a mediatorial role; because man is a covenant creature he looks to his gods for covenant status, for authentication and legitimacy. And so, in a post-Christian, neo-pagan society various cabals have arisen, vying for mediatorial power: the academic, the scientific, the psychiatric, the medical, the legal, the political, the media, and the commercial. So, whenever the leveller of 'justification by faith alone' is destroyed the end result is tyranny. The Gospel teaches that while men are different functionally by virtue of creation, they are equal by virtue of redemption: that is, they are all equally justified by God's grace as a gift—it is unearned, unmerited. This is the primary reason that wherever the Gospel has prevailed in culture and nation-building it has not only produced individual responsibility and productivity but also constitutional government and the rule of law that protect the freedom of the individual, and yet build community. *Third*, Christian-theism – and thus the Gospel – provides an objective and transcendent ethic in the law of God as the foundation for jurisprudence and justice. In contrast to humanistic positivist law, which is relativistic and invented by fiat of an elite, God's law is transcendent, absolute, holy, immutable, and just. Consequently, the Gospel, as explicated by Paul from Romans 1-3, is the foundation for justice in the world, and hence for godly cultures and free societies. Despite its aberrations and failures, the history of Christian Europe and of the West has provided an historical precedent. While the Christian influence is in temporary eclipse in the West through its apostasy, the potency of the Gospel, as a culture-creating force, will see a renaissance and the nations will enjoy an increase of God's government of peace and justice.

3:27–4:25—"By Faith Alone"[▲]

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. **28** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. **29** Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, **30** since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. **31** Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.—In the closing verses of the chapter the apostle drives home the conclusion drawn from v. 21-26, that we are justified by God's grace as a gift—as unearned (v. 24). Boasting is consequently undermined and excluded; "boasting" in the ESV features in 40 verses of Paul's epistles, with four in Romans (2:17, 23; 3:27; 4:2), and hence is of great consequence to him and to the Gospel:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Eph 2:8-9

Autonomous man – whether Jew or Gentile – is universally on the same footing because of justification by faith. There is no covenant status with God apart from faith. This became the hallmark of the Reformation teaching *sola fide* – by faith alone –

which Paul argues is necessary to maintain *sola gratia*. This is the root antithesis between the ‘Gospel of God’ (Christian-theism) and the ‘Gospel of Man’ (humanism); the former is by grace through faith, the latter through works. Hence, the Jews that reject the righteousness of faith, opting for their own righteousness, manifest the same autonomy as the Gentiles, relying on their birth and/or conformity to law – whether human or divine – as the currency of covenant status. And with man as his own god, this status is mediated through the state and its elite. This explains why the Jews so easily conspired with Rome in the person of Pontius Pilate in the judicial execution of our Lord. The apostate church will always have more in common with the messianic state – and its zeitgeist – than the Messiah himself. It also explains why human tyrannies are devoid of grace; in rejecting covenant status by faith they have denied God’s gracious provision.

The ‘Gospel of God’ pulls the rug from under boasting – human merit – and thus dismantles humanistic empires and tyrannies. “By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.” Clearly Paul is using the word “law” (*nomos*) differently to his usual sense of the OT commandments; that is to say, he is now using it in the sense of a ‘system’, ‘principle’, ‘order’, or ‘rule’ as he does later in the epistle (7:21, 23; 8:2; Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 122-23). Nevertheless, some erroneously argue that he is using it in the OT commandment sense and that he is pitching two kinds of law against each other: ‘law of works’ (OT: Moses) versus ‘law of faith’ (NT: Christ), the former impossible to obey and the latter achievable. This misconstrues the old covenant as a non-gracious works-covenant and the new covenant as a non-law grace-covenant (i.e. OT=law, NT=grace), pitching law and grace against each other as a false antithesis, whereas in reality both grace and law operate in both covenants. Furthermore, it renders “faith” no longer as the instrument of justification (i.e. *by* faith) but the merit for justification (i.e. *because of* faith), thus ironically reducing faith to a system of works, to a “law of works”, the very thing they are seeking to escape. See the comments on v. 24 for further explanation of the two covenants.

In v. 28 Paul gives the reason for the “law of faith”: “For we hold that one [*anthropos*] is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” Man (*anthropos*) universally, Jew and Gentile, are justified by faith apart from works of the law, which Paul argues in v. 29-30 is consonant with God being one: “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one... .” The apostle again appeals to the singular purpose of God for man revealed in the fact that he is one God with one purpose and mind, administered through one covenant (see comments on 3:2, 21 for the unity of God and of the covenants). God’s plan for the earth from eternity – established in the Garden, amplified in Israel, and climaxed in Christ – was always for a cosmic temple in which he would dwell with man as his vice-regent. His plan was always for the whole of humanity, for all tribes, tongues and peoples—not just for one race. By appealing to the oneness of God Paul is founding his Gospel on the one covenant purpose of God declared in the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5—

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And this is reiterated by Jesus as *the* ‘Great Commandment’ (Mt 22:37), thus re-establishing God’s one covenant purpose in the new covenant era. In view of God’s one covenant purpose that all mankind are now justified on the same basis – by grace through faith – this then leads logically to Paul’s climactic rhetorical question of v. 31: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.” On the basis of the oneness of God, the apostle is declaring categorically that the law of God, as revealed to Moses, continues into the new economy of God in Christ. Indeed, law and covenant are synonymous in the divine economy.

Even in the face of this close argumentation by the apostle, many still insist that Paul is not meaning the law as commandments but rather the law as the OT scriptures. As evidence, they claim Paul’s use of Abraham in the next chapter. In response, one only needs to set v. 31 in the overall context of Paul’s argument from chapters 1-3 – and indeed the climax of that argument – to settle that Paul is referring to the law as commandments. His whole argument to this climactic point has been that man universally is under the wrath and judgement of God on the basis of his law as commandments, and consequently, God has provided propitiation through Christ by faith as the only means of covenant status. The law thus stands and is upheld by the Gospel (see commentary v. 26, *Implications for Gospel and Culture*). Paul will revisit the role of the law in chapters 7-8, explicating it further.

Returning to his current focus, in the next chapter Paul will expound ‘justification by faith alone’ further from the lives of Abraham and David.

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