

# Paul's View of Justification

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# The Ever-Contentious and Controversial Doctrine of Justification

- In Paul's Day in the 1<sup>st</sup>-Century Church (Acts 15:1-7)
- In Luther's Day in the 1500s
- In our days with the "Lutheran" Paul vs. New Perspective(s) on Paul (NPP)

# I. “Righteous(ness)” in Paul, and Its Relationship to “Justification”

## A. The Cognate Terms: “Righteous(ness),” “Righteous-ify” (=Justify), and “Righteous-ification” (= Justification)

- The noun *righteousness* (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaiosynē*) occurs 58x in Paul’s writings. The adjective *righteous* (δίκαιος, *dikaios*) occurs 17x.
- In English, the terms *righteous* and *justify* come from different roots, but in Greek they are cognate. In Paul, the verb *justify* (δικαιόω, *dikaioō*) occurs 27x. And the noun form *justification* (δικαίωσις, *dikaiōsis*) occurs 2x.

# I. “Righteous(ness)” in Paul, and Its Relationship to “Justification”

**B. Paul speaks most extensively and clearly on this issue because it needed to be clarified because of the Gentile mission and the Judaizer controversy. These circumstances required the answer to the question: On what basis, exactly, are people justified before God?**

- For the sake of convenience, we will focus mostly on Romans, where Paul gives his most systematic treatment of his understanding of the gospel and his view of justification.

## II. The Need for Justification—Because We Are Unrighteous and Facing God’s Wrath

- **(Rom 1:18ff.—Gentiles; 2:1-12—Jews, too, so everybody: 3:9-10, 23)**
- 1:18-32 elaborates on the unrighteousness of the Gentiles.
- -In chapter 2, Paul clarifies that the Jews are in the exact same circumstance because while they have the Law, they do not *do* the Law—and therefore they are facing God’s wrath in the day of judgment.
  - In 2:1-13 Paul makes it clear what the **standard or basis** is for God’s judgment: doing the Law, doing good. These verses do not actually indicate that anybody will meet this condition
- Chapter 3 summarizes: whether Jew or Gentile, we are all in the same boat: unrighteous sinners accountable to God, deserving of his wrath (3:9-10, 12, 23)

# III. Paul's Doctrine of Justification (Rom 3:20-4:12)

## A. Not by the (Works of) the Law (3:20)

- But here we hit a major interpretive question: What does the phrase “the works of the Law” mean or refer to?
  - The traditional understanding is that “the works of the Law” refers to anything and everything that the Law, given to the Jews, commands them to do.
  - The NPP (James D. G. Dunn)- “the works of the Law” refers to those particular aspects of the Law that marked off the Jews as distinct—circumcision, kosher food laws, and Sabbath-keeping. These are “identity badges” or “boundary markers” of the Jewish people. Paul objected to this social function of the Law, to the use of it as a racial barrier to exclude Gentiles from entrance into the covenant people of God.
  - I concede to the NPP interpretation that the “Jewish Identity Badges” or “Boundary Markers” are important. But, with the traditional perspective, I would deny that this is what “works of the Law” *means*. I would go so far as to say that the boundary markers *epitomize* “the works of the Law,” but that is not what the phrase *means*.

# III. Paul's Doctrine of Justification (Rom 3:20-4:12)

## A. Not by the (Works of) the Law (3:20)

- But here we hit a major interpretive question: What does the phrase “the works of the Law” mean or refer to?
  - It seems Paul uses the phrase interchangeably with “the things of the Law,” “the Law” (when speaking of it as something that is or isn't done or kept).
  - In Romans 2, “the work of the Law,” “the things of the Law,” seem to refer to things that cannot be the identity badges: 2:14-15—Gentiles who (at times) “do the things of the Law,” who have “the work of the Law written in their hearts”—it seems pretty clear these can't be the Jewish identity badges. Similarly for the references in 2:25-29 in which the uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law—can't refer to non-Jews observing the Jewish “identity markers.”
  - Also, the Jews are criticized for transgressing the Law, and it specifies commandments from the Decalogue—stealing, adultery.
  - Thus, it seems far more likely that **“works of the Law” just refers to everything that the Law commands.**

# God's Righteousness is Apart from the Law, but is Testified to in the Law & Prophets (3:21)

- cf. 4:1-25, esp. vv. 3, 6-13, 20-24; Gal. 3:6-14ff.
- <sup>NASB</sup> **Romans 3:21** But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,
- What is “the righteousness of God”?

# God's Righteousness is Apart from the Law, but is Testified to in the Law & Prophets (3:21)

- What is “the righteousness of God”?
  - (1) God's own subjective quality or attribute: God is righteous, just, morally upright, the righteous judge of all the earth. (Ps 50:6; Rom 3:5-6)
  - (2) God's saving activity for his people, which reflects his faithfulness, especially to his covenant people and his promises to them. (Ps 31:1; 51:14; Isa 46:13; Mic 7:7-9)

This *saving righteousness of God* is the most frequent usage in the OT. It seems that this is in the background of Paul's use of “the righteousness of God” in 1:16-17 and in 3:21.
  - (3) However, it seems Paul builds on yet goes beyond this concept. He frequently uses “the righteousness of God” in a way that suggests a status that he gives to someone in response to faith. This seems to be the case in 1:16-18; and 3:21 in the context of 3:20-24.
    - cf. also 5:15-19; Phil 3:8-9

# God's Righteousness is Apart from the Law, but is Testified to in the Law & Prophets (3:21)

- What is “the righteousness of God”?
  - Douglas Moo and Michael Bird make a good case for seeing in “the righteousness of God” in 1:17 and 3:21 both God’s saving action and the righteous status God gives to the believer. The saving action enacted through Christ makes possible the righteous status for those who believe.

# God's Righteousness is Apart from the Law, but is Testified to in the Law & Prophets (3:21)

- **Though this saving "Righteousness of God" is apart from the Law, it is testified to by the Law (= Pentateuch) and the Prophets (3:21).**
  - The OT background of the "righteousness of God" as his saving action in the prophets is implied here.
  - Paul will go on to explicitly cite Abraham and David.

# Justification comes in the same way to Jews and Gentiles (3:22)

- <sup>22</sup> even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ **for all those who believe; for there is no distinction** (Rom 3:22 NASB)

# Justification is a gift by God's grace (3:23-24): it is not inherently deserved, or earned as a wage (4:2-5)

- <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace.... (Rom 3:23-24 NASB)
- <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." <sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness (Rom 4:2-5 NASB)

Justification is paid for by the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ's death, which propitiated our sins (satisfying God's wrath) and this redemptive work was completed with Christ's resurrection (3:24-25; 4:24-25)

- <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed (Rom 3:24-25 NASB)
- <sup>24</sup> but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup> *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification (Rom 4:24-25 NASB)

This means of justification shows that God is just and righteous—this is his righteousness (3:25-26).

- <sup>25</sup> .... *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:25-26 NASB)

Justification is attained solely by placing faith in Jesus (3:26-28; 4:4-6; 5:1; Gal 2:21; 5:1-4).

- <sup>26</sup> ...so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup> Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law (Rom 3:26-28 NASB)
- <sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works (Rom 4:4-6 NASB)

## IV. Clarifications

- A. Is Justification “Declaring Someone to Be Righteous” (Forensic), or “Making Someone to Be Righteous” (Ethical)?
- B. Is the Faith that Paul refers to “Faith *in* Christ” (*Pistis Christou* understood as an Objective Genitive—“the Faith the Believer has Toward Christ”) OR “the Faithfulness *of* Christ” (*Pistis Christou* understood as a Subjective Genitive—“the Faithful Obedience of Christ [to God for the believer’s sake]”)?
- C. When Does Justification Take Place? At the time of Faith, or at the time of the Final Judgment?

# Is Justification “Declaring Someone to Be Righteous” (Forensic), or “Making Someone to Be Righteous” (Ethical)?

## FORENSIC

### 1. The meaning of δικαιόω (*dikaioō*)

- In the LXX, **δικαιόω** renders the Hiphil הִצְדִּיק (*hiṣḏîq*) which has a forensic significance: “to justify, declare righteous, or acquit.”
- Hill concludes that for Paul “the verb is primarily and predominantly a forensic term, a word of the law-court, describing a relation to, or a status before God, the judge of all men. It is not a case of God ‘making righteous’ a person who is not so: he ‘puts in the right’ the person who is in the relationship of faith (i.e., trust, surrender and identification) with Christ, in whose life and death the righteousness of God in covenant-faithfulness to man has been manifested.”

Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, 160.

# Is Justification “Declaring Someone to Be Righteous” (Forensic), or “Making Someone to Be Righteous” (Ethical)?

## FORENSIC

### 1. The meaning of δικαιόω (*dikaioō*)

- Similarly, Cranfield concludes that Paul uses δικαιόω to mean “to acquit, to confer a righteous status on,” and in his letters the term “does not in itself contain any reference to moral transformation.”
  - Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, 2:95.

### 2. Righteousness is “credited” to us, and our sins are “subtracted” from our account (Rom 4:3-11).

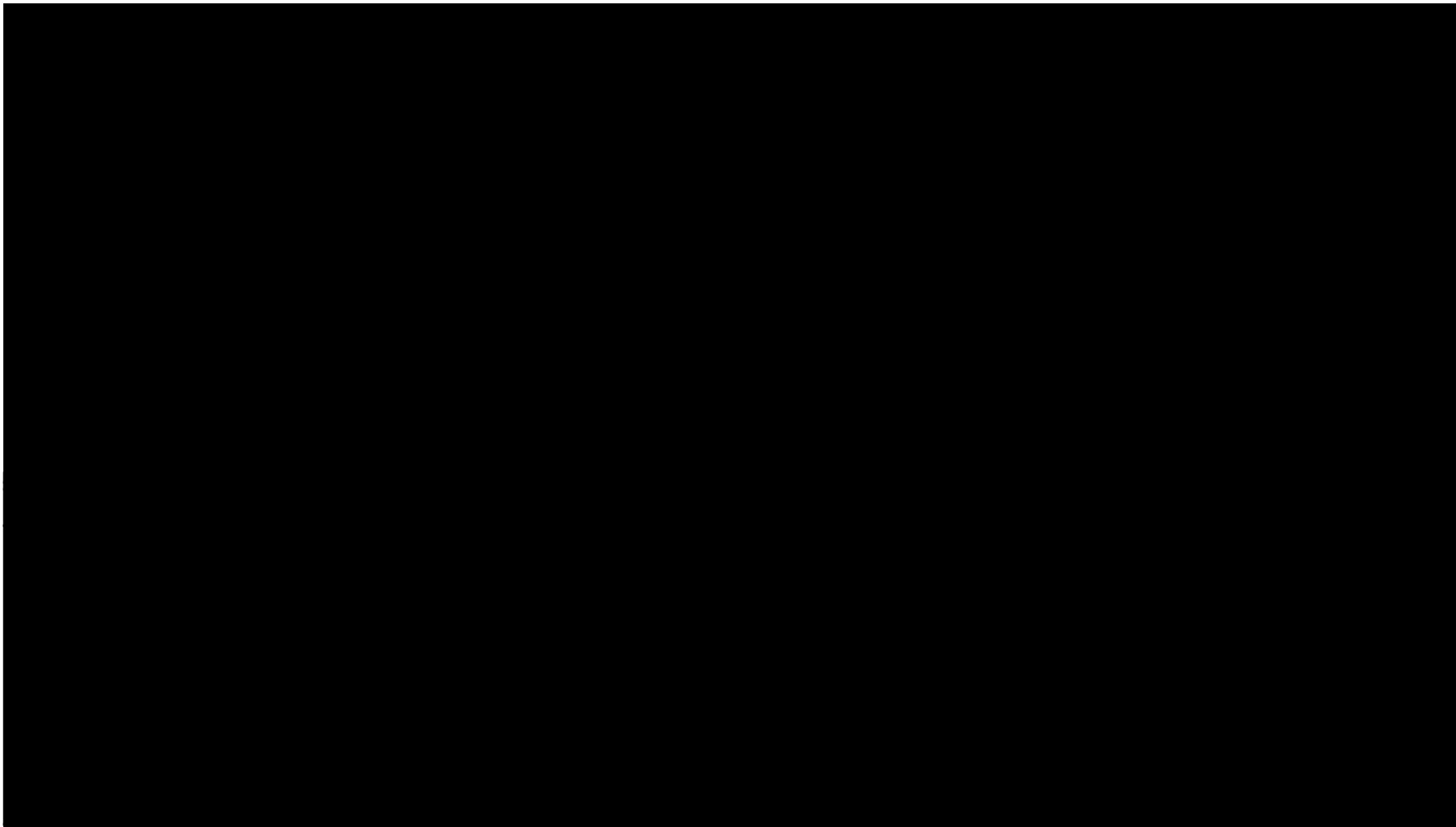
# “Faith *in* Christ” OR “the Faithfulness *of* Christ”? (Objective or Subjective Genitive)

- Objective Genitive— “Faith in Christ”—I think! (It’s highly debated.)
- For technical arguments representing both views, see Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Pistis Christou Debate: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009).
- Context helps us determine the reading, and in the Pauline texts, the faithfulness of Christ is never the issue—this is something that is taken for granted in Paul’s letters, or stated without controversy. The issue that is being debated is the instrumental means by which an individual obtains justification or appropriates the work of Christ. The context is always faith in contrast with works, or works of the Law.

# When Does Justification Take Place? At the time of Faith, or at the time of the Final Judgment?

**PRESENT JUSTIFICATION, i.e., At the time of Faith (Rom 4:10; 5:1-2; 8:1)**

- **Rom. 2:5-13 does not demonstrate “future justification.”**
  - Paul is discussing the standard of justification, and is not debating the timing on the traditional Jewish view of judgment on the last day.
- **Gal 5:5 (arguably) does not indicate “future justification.”**
  - The “hope of righteousness” for which we are “eagerly waiting” is arguably a metonymy for the fullness of our salvation in the eschaton (cf. Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20) rather than a forensic verdict of righteousness (which we already have).



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