

# JUSTIFICATION AS FORENSIC DECLARATION AND COVENANT MEMBERSHIP

A *VIA MEDIA* BETWEEN REFORMED  
AND REVISIONIST READINGS OF PAUL

Michael F. Bird

## Summary

*The emergence of the New Perspective on Paul has led to renewed debate concerning Paul's statements on justification. Discussion is divided over whether being 'righteous' signifies a legal status before God or represents a legitimisation of covenant membership. This study argues that both elements are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of Paul. Proponents of the New Perspective attempt to squeeze all 'righteousness' language under the umbrella of 'covenant', whilst Reformed adherents divorce Paul's talk of righteousness from the social context of Jew-gentile relationships in the Pauline churches. I argue that, in Paul's reckoning, justification creates a new people, with a new status, in a new covenant, as a foretaste of the new age.*

## 1. Introduction

When Paul speaks of justification what is he talking about? Is justification a forensic declaration that the Christian is legally righteous before God? Alternatively is justification merely a Pauline theologoumenon concerning the inclusion of the gentiles? Or does the answer lie somewhere between these two possibilities? The issue of justification is one of many contentious matters emerging from debate concerning the 'New Perspective on Paul'.<sup>1</sup> In light of this controversy,

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I wish to ambitiously propose a *via media* between reformed and revisionist approaches to Paul's conception of justification. My objective is not to produce a theological fudge to satisfy all and sundry. Instead my aim is to demonstrate that the Reformed view and the New Perspective on Paul are indispensable to attaining a proper understanding of Paul's articulation of justification. In sum, I agree with the Reformed view that justification is a vertical category dealing with man's legal relationship to God, but with the New Perspective I affirm that justification is Paul's primary weapon to argue for the inclusion of the gentiles *as gentiles* into Christian fellowship.

## 2. The Reformed View of Justification

I begin with those features of the standard Reformed view of justification that require nuancing in light of recent scholarship. That must be prefaced with the observation that there was a significant degree of diversity amongst the early reformers concerning justification itself.<sup>2</sup> Through the influence of Calvin and the Westminster Confession the understanding of justification that won the day was along the lines of the forgiveness of sins supplemented with the imputed righteousness of Christ.<sup>3</sup> I regard this view not necessarily as wrong, but in urgent need of qualification.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the New Perspective see Michael B. Thompson, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002). See for evaluations of recent scholarship Philip H. Eveson, *The Great Exchange: Justification by faith alone in light of recent thought* (Kent, England: Day One, 1996); Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates* (Leicester: Apollos, 2004); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 2 – The Paradoxes of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2004): 183-205.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (2 vols.), (Cambridge: CUP, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: 3.11.2; Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 11; for contemporary restatements see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994): 722-35; Eveson, *The Great Exchange*; R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995): 95-113; James R. White, *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2001): 111-17.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, (NSBT 9; Downers Grove: IVP, 2000): 173-75.

(1) In many quarters it used to be held that Judaism was essentially legalistic and that Paul confronts this legalistic proclivity in his disputes with certain Jewish-Christians. First, the accusation of ‘legalism’ is anachronistic and inexact if by ‘legalism’ one means something like a self-conscious striving for the accumulation of merit independent of divine assistance in order to make a claim before God for vindication based upon an inherent righteousness.<sup>5</sup> It is anachronistic for the reason that neither Hebrew nor Greek has any term that is translatable as ‘legalism’ with which to impute to Paul’s Jewish contemporaries or to his Jewish-Christian opponents. Second, a charge of legalism is inexact as there was a breadth of diversity in Judaism which resulted in divergent views of eschatology, covenant, grace, election and works. Some strands of Judaism certainly held a more rigorous view of torah observance as constituting the basis of vindication (e.g. 4 Ezra, 2 Enoch, 2 Baruch),<sup>6</sup> but in many cases this rigor still presupposed the operation of divine grace even if the result was sometimes a synergistic view of salvation.<sup>7</sup> Other streams of literature place emphasis on the depths of God’s mercy and grace exercised towards Israel (e.g. 1QS 11:11-15; *m.San.* 10:1; Josephus,

<sup>5</sup> For discussion on ‘legalism’ see Douglas J. Moo, “‘Law’, ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul”, *WTJ* 45 (1983): 90-100; Stephen Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988): 132-34; Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*: 330-35; Scot McKnight, *Galatians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995): 23; Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is the Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002): 29-34. Bruce Longenecker, ‘Contours of Covenant Theology in the Post-Conversion Paul’, in Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul’s Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997): 140 based on Rom. 4:4-5; 9:32; 11:5-6 suggests that Paul regards certain expressions of nomism as a form of legalism.

<sup>6</sup> Timo Laato, *Paulus und das Judentum* (Åbo: Åbo Academy, 1991); Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992): 78-135; Fredrich Avemarie, *Tora und Leben: Untersuchungen zur Heilsbedeutung der Tora in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 55; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1996); Timo Eskola, *Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology* (WUNT 2.100; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1998); D. A. Carson, Peter O’Brien and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 1 – The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Gathercole, *Where is the Boasting?* 37-111; A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001): 13-44.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Eskola (‘Theodicy and Predestination’: 57) who thinks in terms of ‘synergistic nomism’. Cf. Robert H. Gundry, ‘Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul’, *Bib* 66 (1985): 10, n. 23, 19; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfilment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993): 94; Charles H. Talbert, ‘Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists’, *CBQ* 16 (2001): 1-3.

*Ant.* 8:111). It is no wonder that there were disputes amongst Jews themselves as to whether God's blessings/salvation could be earned or was graciously given (e.g. Philo, *Sac.* 54-57; implicitly in 4 Ezra 8).<sup>8</sup> As such, one cannot assume that all Jews were trying to earn enough frequent flyer points to get to heaven. Whatever one might think of Sanders' description of Palestinian Judaism's pattern of religion as 'covenantal nomism',<sup>9</sup> he has forced us all to take a good long look at Judaism rather than settle for skewed caricatures of it. Sanders might not have the right answers, but he asks the right questions. I think that a better designation that encompasses the soteriologies of second-temple Judaism is 'variegated nomism', a designation that underscores the diversity within Judaism and can accommodate a wider range of beliefs concerning the role of the law than 'covenantal nomism'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The reference to 4 Ezra 8 was brought to my attention in Gathercole, *Where is the Boasting?* 169 (who in turn acknowledges Hermann Lichtenberger).

<sup>9</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison in Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977): 75, 422.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. Carson, 'Conclusion', in Carson, O'Brien and Seifrid (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 1 – The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001): 543-48. James D. G. Dunn's review (*TrinJ* 25 [2004]: 111-13) suggests that Carson's conclusions against the viability of Sanders' thesis flies in the face of several (if not most) of the contributors to the volume who are largely appreciative of 'covenantal nomism'. There is no question whether several authors give qualified approval to covenantal nomism as fitting some literary works, but the whole scope of the project suggests that covenantal nomism is indeed reductionist. Dunn's remark (p. 112) that the book should be called *Justification and Variegated Covenantal Nomism* fails to reckon with: (1) covenantal nomism masks a tacit merit theology embedded within its own system (see the essay by Peter Enns, 'Expansions of Scripture': 98); and (2) several streams of literature contradict (not merely diverge from) covenantal nomism. Thus Carson is correct to suggest that covenantal nomism is not sufficiently malleable and plastic enough to embrace the entire diversity of Jewish belief. One might reply that covenantal nomism is a 'very flexible pattern' (Bauckham, 'Apocalypses': 174) and can indeed accommodate a nomistic tendency. In response, I would point out – first, that covenantal nomism cannot hold together mutually exclusive interpretations of the role of the law in relation to God's final and dramatic act of vindication at the eschaton and remain a coherent and consistent system. Second, if covenantal nomism can accommodate a more rigorous approach to the law as the basis of vindication, one must ask whether covenantal nomism is really an alternative to merit theology or if the term is now becoming so broad as to be meaningless. After all, Sanders developed the concept of covenantal nomism over and against views of Judaism as merit orientated. Sanders (as I read him) is not trying to qualify the function of a rigorous nomism in Judaism, as much as he appears to be denying its existence as broadly characterizing Judaism altogether. One cannot argue that covenantal nomism means that Paul should no longer be read against a backdrop of Jewish merit theology, but then insist that covenantal nomism makes room for merit theology. The diversity within Judaism negates the utility of 'covenantal nomism' as a comprehensive backdrop for Pauline exegesis. Brendan Byrne ('Interpreting Romans: The New Perspective and Beyond', *Interpretation* 58 [2004]: 248) makes the same point: 'At

So what was Paul confronting? According to Acts 15:1-5 (assuming Luke's accurate depiction of Paul's opponents), some Jewish Christians from the Pharisees simply saw Christ as an add-on to torah. In contrast, Paul recognised both pre- and post-conversion (but for a very different reason) that Christ and torah are mutual exclusives.<sup>11</sup> In Paul's view, obedience to the torah cannot be pursued as the means of attaining membership in the people of God and, therefore, the grounds upon which God will vindicate believers. It appears that the Judaizers believed that the church, as the people of God, would be vindicated at the coming eschaton. The act of judaizing is how one is incorporated into the people of God who are to be saved in the future age. The Judaizers were insisting on gentile adherence to key precepts that visibly exhibited attachment to the Jewish law in order to attain membership in the church (making their claim ethnocentric). It should also be recognised that circumcision denoted more than identity, but signified a standard of piety and ethics.<sup>12</sup> In demanding circumcision for gentiles, the judaizers were implying that such obedience to constituent elements of the law in combination with faith in Christ was a pre-condition to eschatological vindication (making their claim nomistic). What Paul attacks is the view that one must 'do' Judaism in order to *join* the people of God and thus be *justified* at the eschaton. It may be that Paul is not confronting 'legalism' or 'covenantal nomism' but an *ethnocentric nomism*.<sup>13</sup> Defined, ethnocentric nomism is the view that Jewish identity is the locus of salvation (hence ethnocentric) and one must perform the law so as to enter the Jewish constituency and be vindicated at the eschaton (hence nomistic). This differs from legalism in that the works performed are part of a covenantal framework that defines the identity of God's people. Ethnocentric nomism differs from covenantal nomism in that the desired end-state is eschatological salvation and not merely covenant status. Unfortunately

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least certain strands of Judaism of the time were far more "nomistic" in this sense than Sanders allowed'. On diverse soteriologies in Judaism see Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfilment*: 115; Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994): 68; Talbert, 'Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists': 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, 'Zealot and Convert: The Origin of Paul's Christ-Torah Antithesis', *CBQ* 51 (1989): 655-82.

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, 'Blind Alleys in the Controversy Over the Paul of History', *TynBul* 45 (1994): 78-79.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987): 25, is perhaps correct when he suggests that the charge of legalism arose chiefly in the context of gentile admission to the church.

commentators frequently tell only half of the story concerning the nationalistic and nomistic elements of what Paul confronts, as is evident from a juxtaposition of Sanders and Martyn:

The argument [Paul's] is that one need not be Jewish to be 'righteous' and is thus against the standard Jewish view that accepting and living by the law is a sign and condition of favored status.<sup>14</sup>

To compel the Gentile members to observe even a part of the Law was to imply that the Law, rather than Christ's atoning death, was God's appointed means of salvation for the whole of humanity.<sup>15</sup>

Martyn is correct that a legal prescription for gentiles to take on the law (whole or part) is to denigrate the sufficiency of Christ's death, but such observance will mean becoming effectively Jewish. Sanders is correct to correlate 'Jewish' with 'righteous' but he fails to reckon with the unstated instrument of law observance as the means to righteousness/Jewishness and he omits altogether the end state of such observance as being eschatological salvation (not just covenant status). Hence Paul repudiates the attempt to fuse together an ethnocentric ecclesiology with a nomistic approach to the law. The faith that justifies gentiles also constitutes the proof that they are members of the people of God.

(2) Another feature of the Reformed view of justification that needs teasing out is the assertion that Paul teaches the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the immediate grounds of justification. G. E. Ladd states: 'Paul never expressly states that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers.'<sup>16</sup> The fact remains that no text in the Pauline corpus speaks of justification in these terms. I have argued elsewhere that a better description of what Paul sets forth is 'incorporated righteousness' which is a shorthand way of saying that believers are justified by union with Christ.<sup>17</sup> By being united with Christ believers share in the verdict executed against him on the cross, they participate also in his justification through his resurrection (cf. Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor.

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<sup>14</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983): 46.

<sup>15</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997): 245.

<sup>16</sup> G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (rev. ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993): 491.

<sup>17</sup> Michael F. Bird, 'Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification', *JETS* 47 (2004): 253-75.

15:17; 1 Tim. 3:16).<sup>18</sup> Thus, believers are justified only for the reason that they share a corporate solidarity with the justified Messiah and what is true of him is true of God's people. In Paul's discussions of justification, 'in-Christ' terminology proliferates (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:7-9; Gal. 2:17; Rom. 8:1). That is not to suggest that 'imputed righteousness' is a completely mistaken and inappropriate term. If one shifts from exegesis to systematic theology, the designation is suitable in describing the mechanism through which union with Christ communicates justification.<sup>19</sup> The idea of imputation could be said to be *implicit* in the representative roles of Adam and Christ and nothing in the New Testament is inconsistent with the idea of imputation. Nevertheless, commentators who cite Paul as a proof text in favour of imputed righteousness have not done justice to the relevant texts.

(3) By stressing the forensic nature of justification, reformed theology has had a propensity to bruise the nerve that connects faith with obedience.<sup>20</sup> Catholic and Wesleyan objections to a strictly forensic definition of justification as fostering antinomianism are legitimate. Ben Witherington writes, 'If God were simply to impute to believers his righteousness, then there would be no basis to require righteousness of them after their conversion'.<sup>21</sup> One solution is to posit justification as being transformative, *viz.*, that justification includes declaring and making righteous, forgiving and renewing.<sup>22</sup> Yet, if justification includes both declaring righteous and making righteous it renders virtually incomprehensible the charge of antinomianism leveled against Paul in Romans 3:7-8. I would contend that moral sanctification (to use a theological term) cannot be absorbed under the aegis of justification, but neither can they be separated. In order to avoid misunderstandings, those of the Reformed tradition would do

<sup>18</sup> Michael F. Bird, 'Justified by Christ's Resurrection: A Neglected Aspect of Paul's Doctrine of Justification', *SBET* 22 (2004): 90-91.

<sup>19</sup> D. A. Carson, 'The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields', in Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (eds.), *Justification: What's At Stake in the Current Debates* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004): 72-73.

<sup>20</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 175.

<sup>21</sup> Ben Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): 133.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001): 66-68; Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001): 204-24.

well to accentuate the *effective* nature of justification whereby obedience, faithfulness, righteousness, and love are imperatives that grow out of a saving faith. This is not an innovation by any means; commentators have been saying such things for centuries. As Calvin wrote:

We dream not of a faith which is devoid of good works, nor of a justification which can exist without them: the only difference is, that while we acknowledge that faith and works are necessarily connected, we, however, place justification in faith not works....Thus it appears how true it is that we are justified not without, and yet not by works, since in the participation in Christ, by which we are justified, is contained not less sanctification than justification.<sup>23</sup>

What this means is that justification cannot be separated from the transforming power of the spirit bequeathed to those whom are ‘in-Christ’.

(4) Paul’s theology of justification was applied immediately to the context of Jew-gentile relations in the early church. There is a begrudging acceptance amongst some commentators that justification is related to issues of identity and inclusion (what I call the ‘covenantal aspect of justification’), but the point is clearly subordinated to overarching soteriological concerns.<sup>24</sup> By saying that, I am not proposing that Paul’s conception of justification was spawned out of a polemical engagement with the Judaizers. What I am advocating is that a denial of the covenantal dimension means that justification is artificially removed from the social context in which Paul rigorously prosecuted justification by faith as a mandate for gentile inclusion. As will be argued below, Galatians and Romans delve into the issue of the righteous status believers have before God, but such theology is enlisted in the aid of achieving the unity of Jews and gentiles. This regard for Jew-gentile unity deserves more than a footnote in a textbook on Pauline theology, but constitutes the socio-rhetorical glue that links Paul’s epistles to their historical context.

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<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*: 3.16.1; cf. Gerald Bray, ‘Justification: The Reformers and Recent New Testament Scholarship’, *Churchman* 109 (1995): 112; and see the balanced exposition of the Pauline relationship between faith and obedience in Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 171-75.

<sup>24</sup> Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001): 178, Robert Smith, ‘A Critique of the “New Perspective” on Justification’, *RTR* 58 (1999): 98-99, 102, 104; Eveson, *The Great Exchange*: 142-44; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001): 112; Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*: 316, 440-43.

Moreover, the overarching significance of ‘covenant’ in Paul’s epistles significantly impacts Paul’s conception of righteousness.<sup>25</sup> It is common to regard the ‘righteousness of God’ (Rom. 1:17; 3:21-22; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21) as God’s ‘covenant faithfulness’.<sup>26</sup> However, as Seifrid correctly notes: ‘All “covenant-keeping” is righteous behaviour, but not all righteous behaviour is “covenant-keeping”’.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the words ‘covenant’ and ‘righteousness’ rarely occur in close proximity in either the Old Testament or in Paul.<sup>28</sup> Seifrid suggests that God’s righteousness has a more ‘creational context’ since references to ‘righteousness’ occur more frequently in Israel’s Scriptures in contexts pertaining to ruling or judging.<sup>29</sup> Seifrid does not deny that God’s righteousness operates in relation to the covenant, but he subordinates the covenantal dimension to the creation context. I agree that espousing God’s righteousness as ‘covenant faithfulness’ is reductionistic and there is indeed a broader dimension to God’s righteousness. Even so, if one prosecutes the logic of Seifrid’s suggestion it potentially yields the same problem to which he objects. Do all acts of ruling and judging correlate to creational righteousness? It would seem unlikely. Additionally, creation is far too broad a category to understand the

<sup>25</sup> Stanley E. Porter, ‘The Concept of Covenant in Paul’, in Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline de Roo, eds., *The Concept of Covenant in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 269-85.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988): 40-42; *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998): 341-42; N. T. Wright, ‘Romans’, in Leander E. Keck, ed., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002): 10:397-401; Michael J. Gorman *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): 134, 350, 358-59.

<sup>27</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, ‘Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism’, in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 1 – The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* in D. A. Carson, Peter O’Brien and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001): 424; cf. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 39; ‘The “New Perspective on Paul” and its Problems’, *Themelios* 25 (2000): 12-18; ‘In What Sense is “Justification” a Declaration?’ *Churchman* 114 (2000): 125-27.

<sup>28</sup> Granting the cogency of Seifrid’s linguistic argument for the rarity of ‘covenant’ and ‘righteousness’ appearing together, one should not overlook: (1) the literary contexts that clearly link God’s righteousness to his faithfulness, e.g. Pss. 98; 135, 143; Isaiah 40-55; Dan. 9; Rom. 3, 9-11; (2) the appearance of ‘covenant’ and ‘righteousness’ in reasonable proximity in Paul’s epistles, 2 Cor. 3:6, 9, 14; Rom. 9:4, 30-31; 10:3-6, 10; 11:27; and (3) Gundry (‘The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness’, in *Justification: What’s At Stake in the Current Debates*, Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., (Downers Grove: IVP): 35, n. 40) writes: ‘Nor does a covenantal setting dispossess justification of its legal, juridical connotation, for in the biblical world covenants were legally binding treaties.’

<sup>29</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 39-40.

actual demonstration of God's righteousness. If one subsumes covenant under creation, then the same must be done of Christ and even the consummation. Is the death and resurrection of Christ simply one expression of God's attempt to establish righteousness in creation or does it both fulfil and yet transcend the 'creational context'? Alternatively, I would suggest that God's actions of ruling and judging in creation set the bar, so to speak, of God's righteousness which is then expressed in God's fulfilment of the covenant, purposed in the death and resurrection of Christ, and demonstrated gloriously at the consummation. Creation provides the initial propulsion through which God's righteousness is manifested at the various points of redemptive history. God's righteousness, then, is his saving activity in establishing justice throughout *creation*, fulfilling the *covenant* with Israel, manifested in *Christ*, and culminating at the *consummation*.

Consequently, 'creation' and 'covenant' are parallel spheres of the operation of God's righteousness and not competing paradigms. If one grants this covenantal dimension to justification, it requires that one envisage justification as more (though not less) than a forensic verdict. The justifying verdict creates a new people with a new status in a new covenant as a foretaste of the new age.

### 3. The New Perspective and Justification

The New Perspective is more of a trajectory than a defined position. As such it is better to speak of New Perspectives as opposed to a well defined school of thought. There has been an avalanche of publications that criticise the New Perspective.<sup>30</sup> I have written elsewhere concerning what I think are the major failings of the New Perspective.<sup>31</sup> What follows is a brief statement of two of the most significant weaknesses.

(1) Justification and righteousness (the δίκη – word group) in the New Testament cannot be reduced to mere descriptions of who is in the covenant.<sup>32</sup> According to several New Perspective proponents,

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Michael F. Bird, 'The New Perspective on Paul: A Bibliographical Essay'. *The Paul Page: Dedicated to the New Perspective on Paul*. April, 2005. <http://www.thepaulpage.com/Bibliography.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Michael F. Bird, 'When the Dust Finally Settles: Reaching a Post-New Perspective Perspective', *CTR* 2 (2005): 57-69.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*: 344, 388; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991): 148, 203; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Lion: Oxford, 1997): 122; 'Romans': 490-91, 494; Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul*

language normally associated with legal status and ethical behaviour is ostentatiously transformed into an ecclesiological assertion of church membership.<sup>33</sup> However, being in the covenant did not make one righteous. Righteousness required fulfilment of the commandments of God (Deut. 6:24-25; 30:15-20; Lev. 18:5). Accordingly, covenant and torah cannot be separated.<sup>34</sup> Thus one is covenantally righteous by faithfully expressing one's Jewishness through obedience to the law. Furthermore, if one adds an eschatological dimension where only the faithful will enter the eschaton, keeping the law takes on a quasi-meritorious character (cf. 4 Ezra 8:33-36; 9:7-13; *Pss. Sol.* 9:4-5; 14:1-10; 15:6-13; 2 Bar. 44:12-15; 51:1-6). For some Jews torah was not only a way of life, but a way to life.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, by reducing (or over-emphasizing) justification to a legitimisation of identity, there is the danger that Paul's theocentric language of divine vindication and his apocalyptic framework of human rebellion, redemption and cosmic renewal are being hijacked by

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*and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997): 171; Bruce Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998): 104.

<sup>33</sup> Wright and Dunn often give the impression of reducing justification to an ecclesiological doctrine of who is in the covenant and in doing so rob justification of its very justice. Yet critics often fail to note that both Wright and Dunn recognise the relationship of justification to the final judgement; the problem is that they minimize this aspect and subordinate it beneath the covenantal dimension. Wright does affirm the dual role of justification as covenantal *and* forensic, e.g. ('The Shape of Justification', *Bible Review* 17 (April 2001): 8, 50. Cited at: <http://www.angelfire.com/mi2/paulpage/Shape.html>): 'it [justification] is God's declaration that the person is now in the right, which confers on them the *status* "righteous". We may note that, since "righteous" here, within the lawcourt metaphor, refers to "status", not "character", we correctly say that God's declaration *makes* the person "righteous", i.e. in good standing. This present declaration constitutes all believers as the single people of God, the one family, promised to Abraham (Gal. 2.14-3.29; Rom. 3.27-4.17), the people whose sins have been dealt with as part of the fulfilled promise of covenant renewal (Jer. 31.31-34). Membership in this family cannot be played off against the forgiveness of sins: the two belong together'. Dunn (*The Theology of Paul*: 386) suggests that justification is 'the initial acceptance by God into restored relationship. But thereafter the relationship could not be sustained without God continuing to exercise his justifying righteousness with a view to the final act of judgement and acquittal'. Note similar comments by Gorman (*Apostle of the Crucified Lord*: 111, 138, 201, 349, 359, 365, 584) where he takes justification to mean the establishment of a right covenantal relationship with God with hope for acquittal at final judgement. See also Dunn, 'The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith', *JTS* 43 (1992): 1-22 for a relatively balanced perspective on the soteriological and communal aspects of justification.

<sup>34</sup> Francis Watson, 'Not the New Perspective'. Unpublished Paper delivered at the British New Testament Conference, Manchester, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Byrne, 'Interpreting Romans: The New Perspective and Beyond': 248.

those who wish to take Paul as espousing a postmodern gospel of inclusivity.<sup>36</sup> Yet justification is fundamentally a vertical category where God's wrath against sinners is propitiated and believers emerge acquitted rather than condemned by God's righteousness. McGrath writes:

It is thus perfectly acceptable to suggest that the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith represents a theoretical justification for the separation of Gentile Christian communities from Judaism, thus identifying the obvious social function of the doctrine – providing, of course, that the naïve conclusion is not drawn from this, that the Pauline doctrine is *solely* a social epiphenomenon.<sup>37</sup>

One might add that the tendency to play off forensic and relational models of justification is a false dichotomy. The verdict of 'righteous' that God renders upon believers means that those believers exist in a new redemptive-relationship with God, a relationship established and characterised by God's saving righteousness. The grounds for the relationship are real not fictitious,<sup>38</sup> i.e. the real satisfaction of the law that formerly condemned believers and God really acts *righteously* by vindicating his *righteous* son through raising him from the dead. Believers are incorporated into the justified Messiah and what God declares true of Jesus is also theirs because they are 'in-Christ'.

(2) Wright espouses a tenuous link between regeneration and justification. He states

There may be a hint here...that Paul is thinking of baptism as the Christian version of circumcision – a pointer to the covenant status people have in Christ, by the Spirit, and whose badge is Christian faith....Faith is the sign of life; life is the gift of God. Justification is

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<sup>36</sup> See John Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford: OUP, 2000); Eung Chun Park, *Either Jew or Gentile: Paul's Unfolding Theology of Inclusiveness* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003); cf. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*: 490-91; Paul, *the Law and the Jewish People*: 29-30; James D. G. Dunn, 'The New Perspective on Paul', *BJRL* 65 (1983): 115-16; Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*: 240. I do not doubt that Paul confronts an aggressive Jewish nationalism, but that is not the sum of his criticism of Judaism since he also attacks the nexus between law, the flesh, sin and the evil age. Paul did not need the message of Christ to know that God was not the God of the Jews only; the Hebrew Scriptures through Genesis to Jonah demonstrate God's universal concern. Also, it was possible for Jews and gentiles to be united together under law (e.g. Josephus and Philo commend the law to gentiles); see Gundry, 'Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul': 21; Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 20.

<sup>37</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 39.

<sup>38</sup> On legal fiction contrast Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*: 385-86 with Wright, *Saint Paul*: 102.

God's declaration that where this sign of life appears, the person in whom it appears is within the covenant.<sup>39</sup>

However, this reduces justification to an analytic judgement of God based upon regeneration and effectively minimises notions of forgiveness and redemption.<sup>40</sup>

## 4. A Proposed Solution

How does one escape this maze of Pauline scholarship? To begin with, it must be asked whether or not covenant inclusion and a forensic verdict are really mutually exclusive. Proponents on both sides might concede that they intersect or touch at certain points, but where?

### 4.1 *Vindication in Biblical Theology*

A starting point should be that Paul's remarks on justification must be understood against the backdrop of the theme of *vindication* in biblical theology. The biblical theme of vindication includes God's action in rectifying the status of his people and publicly showing that those people are in a special relationship with him.<sup>41</sup>

Individuals frequently plead to God to vindicate them in the face of their adversaries (e.g. 1 Sam. 24:15; Pss. 17, 26, 35, 54, 143; Isa. 50:8; Mic. 7:8-10). The book of Job concerns how God eventually proves the rightfulness of Job against the accusations of his friends. Elsewhere Israel is clearly in the purview of the vindication that God achieves over and against the pagans who oppress the nation (Deut. 32:36; Pss. 98; 135; Isa. 34:8; 54:17; 62:1-2; 63:1; Jer. 51:10). The suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is the representative of Israel who is vindicated on behalf of the nation by 'seeing the light of life' after his vicarious suffering (Isa. 53:11). In Luke's Gospel one finds the promise of how God will vindicate those who cry out to him day and night (Luke 18:7) and the story of the tax-collector who left the temple justified in light of his repentance and contrition (Luke 18:14). In the biblical corpus banqueting imagery is utilised as a poetic example of the vindication that awaits God's people as depicted in the Old Testament (Isa. 25;

<sup>39</sup> Wright, 'Romans': 495, 501; idem, *Climax of the Covenant*: 214.

<sup>40</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 176, n. 13; 'In What Sense is "Justification" a Declaration?': 123; Eveson, *The Great Exchange*: 145-46.

<sup>41</sup> In the Septuagint this theme is frequently associated with the word κρίνω and the δίκη word group.

Ezek. 39:17-28), the Gospels (Matt. 8:11-12/Luke 13:28-30; Matt. 22:1-10/Luke 14:15-24), and, climactically, in the wedding supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19.

In this sense, justification is Paul's primary way of speaking of the divine act of vindication that transpires in the dispensation of the new covenant. Justification is the contingent metaphor drawn from legal jurisprudence that Paul utilizes to describe the end of God's contention against sinful persons and their reorientation before God in a new redemptive relationship where the believer is righteous on account of being in-Christ. Does this lend credence to the view that Paul's view of justification is exclusively individualistic? Not at all, as Davies writes:

Paul's doctrine of justification by faith was not solely and not primarily orientated toward the individual but to the interpretation of the people of God. The justified man was 'in Christ', which is a communal concept. And necessarily because it was eschatological, the doctrine moved towards the salvation of the world, a new creation.<sup>42</sup>

The justification of the ungodly cannot be isolated from the public vindication of the people of God. What drives the biblical concept of vindication (and the Pauline notion of justification) is not the problem of how sinners can find a gracious God, rather the controlling question is: who are the people of God and in what economy shall they be vindicated? To use the cosmic terminology of Romans 8:18-39, justification is about the long awaited revelation of the sons of God and the public vindication of these sons before the entire world. In the final assize, Christians are seen for who they are, not the scum of the earth or refuse of the empire, but God's own people. The resurrection is the incarnation of the justification of the saints<sup>43</sup> whereby the pagan world learns (perhaps to its disdain) what God thinks of the Messiah-believers through what he grants to them: glory, honour, righteousness, and life. Situated in this light, justification demonstrates that the issues of corporate identity and divine justice are intrinsically related.

#### 4.2 *Galatians 2*

An overview of Galatians 2 demonstrates that Paul's articulation of justification included both a forensic declaration of righteousness and

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<sup>42</sup> W. D. Davies, 'Paul: From the Jewish Point of View', in *Cambridge History of Judaism. Volume 3: The Early Roman Period* in William Horbury, W. D. Davies & John Sturdy, eds., (3 vols.; Cambridge: CUP, 1999): 3:716.

<sup>43</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 71.

the establishment of gentiles in the people of God. To begin with, what is Galatians about? It does not appear to be a polemical tract written on how to resist the legalistic designs of the Judaizers. Yet it moves beyond discussion of ‘boundary markers’ into the plight of the Jews under the law and even the bondage of the human condition apart from Christ. The epistle to the Galatians is a manifesto for the inclusion of gentiles into the people of God *as gentiles*. Galatians does not start with the issue of *how to get saved* but with an argument about food and fellowship. According to Paul, the issue of who is permitted to dine at Jewish tables as well as what is required of the gentiles in order to live obediently to God is indelibly related to justification.

Paul begins by rebuking the Galatians for adopting ‘another gospel’ other than his own (Gal. 1:6-10). Paul includes a biographical section detailing his conversion and calling with particular emphasis on its divine origin (Gal. 1:11-24), and detailing how his gospel was indeed authorised by the Jerusalem pillars themselves (Gal. 2:1-10). Paul then narrates his confrontation with Cephas in Antioch signifying that it was Cephas and not himself who has shifted in regard to the gospel. Cephas’ withdrawal from gentile fellowship at the arrival of ‘certain men from James’ triggered Paul’s polemical response depicted in Gal. 2:11-14:

<sup>11</sup>But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; <sup>12</sup>for until certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. <sup>13</sup>And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup>But when I saw that they were not walking towards the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to judaize?’

What was so reprehensible to the ‘certain men from James’ (τινας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου) and ‘those of the circumcision’ (τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς) was not that Peter was eating with gentiles *per se*. Jews of the Diaspora could associate and eat with gentiles under certain conditions.<sup>44</sup> Was the issue then the non-observance or relaxed adherence to food purity laws by Antiochean Jewish Christians due to the inclusion of gentiles?

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Ep. Arist.* 172-86; Josephus, *War* 2.461-63; 7.41-62; *Apion* 2.39; E. P. Sanders, ‘Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11-14’, in Robert T. Fortna and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J Louis Martyn* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990): 170-88.

Perhaps, but we simply don't know if the food was kosher or not, and it was gentiles, not Jewish-Christians, who were compelled to follow Jewish scruples. The contention was probably that these meals identified gentiles as equals with Jews without making them come via the route of proselytization. The offence was that to include gentiles as equal participants in communal meals was to lower the currency of Israel's election and deny the superiority or the advantage of the Jew. The presupposition for gentile inclusion as full members at these meals was that the connection between Jewish law and Christian identity was abolished. The delegation from James arguably understood this point, took exception to it, and successfully argued that Jews must withdraw from fellowship unless or until the gentiles sufficiently judaize. Mark Nanos comments: 'The ones advocating proselyte conversion of these gentiles thus objected to circumventing the place of this rite to reidentify these gentiles *as full and equal members* of this Jewish subgroup – which was how they were being identified at these meals, rather than as merely pagan guests.'<sup>45</sup> Thus, Peter's separation signified a denial of the equal status of gentiles in the messianic community and represented a demand (implied or verbalised) that gentiles would have to undergo circumcision in order to attain that status. Paul's rebuff to Peter concerns the sufficiency of faith in Christ for the entrance and inclusion of gentiles as gentiles in God's saving action.

But what generated the demand for gentiles to take on the law by these Jewish or Jewish-Christian antagonists? In Israel's Scriptures gentiles ordinarily join Israel through incorporation, living under the Jewish laws when in the Jewish land. In the Diaspora, gentiles would 'convert' to Judaism only after going through the ritual of circumcision.<sup>46</sup> Yet in passages dealing with the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations, the gentiles do not proselytize as such but

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<sup>45</sup> Mark D. Nanos, 'What was at Stake in Peter's "Eating with Gentiles" at Antioch?' in Mark D. Nanos, ed., *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002): 301. One should consult also: James D. G. Dunn ('The Incident at Antioch', *JSNT* 18 [1983]: 3-57) who sees the main problem as laxness in social interaction between Jews and gentiles and Markus Bockmuehl (*Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000]; 'Antioch and James the Just', in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, eds., *James the Just and Christian Origins* [Leiden: Brill, 1999]: 155-89) who identifies a further issue of whether or not Antioch was part of the Jewish land.

<sup>46</sup> Esth. 8:17 (LXX); Jdt. 14:10; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.285; 20.38, 43-48; *War* 2.454; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96-106; Petronius, *Satyricon*, *Frag.* 37; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5; *b.Ker.* 9a.

come to God *as gentiles*, drawn in on the coat-tails of the restored Israel, and throng to the new Zion. In Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-4 the gentiles may receive instruction of God's ways, but that is not the same as proselytizing. It is significant that predictions of the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations (Isa. 11:12; 66:18-20; Zech. 8:23; Tob. 13:11; 14:5-6, *Sib. Or.* 3:702-31, 772-75, *Pss. Sol.* 17:31; *1 Enoch* 90:33; and *2 Bar.* 68:5) do not make proselytism a precondition for salvation.<sup>47</sup> This lack of social integration is all the more striking then when one discovers that some Jewish literature reinterpreted such promises to combine the notion of proselytism with the eschatological ingathering of the gentiles. A contrast of the various editions of Isaiah 56:6 demonstrates this aptly:<sup>48</sup>

MT: And the sons of a foreigner that join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without profaning it, and hold fast my covenant.

LXX: And to the foreigners that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be to him servants and *handmaids*; and *as for* all that guard my *Sabbaths* from profaning *them*, and hold fast to my covenant.

Tg. Isa.: And the sons of *gentiles* who have *been added to the people of* the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who *will* keep *the* Sabbath without profaning it, and hold fast my covenants.

1QIsa<sup>a</sup>: Also the sons of a foreigner that join themselves to the Lord, *to be his servants, and to bless the name of the Lord*, that observe *the* Sabbath without profaning it, and hold fast my covenant.

The Septuagint follows the Masoretic Text very closely. In contrast, 1QIsaiah<sup>a</sup> presupposes that the gentiles who come cannot serve as priests since the reading omits 'to minister to him' significantly restricting the service offered by gentiles. The Isaiah targum emphasizes that the gentiles who flock to Zion have first been 'added to the people of the Lord' or become proselytes. Like the Targum, later

<sup>47</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, 'Proselytes or "Righteous Gentiles"? The Status of Gentiles in Eschatological Pilgrimage Patterns of Thought', *JSP* 7 (1990): 3-27; Paula Fredriksen, 'Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2', *JTS* 42 (1991): 544-48.

<sup>48</sup> I have cited the texts from Craig A. Evans, 'From "House of Prayer" to "Cave of Robbers": Jesus' Prophetic Criticism of the Temple Establishment', in Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon, eds., *The Quest for Context and Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 424-32.

rabbinic Midrashim could interpret Isaiah 56:3-6 as implying that the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord first became proselytes (*Exod. Rab.* 19:4; *Num. Rab.* 8:2).<sup>49</sup>

The chief difference between Paul and 'those of the circumcision' at Antioch was in relation to the meaning and method of the inclusion of gentiles. If the eschaton had arrived in Christ's death and resurrection (e.g. Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-58; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:18) then Paul could argue that the gentiles could join Israel *as gentiles* as stipulated in the prophetic hope for the pilgrimage of the nations. The agitators in Antioch resisted this conclusion for one of two possible reasons. Perhaps they held to a strictly futurist eschatology and insisted that since the eschaton had not yet arrived, gentiles must still proselytize in the interim in order to join Israel. Otherwise, even if the antagonists mirrored Paul's 'inaugurated' eschatology they may have interpreted such prophetic passages in a way sketched above in order to combine proselytism with the eschatological pilgrimage of the gentiles. In either case the effect is the same: gentiles have to proselytize. Thus we observe that the legitimacy of gentile membership was closely tied to the conditions of their entrance into salvation.

A look at the key terms of 'judaize' and 'works of the law' further illuminates the connection between entrance and covenant membership. The meaning of the word Ἰουδαΐζειν ('to judaize') varies from following only certain Mosaic ordinances, politically supporting the Jewish people, or signifying full conversion to Judaism.<sup>50</sup> For the most part circumcision was the final threshold to be crossed in judaizing.<sup>51</sup> All circumcision is judaizing, but not all judaizing entails circumcision/conversion. The word is often applied in the context of Jewish aggression towards gentiles where gentiles are forced to adhere to Jewish customs. This action is a visible way of expressing Israel's triumph over pagan religion and gentile kingdoms.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Evans, 'House of Prayer': 439 n. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Esth. 8:17; Josephus, *War* 2.454, 463; *Acts of Pilate* 2.1; Plutarch, *Cicero* 7.5-6; Ignatius, *Magn.* 10.3; Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9.22.5.

<sup>51</sup> On circumcision and conversion see S. J. D. Cohen, 'Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew', *HTR* 82 (1989): 13-33; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BC – 117 AD)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996): 438-39; Paul Barnett, 'The Jewish Mission in the era of the New Testament and the Apostle Paul', in *The Gospel to the Nations*, eds. P. Bolt and M. Thompson (Sydney: Apollos, 2000): 264.

<sup>52</sup> 1 Sam. 18:25-27; Esth. 8:17; Jdt. 14:10; 1 Macc. 2:46; Strabo, *Geog.* 16.2.34; Josephus, *Life* 112-13, 149-54; *Ant.* 13.257-58; 318-19; 397; 15.254-55; *War* 2.454.

Peter's withdrawal from gentile table fellowship and the subsequent compulsion exerted on gentiles to be circumcised was a form of judaizing that placed the vindication of Israel above the vindication (or justification) of the gentiles. The gentiles become pawns in the quest to further the victory of Israel over pagan forces. To insist on judaizing implied that salvation resides exclusively in the Jewish constituency.

The meaning of the 'works of the law' (ἔργων νόμου) is much discussed and debated.<sup>53</sup> Dunn and Wright have argued at length that 'works of the law' signifies the distinctive boundary markers of Judaism in particular (sabbath keeping, food laws, and circumcision) and the wider law in general.<sup>54</sup> Based on usage elsewhere it seems far more likely that the phrase 'works of the law' (Rom. 3:20, 27, 28; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10) signifies the works which the law requires.<sup>55</sup> The 'works of the law' is a metonym for the stipulations of the entire Mosaic code. Moreover, 'works of the law' cannot be reduced to 'ethnic boundary markers'. In saying that, one does not have to evacuate 'works of the law' of its national significance. Only Jews could do the works of the law and the works in question include circumcision, Sabbath-keeping and dietary regulations.<sup>56</sup> Hence, in Galatians 2:14-16, 'judaize' and 'works of the law' are *virtually* synonymous. The ethnocentric nomism of the circumcision faction insisted on gentile submission to the Jewish law as a condition for entering into the covenant community who are themselves the locus of God's saving activity. In contrast, Paul insists that it is submission to Christ, and not law, that comprise the basis of membership in the community destined for salvation.<sup>57</sup>

What should be evident is that any bifurcation between justification as 'entrance' or 'membership' is based on a false dichotomy. The

<sup>53</sup> See for recent discussion Robert Keith Rapa, *The Meaning of 'Works of the Law' in Galatians and Romans* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*: 240-42; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1990): 215-41; idem, 'Yet Once More – "The Works of the Law": A Response,' *JSNT* (1992): 99-117; idem, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*: 354-66; idem, *Romans 1-8*: 158.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. e.g. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 99-105; Schreiner, *Paul*: 111-12; Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*: 313-21.

<sup>56</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*: 100-1, n. 26; Frank Thielman ('Paul as Jewish Christian Theologian: The Theology of Paul in the Magnum Opus of James Dunn', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25 [1998]: 385) notes how 'works of the Law' can be used in connection with nationalism and sometimes human effort.

<sup>57</sup> Donaldson, 'Zealot and Convert': 682.

circumcision group raised the question of entrance through their insistence that gentiles must judaize or do works of the law. Yet their concern was to de-legitimize the membership status that gentiles currently had in the mixed Christian gatherings. What is discernible is that Paul moves from the topic of covenant inclusion to eschatological vindication as a natural inference when he applies the Antioch incident to his Galatian readers. It appears that the agitators in Galatia were urging the Galatians to take on parts of the law in order to attain full membership in the church, to live obediently to God, and to restrain them from returning to their old pagan ways. Paul picks up the thread of the agitators argument and takes it to its logical conclusion. If doing works of the law is necessary to judaize into the people of God, and if the people of God are those whom God will justify, then the Judaizers were *de facto* making justification by works of the law.

#### ***4.3 Justification in the Jew-Gentile Context***

It is worth briefly perusing several passages which link justification to Jew-gentile relations in the Pauline churches.

In Romans 3:21-26 Paul provides his most theologically rigorous articulation of justification by faith. The passage overflows with descriptions of the righteousness of God, the law and the prophets, the glory of God, justification, propitiation, redemption – all in relation to Christ's saving work on the cross. And yet the first implication that Paul draws in Romans 3:27-31 is that justification by faith means the demise of Jewish ethnocentrism. God is not the God of the Jews only, and this opens up the possibility of gentile inclusion in God's saving purposes.

Romans 10:9-10 makes faith in the saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection and confession of Jesus' lordship the sole criterion for salvation/eschatological vindication. Paul shifts immediately in 10:12 to reiterate that there is no 'distinction' (διαστολή) between Jew and gentile in the economy of salvation just as there is no 'distinction' between Jew and gentile in the economy of condemnation in Romans 3:22-23 because 'all have sinned'. The verdict of condemnation against Jews and gentiles is overturned by one verdict of vindication which creates one people of God comprised of Jews and gentiles.

Paul's references to Abraham in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 is illustrative of the dual role of justification as pertaining to entrance into salvation and membership in God's people. In contrast to depictions of

Abraham as keeping the Mosaic law in second-temple literature (cf. *Jub.* 15:1-2; 16:20, 28; 23:10; 24:11; *Sir* 44:19-21; *CD* 3:2; *2 Bar.* 57:2; *m.Qid.* 4:14), Paul insists that Abraham stood in the position of a gentile when he was justified and was partner in a covenant wholly apart from circumcision. The Abrahamic narratives are enlisted in order to drive home the point that gentiles are justified in the same way as Abraham (without circumcision) and those who emulate the Abrahamic faith belong in the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>58</sup>

In Ephesians 2:8-10 one observes Paul's most lavish expression of God's abundant grace and the clearest denial of salvation by works in the New Testament. The passage is an undeniable affirmation of the richness and depth of God's grace towards sinners. Yet what follows immediately in Ephesians 2:11-3:6 is the Apostle's description of the mystery of the gospel as the unity of Jews and gentiles in one body.

To reiterate my point, I do not think it possible to reduce justification to issues of covenant membership. Paul was not pleading for gentiles to 'join our community and you too will become righteous'.<sup>59</sup> Justification is primarily about the execution and satisfaction of God's justice revealed in Christ. However, covenant membership is more than an implication or result of justification, but is intrinsically bound up with justifying verdict itself.<sup>60</sup> Recognising this corporate dimension to God's actions of vindication inexorably leads to the conclusion that justification not only refers to the forgiveness and acquittal of believers, but it establishes their membership as rightful participants in the people of God. The upshot is that justification is the nexus by which one enters the messianic cosmopolitan community,<sup>61</sup> an event embedded within justification and not simply its sequel.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003): 168-194.

<sup>59</sup> Bray, 'Justification': 120-21.

<sup>60</sup> In this sense I would want to go further than Seifrid ('Blind Alleys': 94) who sees justification as a 'precondition' to covenant membership and Eveson (*The Great Exchange*: 143-44) and Smith ('A Critique': 104) who perceive covenant membership as a 'result' or 'implication'.

<sup>61</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law and Justification* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996): 282.

<sup>62</sup> I suggest that this position is entirely consistent with the Reformed heritage. Craig B. Carpenter ('A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification', *WTJ* 64 [2002]: 385) points out that on justification, Calvin is more 'ecclesiocentric' than many within the Reformed camp normally recognize.

## 5. Conclusion

I have not tried to demonstrate that the New Perspective and the Reformed view of justification are complementary or even reconcilable. What I have endeavoured to show is that both positions bring part of the solution to the problem of locating Paul's statements on justification in a first century context. What Paul confronts is not 'legalism' or 'nationalism' but an ethnocentric nomism. In response, Paul articulates his understanding of justification that accentuates the facets of divine *vindication* and *covenant inclusion*: God creates a new people, with a new status, in a new covenant, in the wake of the new age. A question of what comes first, 'forensic status' or 'covenant membership' is much like asking about the priority of the chicken or the egg. Both aspects must be co-joined for a comprehensive understanding of justification. In Romans, Paul moves from vindication to covenant inclusion, whilst in Galatians Paul moves in the reverse order, starting with covenantal inclusion and then pressing on to eschatological vindication. Little wonder why the New Perspective proponents cite Galatians as evidence of their view whilst the adherents of the Reformed view will often refer to Romans for their counter-response. A holistic reading of Romans and Galatians should tie together the covenantal and juridical dimensions of God's righteousness revealed in Christ.

Evangelical scholarship has wrestled with the issue of how justification and sanctification relate together (particularly against the backdrop of Evangelical–Catholic discussion). I suggest that a new domain of exchange should open up concerning the relationship between justification and adoption. A stream of dialogue on this topic may foster a greater understanding concerning the relationship between justification and Christian identity and, furthermore, perhaps attain a post-new perspective equilibrium.<sup>63</sup> Then perhaps we may see more clearly how God justifies the ungodly and adopts them into the household of faith.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Brendan Byrne, 'Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post-"New Perspective" Perspective', *HTR* 94 (2001): 227-41; Witherington, *Romans*: 102-7; Bird, 'When the Dust Finally Settles'.