

***The Righteousness
of God in Paul's
Epistle to the
Romans***

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1. Introduction

“Now faith such as I described is ‘righteousness,’ and is called the righteousness of God, or the righteousness that is valid in God’s sight, because he bestows it and counts it for righteousness for the sake of Christ, our Mediator.” So wrote the great Reformer, Martin Luther, in his *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*.

The term “the righteousness of God” is key to one’s understanding of Paul’s Epistle. However, its precise significance in each case has been the subject of much discussion. Firstly, δικαιοσύνη itself, while used in the context of its Graeco-Hebraic background, is evidently used by Paul in a particular, almost “technical”, sense. Secondly, it appears to be used in the Epistle in both “usual” and “technical” senses. Thirdly, θεοῦ, though sometimes plainly a possessive genitive, is not always so, but often rather approximates a genitive of cause or origin. Fourthly, the whole phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in some contexts seems to be equivalent to δικαιοσύνη ἐκ πίστεως.

Parallel to this theme is the concern of the Epistle, which is with people’s justification or acquittal before God. People are not just (and cannot be justified) by their own goodness which continually falls short of God’s requirement. They can only be acquitted by the act of a merciful God. But how can God acquit sinful people and still be δίκαιος by his own nature (cf. 3.26)? This was the point of difficulty.

In approaching this subject, then, it is essential to appreciate the background of Paul’s use of the term δικαιοσύνη, both in contemporary Greek and in the Old Testament, but to remember that this is only background and that in each case the precise meaning is to be determined by context. This study has indicated that “God’s righteousness” in the sense of his righteous character is a foundation principle in terms of which his judgment and his righteousness in the “technical” sense of saving activity must be regarded.

2. Background to Paul’s use of the term “Righteousness”

In non-biblical Greek, δίκαιος was related to social duties and legal requirements. Moulton and Milligan¹ give examples where the neuter is used largely in the sense of “duty”, “rights” or “claims”, leading to the meaning of “right” or “justice” which figures in the concluding formula of numerous petitions. The word δικαιοσύνη itself “is rare in the papyri, though it occurs very frequently in the inscriptions.”² The word signifies that quality of the person which accords with a particular acknowledged standard. Dodd³ notes that it was “the ordinary term for ‘righteousness’ (‘the whole of virtue as it related to one’s fellow-man,’ as Aristotle defined it), or ‘justice’ (‘the science of giving every man his due,’ as the Stoics defined it).” This forensic significance was also present in the verb, δικάιω, “to think or deem right.”

Δίκαιος and its cognates occur hundreds of times in the LXX. In the vast majority of these instances (except in the use of δικαίωμα), they translate some form of the Hebrew root צדק. Apparently this originally conveyed an idea of stiffness or straightness. This was extended to signify what is right, just or normal, and to include rightness in an ethical, as well as practical, sense. It also signified vindicated righteousness and is the source of an Old Testament concept of “justification” whereby one who is unjustly accused is vindicated. Used with regard to God, it seems to indicate his attribute as sovereign, the constancy of his will and the impartiality of his justice seen in vindicating his people unjustly treated, but also in the certainty of his wrath upon evil.

¹ *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, in loco*.

² *ibid.*

³ p. 10.

While the strong emphasis seems to be on the righteousness of God in vindication and judgment, there is another element acknowledging human righteousness to be inadequate before God, and coming to an awareness of God's righteousness in his redemptive acts. This aspect of the רַדַּף word-group is emphasised by the evident mis-translation in the LXX in some ten instances (chiefly הַרַדַּף) by ἐλεημοσύνη, "mercy, pity." The righteousness of the law was especially manifested in mercy. After all, was this not an integral part of the Lord's dealings with them? In Num. 14.19, Moses pleaded for the rebellious people of Israel, "Pardon, I pray thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of thy רַדַּף (LXX [τὸ μέγα] ἐλεός, Vg. *misericordia*, AV "mercy", RSV "steadfast love") and according as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

It is in the light of God's רַדַּף that his רַדַּף and הַרַדַּף are to be understood. "I will not justify (רַדַּף , RSV 'acquit') the wicked" (Ex. 23.7), the Lord had said, and this principle of divine action was laid down as an example to be imitated by the earthly judge in Dt. 25.1, "Then shall they justify the righteous ($\text{רַדַּף$) and condemn the wicked."

But how was Ps. 14 to be interpreted? "There is none that does good (אֵין עֹשֶׂה טוֹב) which Paul renders οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος), no, not one" (vv. 1,3). This refers not merely to the fool who denied the existence of God, but to all the "children of men (בְּנֵי אָדָם)" (v. 2). Whatever author and date be accepted for Is. 64.6 (5), the universal implications of unrighteousness are there apparent. God's wrath is seen to rest on his chosen people also, for, although he meets the one who joyfully works רַדַּף (v. 5), "all our righteousnesses (רַדַּף ; LXX has sing. RSV 'righteous deeds') are as filthy rags (בְּגָדֵי עֵדָה , lit. 'rag of menstruations', cf. Vg. *pannus menstruatae*, and thus implying ritual as well as physical uncleanness, i.e. the totality of uncleanness it is possible to attribute to an inanimate object)."

It was with this kind of acknowledgment that it became possible to realise more fully God's righteousness in dealing with his people's sin. By his nature of רַדַּף it would be unjust for him in forgiving to pass by their sin even when they had turned from it. However, one interprets the "suffering Servant" passages of Isaiah, it is the servant **of the Lord** who suffers – the saving act is essentially God's (see especially Is. 53.4,6,10).

Much of this was in undeveloped form. From the view-point of those living after Christ it seems clearly to lead on to New Testament doctrine. However, the Jews tended to develop the other elements in Old Testament doctrine, viewing people as capable of achieving the moral requirements of God and viewing God therefore as dispenser of legal justice without much of that "mercy" and forgiveness able to raise the fallen, which are key features of the concept in Paul's thought.

3. The Righteousness of God as Character

It is evident that the term δικαιοσύνη largely indicated, when applied to people, that state which is acceptable to God, and, when applied to God, the constancy of his will and his eternal self-consistency.⁴ Now, while it is plain that this is not Paul's outstanding use of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in the epistle to the Romans, yet it is present and forms the basis of the other considerations. Both God's judgment and his justification stem from his character of δικαιοσύνη.

This is especially clear in Paul's assertions at the beginning of chapter 3. "The faithfulness of God" (τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 3), "the justice of God" (θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην, v. 5), and "the truthfulness of God" (ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 7) are presented as roughly analogous. In each case, they are set out in contrast to human sinfulness and inconstancy.

The Jew, he argues, had an advantage over the Gentile (speaking here apart from the coming of Christ), because the Scriptures, "the oracles of God" (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ) were entrusted to them. "If some disbelieved (or, 'were faithless to their trust'), will their disbelief (or, 'faithlessness') nullify the

⁴ There can be no other standard by which we describe God. Perhaps we might ascribe to him the attribute of absolute moral perfection, but this he is by virtue of being God, the one by whom our varying moral imperfections are judged.

faithfulness of God?” No matter which way ἀπιστία is interpreted, the significance is the same – the Jews were unfaithful to their trust since they **did not believe** in the Old Testament promises as fulfilled in Christ.⁵ Paul sets out the faithfulness of God in contrast to this. His promises⁶ stand sure even though they be disbelieved by those to whose charge they are given. It is to make an affirmation quite contrary to God’s nature to suggest that he is not true⁷ who is the Judge of all.

Paul goes on to make a parallel statement that “our (i.e. the Jews’) unrighteousness (ἀδικία) commends God’s righteousness (δικαιοσύνη).” Ἀδικία is more general than (yet includes) ἀπιστία; so also is δικαιοσύνη in relation to πίστις in this context.⁸ It is his faithfulness to his promises in spite of people’s unfaithfulness – that necessity of his nature by which he must be true to himself – that provokes the question of the justice of his wrath ὀργή towards us. This is also his δικαιοσύνη as vindicated,⁹ and that against the unfaithfulness of people. Here is seen the reason for using the more general term. God’s faithfulness to his promises springs from his righteousness, but so does his wrath. The mistake that leads to the question lies in the assumption that God’s faithfulness extends only to his promises. To want him merely true to his promises is to limit him to our own desires. Essentially he is true **to himself**. The constancy of his will and his eternal self-consistency are not to be limited to his promises. It is a contradiction of terms to call him ἄδικος whose essential nature is δικαιοσύνη, both in fulfilling promises in the covenant relationship, and in judging the world.

Paul then gives a third parallel – viz. that “God’s truth by means of (ἐν) my falsehood (unfaithfulness)¹⁰ abounded to his glory” (v. 7). This plainly refers back to v. 4. The truthfulness of God in making his promises¹¹ is seen in contrast to the falsehood of the Jews¹² in denying their fulfilment. It is acknowledged that God is to judge the world, yet why should the Jew be judged a sinner, since his falsehood means an abounding of God’s truthfulness to his glory? But this is clearly untenable as leading inevitably to antinomianism. The condemnation of such an act on this principle is just. Again, the truthfulness of God in making his promises, and as magnified by the Jews’ falsehood, can in no way be used as an argument to escape God’s judgment.

The whole question of the Jewish rejection of Christ is considered by Paul in detail in chapters 9 to 11. There is no injustice (ἀδικία) on God’s part (9.14). The promise was a promise for faith, and the righteousness was a righteousness by faith (ἐκ πίστεως, v. 30). The promise was for the chosen seed and therefore for the descendants of Abraham by faith rather than according to the flesh. The rejection of Israel is not a breach of God’s righteousness with regard to the covenant. It is rather connected with Israel’s unbelief and their rejection of Christ.

This is the same principle involved in people’s salvation is shown in 3.25. The putting forth Christ as a propitiation (ἱλαστήριον) for sin was to show God’s righteousness (δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) on account of (διά with accusative) the passing over (τὴν πάρεσιν),¹³ in God’s forbearance, of the previously committed sins – i.e. those sins committed before the death of Christ; further, it was to

⁵ It may be argued that, by contrast with ἐπιστεύθησαν (v. 2) and πίστιν, ἀπιστία must here mean “unfaithfulness”. For the argument in favour of the meaning “unbelief”, see Sanday and Headlam, *in loco*. The intention of the words is the same in either case.

⁶ So most commentators, but Denney considers this to refer back to God’s judgment (cf. C.H. Dodd). This has in its favour the original context of the quotation from Ps. 51.4, where the reference is to the justice of God in pronouncing judgment on the sinner. Alford, however, sees reference here to the covenant relationship.

⁷ ἀληθής used here in contrast to ψεύστης, seems here closely related in meaning to πίστος. He is ἀληθής in making his promises, because he is πίστος in executing them.

⁸ cf. Sanday and Headlam, *in loco*.

⁹ So Alford, referring back to the δικαιοθῆς of v. 4.

¹⁰ cf. Alford, *in loco*. Thayer notes under ψεύσμα, “spec. the perfidy by which a man by sinning breaks faith with God.”

¹¹ Sanday and Headlam see ἀλήθεια in terms of God’s fulfilment of his promises. In a sense this is also true, but I have held ἀλήθεια and πίστις here as intimately related but logically distinct.

¹² “St. Paul used the first person from motives of delicacy” (Sanday and Headlam). The reference still seems primarily to the Jews, as throughout all this passage.

¹³ Several commentators note the difference of meaning between this word and ἀφεσις, “forgiveness, remission.”

show his righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) at the present time (ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ) with respect to (εἰς) his being just (δίκαιος) and the justifier (δικαιοῦντα) of the one who has faith in Jesus.¹⁴ This clearly refers to the declaration of God's nature of δικαιοσύνη in so far as this could have been challenged on the grounds of the forbearance he has shown in the past (cf. 2.4) and as this nature is expressed in the means of justification now provided for people. This interpretation of δικαιοσύνη at this place differs from the views of C.H. Dodd and A. Nygren.

Nygren¹⁵ interprets ἱλαστήριον as “mercy-seat”, following its general meaning in the LXX.¹⁶ Christ is thus the place of atonement rather than the propitiatory sacrifice. The δικαιοσύνη referred to, therefore, cannot be the justice of God since God had showed himself able to pass by sins even in the Old Testament times, but is rather that δικαιοσύνη which is “the same righteousness which is affirmed throughout the epistle.” The difficulties with this view are several. It tends to minimise the importance of the ὀργὴ θεοῦ which, as Nygren acknowledges, is to Paul “a terrifying reality”.¹⁷ Paul evidently has the propitiatory offering in mind, since he makes explicit mention of “the blood”, calling it “his blood”, i.e. the blood of **Christ**. Even if ἱλαστήριον be considered as “mercy-seat”, it is more than a place of intercession and reconciliation, for Christ himself is the propitiatory sacrifice and his blood is sprinkled on the mercy-seat for the sins of the world.

Since the word was not frequent in the LXX and in spite of its technical use there,¹⁸ it is unjust to press that Paul would not use it here in its primary sense, for primarily ἱλαστήριον signifies the **means** of appeasement and only by transference the **place** where this comes about. Alford¹⁹ argues against this which was the “ordinary interpretation” of his time on the grounds that it does not agree with εἰς ἔνδειξιν κ. τ. λ. which require an expiatory victim (as being a public manifestation rather than that in the Holy of holies), and that it confuses the ideas since, as seen above, Christ must be both victim and mercy-seat. Since ἱλαστήριον is “propitiatory offering”, it follows naturally that δικαιοσύνη is “judicial righteousness, justice”, and “this interpretation **alone** suits the requirements of the sense.” Thus, the Death of Christ proves not only God's love and grace, but also his justice which requires punishment and expiation.

C.H. Dodd concurs with this view of ἱλαστήριον, but says concerning δικαιοσύνη, “The justice of God in verse 26 is the same thing as the righteousness of God in verses 21-22.”²⁰ He categorically asserts, “There is **no** suggestion that a device has been found by which the justice of God can be satisfied (by the vicarious punishment of sin, for example), while at the same time his mercy is exerted to save the sinner. No such antithesis was in Paul's mind.” Part of the problem here is that ὀργὴ θεοῦ is seen as some kind of impersonal Nemesis²¹ rather than as an expression of God's nature. There is thus the idea of a “divine intervention” to save man from something that is not directly God's. But Dodd rightly claims that Paul saw “no antithesis between justice and mercy.” It is the consistency of these two attributes that is shown in the death of Christ. Paul knows no mercy but that which is consistent with the same δικαιοσύνη as is expressed in the wrath of God against sin. Thus Knox says, “God's apparent ignoring of man's previous sinning would have been impossible (because morally inadmissible) if it had not been that the death of Christ was present in the purpose and foreknowledge of God.”²²

¹⁴ τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ (cf. Vg. *qui est ex fide Jesu Christi*) is thus uniformly translated. More strictly, this is “the one whose ruling motive is faith” (Sanday and Headlam) or even “the one the source of whose being is faith...”

¹⁵ See p. 156 ff.

¹⁶ In twenty out of its 25 occurrences, it translates the Hebrew מִזְבֵּחַ. This is also the plain meaning in Heb. 9.5, the only other occurrence of the word in the N.T., where, however, there is a direct reference to the tabernacle.

¹⁷ p. 97.

¹⁸ מִזְבֵּחַ is only so translated in the Pentateuch; its other occurrence, 1 Chron. 28.11, is translated by ἐξίλασμός.

¹⁹ II, p. 343.

²⁰ p. 59. It is evident from what follows that he does not mean this simply in terms of Moffatt's translation of the words.

²¹ See Dodd, p. 20ff.

²² *in loco*.

It appears, then, that at the source of all God's dealings with humanity is his character of δικαιοσύνη, in the sense of the constancy of his will, and his eternal self-consistency. This is the basis of God's truthfulness in the making of his promises and of his faithfulness in fulfilling them, as well as of that justice which brings his ὀργή on sinners, Jew and Gentile alike. In particular, it is the basis of his mercy and of the means of justifying sinners which stems from his mercy.

4. The Righteousness of God in Judgment

It has already been noted that the δικαιοσύνη of God, as this term is applied to God's attributes, bears as strong a relation to God's judgment of sin as to his fulfilment of promises. This was not merely the influence of Paul's Jewish background,²³ for the manifestation of God's righteousness in judgment is, in Paul's thought, a necessary correlate of its manifestation in justification.

It is not in terms of human whim and passion, but of God's essential δικαιοσύνη, that his "wrath" (ὀργή) is to be understood. The parallelism of 1.17,18 is noteworthy. V. 17 refers to the revelation of God's righteousness (δικαιοσύνη here in the more technical Pauline sense) in the gospel. The necessity for this revelation is seen to consist in the present revelation of God's wrath against all ungodliness and wickedness of men. The latter revelation is seen in the thrice-repeated "God gave them up" (παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός, vv. 24,26,28), in the present judgment, and in the divine decree (δικαίωμα) of death awaiting future fulfilment (v. 32). There is no excuse for the Gentile, for there have been clear evidences of God's nature in creation, namely "his eternal power and divinity" (v. 20). The judgment of God is "according to truth" (κατὰ ἀλήθειαν, 2.2) against such sin. Yet the Jew also is without excuse and comes under the same divine judgment. He has had clearer manifestation of God's goodness, but has not allowed this to lead him to repentance (v. 4). Consequently, by his hard and impenitent heart he is storing up for himself "wrath (ὀργή) in the day of wrath (ἐν ἡμέρῃ ὀργῆς) and of the revelation of God's righteous judgment (ἀποκαλύψεως δικαιοκρισίας τοῦ θεοῦ)."²⁴

God's δικαιοσύνη is now revealed (ἀποκαλύπτεται) in the gospel (1.17). His ὀργή is now revealed (ἀποκαλύπτεται) against sin in the delivering up of the heathen to their own lusts (1.18ff). It is also incurred by the Jews and is being stored up against the day of ὀργή, a day when God's δικαιοκρισία will be revealed (2.5), presumably also the day of fulfilment of the divine decree (δικαίωμα) of death (1.32). The original decree of death, the wrath of God in the present and as it will issue in righteous judgment, are all seen as stemming from God's nature of righteousness.

Paul pursued this idea further, for by this δικαιοκρισία God will render to each (i.e. to Jew and Gentile alike) according to his works (2.6) – punishing the evil, rewarding the righteous – for "there is no partiality (προσωποληψία) with God" (v. 11). Here προσωποληψία, referring to corrupt judgment (by bribery or some other means not regarding the case by its intrinsic merits²⁵), is set in contrast to δικαιοκρισία. In all of God's judgment he is just. Who "the just" are Paul does not say here, for, in fact, he goes on to demonstrate that none is δίκαιος, that Jew and Gentile alike have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (3.9ff). Rather he seeks to establish clearly here that God's judgment is righteous judgment (cf. 3.5). Were there any who could be δίκαιος naturally or by the law, they would thus be acquitted, but he later shows that this acquittal only in fact takes place if one is δίκαιος in Christ.²⁶ Having once established this principle of divine judgment, it is significant that he ceases to use this word δικαιοκρισία, and writes rather of κατὰκριμα (namely, at 5.16,18; 8.1),

²³ It has already been shown, however, that even the Old Testament idea of righteousness (צדקה and צדק) included the possibility of, and at times set forth the reality of, mercy (רחמים).

²⁴ Sanday and Headlam, *in loco*, maintain that δικαιοκρισία denotes not so much the character of the judgment as the character of the Judge.

²⁵ See Sanday and Headlam, *in loco*.

²⁶ 2.15 may well be an allusion to the "new covenant" of Jer. 31.31ff.

“damnatory sentence, condemnation,”²⁷ implying in each case its universal extent, apart from the grace of God in Christ.

Essentially, then, apart from the provisions for human sinfulness which Paul saw in the gospel, the δικαιοσύνη of God is expressed in wrath (ὀργή) toward sin and will be revealed in the righteous judgment (δικαιοκρισία) of God in the day of wrath which **would** lead to universal condemnation (κατάκριμα) of man since none is δίκαιος, either by means of the works of the law or apart from the law.

5. The Righteousness of God in Justification

So far δικαιοσύνη has been considered in its “usual” meaning, but consideration must now be given to Paul’s particular use of it. To say the least, there is a contrast between his statement that God “justifies the ungodly” (4.5, δικαιούντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ) and the Old Testament statement, “I will not acquit the wicked” (Ex. 23.7. LXX has οὐ δικαιώσεις τὸν ἀσεβῆ)!

For Paul, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ did not merely signify an attribute of God, but his saving activity, that state acceptable to God, provided by God and received by faith. Perhaps this is seen even more unmistakably in a later epistle where it is connected with the idea of being “in Christ” – Paul wants to be found in him, “not having my own righteousness proceeding from the law (ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου) but that which is through faith in Christ,²⁸ the righteousness proceeding from God (τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην) on the basis of (ἐπί with dative) faith” (Phil. 3.9). The point that this is not simply an attribute of God is made emphatic there by the addition of the preposition ἐκ, and by the evident statement that this righteousness is designed to be received on the basis of faith.

In 1.17, it is stated that this δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is revealed in the gospel ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν –lit. “from faith to faith.”²⁹ If δικαιοσύνη is taken here to mean God’s attribute, then πίστις becomes a kind of spectator quality enabling a person to see that God is righteous in the gospel as well as in his wrath. However, this is not Paul’s idea of faith (cf. 4.20,21) – in fact, it is extremely doubtful whether this kind of meaning can be advanced even in Heb. 11.1, where a superficial reading might seem to indicate it. Faith is not here an abstract belief but a living trust, as is clearly seen from the quotation from Hab. 2.4 which follows. Whatever connotation the word had in the original,³⁰ its present context indicates a faith which stands in vital relation to the life. This is true whether ἐκ πίστεως is taken with ὁ δίκαιος or with ζήσεται. The sense in the former case would be that the man whose righteousness comes from faith shall live; the latter that the principle of the life of the righteous man is his faith. In both cases the righteous condition is based on faith (in the former as regards its origin, in the latter, its continuance); and in both cases faith is the course of the life (in the former, because it brings about the necessary kind of righteousness, in the latter, directly).

God’s righteousness in the judgment of humanity has already been noted. Here is the other aspect of God’s righteousness manifested in mercy and salvation. It is revealed in the gospel³¹ which,

²⁷ Thayer, *in loco*.

²⁸ Taking (πίστεως) Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive. The phrase could also presumably be rendered “through the faithfulness of Christ.” But even so, ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει evidently refers to human faith.

²⁹ This could signify: (a) “from (source) God’s faithfulness to the human response of faith” (cf. Knox. *in loco*). It is interesting that this interpretation has been taken by Barclay); (b) “starting from a smaller quantity of faith to produce a larger quantity” (so Sanday and Headlam. Cf. Nygren, V. Taylor); (c) simply an emphasis, “faith from start to finish” (Denny, Dodd, Knox). The issue depends largely on whether the phrase is taken with δικαιοσύνη or with ἀποκαλύπτεται.

³⁰ Nygren (p. 81ff) sees Habakkuk’s meaning as directly opposite to Paul’s. However, C.L. Taylor (*Interpreter’s Bible*, on Hab. 2.4), while stating its meaning of “faithfulness”, also seen a reference to faith in God.

³¹ Ἐν αὐτῷ could presumably be taken as equivalent to a simple dative of instrument. The verb ἀποκαλύπτεται, however, seems to require the other meaning. The other point of question in the text is whether αὐτῷ refers to τὸ εὐαγγέλιον or to τῷ πιστεύοντι. It could only refer to the latter by reason of proximity, whereas the other

for everyone who has faith, is the power of God aimed at (εἰς) salvation (σωτηρίαν) – salvation from ὀργή, the consequences of sin, and salvation from the present power of sin.³² The central Person of this gospel has already been indicated by Paul (v. 3ff) – Jesus Christ our Lord, the human and divine Person³³ – though he has not specified what about his Person constitutes the gospel, nor why it should especially reveal the righteousness of God.

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The necessity for this revelation of God's righteousness lies in the revelation of God's wrath against sin (v. 18) - as has been seen, this is righteous wrath revealed against the sin which embraces all alike, present wrath which will issue in righteous judgment according to God's righteous decree. This is the theme developed from 1.18 to 3.20.

From 3.21, Paul returns to the theme of 1.17 - "But now apart from (or independently of³⁴) the law God's righteousness has been manifested,³⁵ having witness borne to it by the law³⁶ and the prophets, the righteousness of God by faith in [Jesus] Christ³⁷ to all who believe." Δικαιοσύνη θεου refers here to that righteousness which God himself provides for men. He has stated (v. 20) that "by works of the law no flesh shall be acquitted (or pronounced righteous - δικαιωθησεται) in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."³⁸ This righteousness of God, however, is able to achieve quite independently of the law what the law could not do - viz. justify man, pronounce him righteous - and comes by faith in Christ to all who believe simply because there is no distinction between men, Jew or Greek (cf. 10.12). All alike have sinned, so he has established, and continue to fall short of the divine image in which they were created.³⁹

There are then two points of reference - the universality of sin and the inability of the law to make men δικαιοσ before God. The only possible way, then, for men to be justified δωρεαν (literally, "as a gift", and hence, "freely, gratis") by God's grace mediated through the redemption (ἀπολυτρωσεως)⁴⁰ which is in Christ Jesus. This act of justifying men comes not only from the willingness of God (his χάρις) but from an act in Christ whereby man is set free. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Paul implies here that the death of Christ is the λύτρον, or "ransom-price", by which our release is secured.⁴¹ It would otherwise be just a casual addition, having little connection with what precedes, to add concerning Christ, "whom God put forth as a propitiation (ἱλαστηριον)⁴² by his blood, (to be received) by faith."

This surely is the point of union between the two conceptions of δικαιοσύνη θεου. God does not justify or acquit men by winking at their sin or by the forbearance of his ὀργη - rather, a ransom-price, a propitiatory offering, has been made and is the basis of the divine acquittal of man. God's saving activity of δικαιοσύνη ought not to be set in opposition to his essential character of δικαιοσύνη, for the ransom-price or equivalent for man's sinfulness has been provided (in fact, by God himself), nor should his χάρις and his ὀργη be considered as incompatible opposites (or the ὀργη be "depersonalised"), for the propitiatory offering has been set forth by God himself. Thus God's righteous character is declared (vv. 25, 26 - see earlier).

The argument then proceeds to establish that this δικαιοσύνη is bestowed on man on the sole grounds of faith. "For we hold that a man is justified by faith (πιστει) apart from works of law" (v.

has the precedence as subject of the preceding clause. Both of these points of interpretation have been largely overlooked by commentators.

³² Roughly, these themes can be traced in 3.21-5.21 and 6.1-7.25 respectively, but they obviously overlap and are not confined to these sections. There is sufficient demarcation to indicate these as the important themes in Paul's use of σωτηρία.

³³ Space does not permit a full discussion of ὀρισθέντος here. Suffice it to say that προεπηγγείλατο... περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ (vv. 2,3) certainly indicates the primacy of his divine Sonship over the statements that follow and may well indicate this as the pre-existent condition, that ὀρισθέντος is set in contrast to γενομένου which signifies entry into a new condition, that this interpretation is necessary for the consistency of Paul's thought in this epistle (cf. e.g. 5.10 and 8.32 where the reference is again primarily to his death, but also appears to have an application to the total act of the incarnation).

28). The substance of the argument is based on Abraham, of whom it was written, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as (εις) righteousness" (Gen. 16.5⁴³). Works being their due on the basis of merit (4.4), but by this means man can never be justified before God. Acquittal comes by faith in the God who acquits the ungodly (v. 5) - not, indeed, in contradiction of his nature (and hence there is here no contradiction of Ex. 23.7), but by means which demonstrate his essential δικαιοσυνη. This promise depends on faith since only so could it rest on God's grace. The δικαιοσυνη which comes from God is **reckoned** to us - λογιζεσθαι, a key word in this chapter, largely a forensic term - whohave faith in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. This reckoning of righteousness to a person is equivalent to his justification (δικαιωσις, v. 25). He is justified, or rockoned as having δικαιοσυνη by his faith in the one who was delivered to death for our trespassed and raised for our justification.⁴⁴

These points are restated in chapter 5. We are justified by faith (εκ πιστεως, v. 1), by the death of Christ (εω τω αματι αυτου, v. 9), a death by which God has shown his love to us (v. 8). On the grounds of the present justification, we shall be saved (σωθησομεθα, presumably at the day of wrath) from his οργη. With regard to the work of Christ, the terms of exchange (καταλλαγη) are used, and this accords with what has already been noted on the essentially righteous nature of God's act. Emphasis is laid on the free gift of righteousness (της δωρεας της δικ., v. 17), made possible by the obedience of Christ.

Chapters 6 and 7 are concerned with aspects of practical righteousness, but chapter 8 comes back to the central theme again. Paul had stated (5.16) that sin had brought κατακριμα whereas the free gift had brought δικαιωμα.⁴⁵ Again he emphasises that there is no longer any κατακριμα to those who are in Christ Jesus (v. 1),⁴⁶ for God has achieved in the sending of his Son as an offering for sin what the law was unable to do (v. 3), in order that the δικαιωμα of the law might be fulfilled in us. Δικαιωμα heresignifies "the just requirement (of the law)" (R.S.V.), or even simply "the decree". The decree of death against sin (and of life for righteousness) is fulfilled in us by the death of Christ which has freed us from the principle (απο του νομου) of sin and death, and by the new life εν Χριστω, walking according to (κατα) the Spirit.

With relation to the rejection of Israel, Paul further develops the theme of the righteousness of God. The Gentiles who were not pursuing righteousness (as by works of the law) have attained it, that is, the righteousness which is by faith (εκ πιστεως), but Israel who was pursuing a law of righteousness did not measure up to that law (9.30,31). Their error was in not seeking it by faith (ουκ εκ πιστεως) but as if it came by works (αλλ εξ εργαων).⁴⁷ This is the basis of 10.3, "For being ignorant of the righteousness of God (here plainly that which is bestowed by God and acceptable to him) and seeking to establish their own (την ιδιαν), they did not submit to the righteousness of God." What they were seeking was την ιδιαν because it was based on what **they** did, on the works of the law, which in fact could not make them righteous before God. The righteousness which is valid before God is based on the act of God in Christ. The coming of Christ has put an end to the law⁴⁸ as a means of attaining righteousness, for everyone is acceptable to God (and justified by him) if he has faith (v. 4). Righteousness is not εκ νομου but εκ πιστεως (v. 5ff) since it is based on God's act.

6. Conclusion

It has been seen that basic to Paul's use of the term δικαιοσυνη θεου is the fact of God as righteous by nature, i.e. that his will is constant, and that he always acts consistently with his will and nature. The οργη θεου necessarily results from this. For Paul, to deny God's wrath would be a gross offense to his nature. Though the figure of a human passion must be used, God's wrath is not like human passion which is largely subjective, but is objective and consistent with his character. His decree of death and his judgment are righteous, and a simply by-passing or denial of them is, in effect, a denial of his righteousness.

Quite consistent with this is the emphasis on God's love - a love shown to those who were still sinners and hence under his οργη, love towards all men, none of whom was righteous or could finally be

acquitted on his own merit. God has therefore provided the means of man's acquittal in Christ, so that by faith in him, man is counted as having δικαιοσύνη, i.e. he is in that state which is acceptable to God. This is the righteousness **of God** because it comes from God, is sustained by the life of God and is finally acceptable to him. It is the righteousness **of faith** because it is received by faith, is reckoned to a person on the basis of faith, and depends on faith from start to finish.

This saving activity of God is, however, consistent with God's righteous nature since it involves the sacrificial death of Christ viewed as the ransom-price of our release, the propitiation of the divine wrath, the exchange, the sin-offering. This is the focal point of the two basic uses of δικαιοσύνη θεου in the epistle to the Romans.

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