

INCORPORATED RIGHTEOUSNESS:
A RESPONSE TO RECENT EVANGELICAL DISCUSSION
CONCERNING THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S
RIGHTEOUSNESS IN JUSTIFICATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years biblical and theological scholarship has witnessed an increasing amount of interest in the doctrine of justification. This resurgence can be directly attributed to issues emerging from recent Protestant-Catholic dialogue on justification and the exegetical controversies prompted by the New Perspective on Paul. Central to discussion on either front is the topic of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, specifically, whether or not it is true to the biblical data. As expected, this has given way to some heated discussion with salvos of criticism being launched by both sides of the debate. For some authors a denial of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the sole grounds of justification amounts to a virtual denial of the gospel itself and an attack on the Reformation. Others, by jettisoning belief in imputed righteousness, perceive themselves as returning to the historical meaning of justification and emancipating the Church from its Lutheranism. In view of this it will be the aim of this essay, in dialogue with the main protagonists, to seek a solution that corresponds with the biblical evidence and may hopefully go some way in bringing both sides of the debate together.

II. A SHORT HISTORY OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS
SINCE THE REFORMATION

It is beneficial to preface contemporary disputes concerning justification by identifying their historical antecedents. Although the Protestant view of justification was not without some indebtedness to Augustine and medieval reactions against semi-Pelagianism, for the most part it represented a theological *novum*. The primary characteristics of the Reformation understanding of justification were as follows. (1) Justification refers to the believer's legal status *coram Deo*, not his moral state. (2) A distinction is made between justification (a divine declaration of righteousness) and sanctification or regeneration (inner transforming work of the Spirit). (3) The formal cause of

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justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers. The chief contribution of Martin Luther that helped cultivate this articulation of justification was his contention that justification ensues because of the *iustitia Christi aliena* (alien righteousness of Christ).¹ Commenting on Titus 1:14, Luther declares, “Our faith depends solely on Christ. He alone is righteous, and I am not; for His righteousness stands for me before the judgment of God and against the wrath of God . . . for a foreign righteousness has been introduced as a covering.”² When expositing Romans 4, Luther’s faith and scholarship merge with poignant effect:

He has made His righteousness my righteousness, and my sin His sin. If He has made my sin to be His sin, then I do not have it and I am free. If He has made His righteousness my righteousness, then I am righteous now with the same righteousness as He. My sin cannot devour Him, but it is engulfed in the unfathomable depths of His righteousness for He himself is God, who is blessed forever.³

It was in Melancthon, however, that Lutheran ideas about imputed righteousness began to crystallize and the distinction between justification and sanctification was engraved in Protestant thought. He writes, “If we believe on the *Son of God*, we have forgiveness of sins; and *Christ’s* righteousness is imputed to us, so that we are justified and are pleasing to God for the sake of Christ.”⁴ Soon thereafter Melancthon comments, “By *are justified* he means this comfort in the midst of true anguish, forgiveness of sins received through faith . . . But the renewal that follows, which God effects in us, he calls *sanctification*, and these two words are clear and distinct.”⁵

John Calvin argued with equal vigor for the imputed righteousness of Christ as constituting the material cause of justification:

A man will be *justified by faith* when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.⁶

Yet in the same chapter of *Institutes* Calvin also underscores the Christocentric nature of justification and intimates his awareness of its relationship to union with Christ:

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A history of the Christian doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 1.180–87.

² Martin Luther, “Lectures on Titus,” in *Luther’s Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; 55 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968) 29.41; see also, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *Luther’s Works* (ed. Harold J. Grimm; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957) 31.297–99.

³ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Romans,” in *Luther’s Works* (ed. Hilton C. Oswald; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972) 25.188.

⁴ Philip Melancthon, *Loci Communes* (1555 German edition; original Latin edition 1521): “10: How man obtains forgiveness of sin and is justified before God.” *Melancthon on Christian Doctrine: Loci communes 1555* (trans. Clyde L. Manschreck; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965) 155–56.

⁵ Melancthon, *Loci Communes* (1555): “13: Of the word: ‘justification’ and ‘to be justified.’” Manschreck, *Melancthon on Christian Doctrine* 163.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.11.2.

For though God alone is the fountain of righteousness, and the only way in which we are righteous is by participating with him, yet as by our unhappy revolt we are alienated from his righteousness, it is necessary to descend to this lower remedy, that Christ may justify us by the power of his death and resurrection.⁷

You see that our righteousness is not in ourselves, but in Christ; that the only way in which we become possessed of it is by being made partakers of Christ, since with him we possess all riches.⁸

It is little known that the imputation of Christ's righteousness was not advocated universally amongst the Reformers as the central tenet of justification. The Augsburg confession states, "This faith God imputes for righteousness before him."⁹ This stands in stark contrast to the Westminster confession which reads, "Those whom God effectually called he also freely justified . . . not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them."¹⁰

Likewise, late seventeenth-century Puritans themselves disputed the notion of justification comprising the imputation of Christ's righteousness, with Richard Baxter, Christopher Cartwright, John Goodwin, and Benjamin Woodbridge instead holding to the *imputation of faith* as the formal cause of justification.¹¹ John Owen and Richard Baxter in particular exchanged some vehement criticism over this doctrine.¹² Suffice it to say, belief in the imputation of faith appears entirely consistent *within* the domain of Reformation thought. One encounters other variations *within* the Reformed tradition. Although Richard Hooker was committed to imputed righteousness, his understanding of justification interfaces with a strong sacramentalism.¹³ Martin Bucer held to a double justification, the first stage being the *iustificatio impii* ("justification of the ungodly") and the second comprising the *iustificatio pii* ("justification of the godly").¹⁴

John Wesley's view of justification has been scrutinized endlessly to determine whether or not the founder of Methodism really believed in forensic justification. One finds in Wesley a host of conflicting statements. For instance, in his sermon entitled "Justification by Faith" he states that "the very moment that God giveth faith (for 'it is the gift of God') to the 'ungodly,' that worketh not, that 'faith is counted to him for righteousness.'"¹⁵ Regarding imputation Wesley wrote, "Do not dispute for that particular phrase 'the

⁷ Ibid. 3.11.8 (in the context of refuting Osiander and reflecting on Isa 53:11).

⁸ Ibid. 3.11.23.

⁹ *The Augsburg Confession*, Article 4, "Of Justification."

¹⁰ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 11.1, "Of Justification."

¹¹ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* 2.103, 116–17.

¹² See Baxter's *Aphorisms of Justification* and John Owen's *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*. Cf. Hans Boersma, *A Hot Peppercorn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993).

¹³ Cf. Martin Foord, "Richard Hooker's Doctrine of Justification," *Churchman* 114 (2000) 316–29.

¹⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 111–12.

¹⁵ John Wesley, "Justification by Faith," in *The Works of John Wesley* (14 vols.; 3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 5.62.

imputed righteousness of Christ.' It is not scriptural."¹⁶ Interpreters of Wesley have long noted that such remarks arise from a suspicion that imputed righteousness could potentially foster antinomianism and stifle the pursuit of righteousness.¹⁷ However, under a barrage of criticism Wesley attempted to assuage his reformed critics in his sermon "The Lord our Righteousness" where he asserts, "To all believers the righteousness of Christ is imputed; to unbelievers it is not."¹⁸ Traditionally, belief in imputation is something upon which both Calvinistic and Arminian theologians have generally agreed.¹⁹

In view of such heritage it is no surprise that Reformed systematic theologies, from Beza to Berkhof, have regarded the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ as the defining mark of justification for Protestantism. At this point we may draw two conclusions about the place of imputation in Protestant theology. First, it has functioned largely as a boundary marker to delineate Protestants (especially evangelicals and Reformed) from Catholics. Second, the imputed righteousness of Christ has been foremost in shaping Protestant theology, worship, and spirituality. John Bunyan's poignant image in *Pilgrim's Progress* of Christian being clothed with the righteousness of Christ²⁰ and Charles Wesley's hymns such as "And Can It Be" are all permeated by belief in imputed righteousness. Consequently, to challenge the biblical integrity of imputed righteousness is to seriously question what has been part of the foundation of Protestant self-identity and piety. In the words of E. Wolf, this understanding of justification constitutes the "centre and boundary" of all theology.²¹ Thus, contemporary evangelicalism has far more invested in this doctrine than mere adherence to an ongoing exegetical tradition. It is with this in mind that we may direct our attention toward current debates within evangelicalism which revolve around imputed righteousness.

III. A RECKONING OVER IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

Robert H. Gundry, reacting to what he sees as the overemphasis on imputed righteousness in the document *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evan-*

¹⁶ Cited in Woodrow W. Whidden, "Wesley on Imputation: A Truly Reckoned Reality or Antinomian Polemical Wreckage?" *Asbury Theological Journal* 52 (1997) 64.

¹⁷ Cf. Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 210.

¹⁸ John Wesley, "The Lord our Righteousness," in *The Works of John Wesley* 5.237.

¹⁹ Whidden ("Wesley on Imputation" 68) aptly sums up Wesley's position: "For Wesley, the reality of imputation dealt mainly with the sins of the past: sinners are reckoned to be something which in reality they are not, i.e., in Christ they are counted sinless, though their records testify otherwise. Thus imputation is a reckoned reality; but imputation is not a reality that may be viewed as a cover for attitudes and dispositions that would tolerate sin in any form."

²⁰ See further on Bunyan, Robert Oliver, "'Grace Abounding'—Imputed Righteousness in the Life and Work of John Bunyan," *Churchman* 107 (1993) 70–80.

²¹ E. Wolf, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre als Mitte und Grenze reformatorischer Theologie," in *Peregrinatio: Studien zur reformatorischen Theologie, zum Kirchenrecht und zur Sozialethik* (2 vols.; München: Chr. Kaiser, 1965) 2.11–21.

gical Celebration,²² contends that such a doctrine flies in the face of the biblical testimony. He parades the usual textual suspects that are said to imply imputed righteousness (Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:19–21; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 1:11; 3:9; Gal 3:6; Rom 1:17; 3:21–31; 4:6–24; 5:12–21; 10:3–4) and contends that “[n]othing is said about a replacement of believers’ sins with the righteousness of Christ.”²³ Consequently, Gundry advocates that the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ should be abandoned as unbiblical.

It is no accident, then, that in New Testament theologians’ recent and current treatments of justification, you would be hard-pressed to find any discussion of an imputation of Christ’s righteousness . . . The notion is passé, neither because of Roman Catholic influence nor because of theological liberalism, but because of fidelity to the relevant biblical texts. Thus New Testament theologians are now disposed to talk about the righteousness of God in terms of his salvific activity in a covenantal framework, not in terms of imputation of Christ’s righteousness in a bookkeeping framework.²⁴

Mark A. Seifrid has written two substantial monographs on justification and in the course of his research has been a vocal critic of the New Perspective on Paul. Seifrid’s contributions to the subject include the following. (1) He acknowledges that understanding justification as the “non-imputation of sin and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness” is indeed a reasonable way of understanding the forensic nature of justification over against a view of infused or imparted righteousness. The problem with the term “the imputed righteousness of Christ” is not that it is wrong but that it is deficient. (2) An emphasis on imputation treats God’s justifying verdict as an isolated gift without relating it to Paul’s Christ-centered theology. Consequently, it reduces justification to an abstract event that occurs in the believer rather than seeing it as taking place in Christ. Seifrid states, “It is better to say with Paul that our righteousness is found, not in us, but in Christ crucified and risen.” (3) The Protestant tendency to view salvation in terms of a series of consecutive ideas (justification, sanctification, glorification) fails to grapple with Paul’s conception of justification as comprehensive and holistic term relating to redemption, forgiveness of sins, peace, resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit. Thus justification is not merely the erasure of our failure supplemented by an alien righteousness, but emerges as the supreme act of God in Christ for our salvation. Furthermore, its Christocentric dimension means that the imperatives of continuing love, faith, and obedience are never isolated from justification itself. (4) According to Seifrid, the justification of the believer cannot be separated from the justification of God in his wrath towards human evil. Imputation momentarily detracts from the

²² “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,” *Christianity Today* 43/7 (June 14, 1999) 51–56. Available electronically at <http://www.a-voice.org/discern/gospeljc.htm#gjc>.

²³ Robert H. Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration’ . . . Even Though I Wasn’t Asked to,” *Books and Culture* 7/1 (January-February 2001) 6–9. Available electronically at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2001/001/1.6.html>.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

theocentric quality of justification, for there can be no justification of the believer without the simultaneous justification of God.²⁵

N. T. Wright, in his book *What Saint Paul Really Said*, advocates that justification is juridical (in a Jewish sense), covenantal, and eschatological. Furthermore, it is not about “getting in” but “telling who is in.” Thus justification is more about ecclesiology than soteriology.²⁶ In doing so, Wright implies that a reckoned righteousness becomes tantamount to “legal fiction.”²⁷ In defending his position against criticism of Australian NT scholar Paul Barnett,²⁸ Wright appears to have modified his view slightly in affirming that justification is *both* forensic and ecclesiological. “‘Justification’ is thus the *declaration* of God, the just judge, that someone is (a) in the right, that their sins are forgiven, and (b) a true member of the covenant family, the people belonging to Abraham.”²⁹ Elsewhere he argues that in justification God creates a new people with a new status.³⁰

By contrast, several scholars have attempted to respond to these developments by restating the traditional arguments for imputed righteousness, including R. C. Sproul, Wayne Grudem, James White, and Philip Eveson.³¹ By far the most capable and rigorous defense of imputed righteousness in recent times has come from John Piper.³² Piper commences by awakening our attention to the pastoral significance of the doctrine of justification. Using Gundry as his foil, Piper then develops his argument that an external righteousness, namely Christ’s righteousness, is imputed to believers rather than their own faith being reckoned as righteousness. He also rejects the notion that justification is transformative and is a category espousing liberation from sin’s mastery.

What is highly significant is that the exegetical validity of imputed righteousness is being questioned by both those who are within the trajectory of

²⁵ Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness: Paul’s theology of justification* (NSBT 9; Leicester/Downers Grove: Apollos/IVP, 2000) 173–75.

²⁶ Tom Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Oxford: Lion, 1997) 96–133.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 102.

²⁸ Paul Barnett, “Tom Wright and the New Perspective,” (December 2000), http://www.anglicanmedia.com.au/old/pwb/ntwright_perspective.htm

²⁹ N. T. Wright, “The Shape of Justification,” *Bible Review* (April 2001). Cited electronically at <http://www.angelfire.com/mi2/paulpage/Shape.html>.

³⁰ N. T. Wright, “Romans,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon 2002) 10.529.

³¹ R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); R. C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie That Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK/Grand Rapids: IVP/Zondervan, 1994) 726–29; James R. White, *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2001); Philip Eveson, *The Great Exchange: Justification by faith alone in light of recent thought* (Kent: Day One Publications, 1996).

³² John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002). For a recent critique of Piper’s argument see Don Garlington, *Imputation or Union with Christ? A Response to John Piper*. This rejoinder to Piper was encountered late in the stages of the writing of this article and elements of Garlington’s critique have been added throughout. Garlington’s article was cited at http://www.tanglewoodbaptist.com/newsletter/01-03/theology/gar_imp.htm.

the New Perspective but also by evangelicals (Seifrid and Gundry) who themselves have been highly critical of the New Perspective.³³

IV. CLARIFYING THE DEBATE

Due to the tenor with which the debate has been conducted and several ensuing misunderstandings, it is vital to clear the deck on some important issues. First, an obvious starting point is for the rhetoric to be toned down. There is little gain in suggesting that one *either* assents to the imputation of Christ's righteousness as exemplified in Reformed confessions *or else* must be tagged a semi-Pelagian legalist. This is an unfair caricature, and there is no reason to think that these are the only two games in town.³⁴ Likewise, those who are critical of the traditional Lutheran interpretation of justification need to pay closer attention to Luther's context and the finer points of his exegesis.³⁵ According to one former New Perspective proponent, Francis Watson, a fundamental pillar of the New Perspective is the travesty of the Lutheran interpretation.³⁶ However, as Carl Trueman has pointed out, those who consider Luther to be a revisionist who projected the debates of his own day into Paul's epistles are themselves presenting a revisionist account of Luther.³⁷ Instead, modern exegetes should acknowledge the rich heritage of biblical exegesis that we have inherited from the Reformation. As Stephen Westerholm humorously states, "[S]tudents who want to understand Paul but feel they have nothing to learn from a Martin Luther should consider a career in metallurgy. Exegesis is learned from the masters."³⁸ By the same

³³ Robert H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Bib* (1985) 1–38; Mark A. Seifrid, "The 'New Perspective on Paul' and its Problem," *Them* 25 (2000) 4–18.

³⁴ For instance, Sproul (*Faith Alone* 73) states, "The conflict over justification by faith alone boils down to this: Is the grounds of our justification the righteousness of Christ imputed *to* us, or the righteousness of Christ working *within* us?" Sproul seems to think that the only options are Westminster and Trent. I wonder where scholars such as Ernst Käsemann, Peter Stuhlmacher, Eberhard Jüngel, James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, Don Garlington, Scott Hafemann as well as Catholics like Joseph Fitzmyer and K. Kertelge fit into his taxonomy?

³⁵ Particularly culpable is James D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, *The Justice of God: A fresh look at the old doctrine of justification by faith* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1993) 5–42; N. T. Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God* [COQG 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996] 15–16, 339 n. 88) also uses the Lutheran-Reformed view predominantly as a foil to point out all that is wrong with exegesis and theology.

³⁶ Francis Watson, "Not the New Perspective," www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/articles/watsonart.hti. Unpublished paper presented to the British New Testament Conference in Manchester 2001. Watson argues that the idea of a "Lutheran approach" is question-begging, as any antithesis of divine and human activity can take on a variety of forms. Even so, Watson does not appear to hold Luther in the highest esteem. See his book *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 2–22.

³⁷ Carl Trueman, "A Man More Sinned Against than Sinning? The Portrait of Martin Luther in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship: Some Casual Observations of a Mere Historian," <http://www.crcchico.com/covenant/trueman.html>. Unpublished paper presented to the Tyndale Fellowship at Cambridge in 2000. See also Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 3–12.

³⁸ Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* 173.

token, criticism should not be vented against scholars on the grounds that they are departing from Reformation theology. (1) We should keep in mind that the Reformers and Puritans themselves differed on the finer details concerning righteousness and justification. (2) Alister McGrath notes that those who have criticized Wright for holding a non-Reformed view of justification are surreptitiously sweeping in a new basis of authority: tradition.³⁹ To use Reformation theology as a litmus test for theological accuracy represents a departure from the Reformers themselves and places them upon a pedestal which they would not otherwise care to sit on.

Second, it needs to be spelled out exactly how the gospel stands in relation to justification. I remain unconvinced that, providing one retains the forensic dimension of justification, a denial of imputation necessarily draws one into denying the gospel. On the one hand, there are those who see the gospel as being justification by faith with the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the cornerstone of justification, therefore making imputation almost synonymous with the gospel. That is, to be sure, a miscalculated logic. To equate the gospel as consisting of the doctrine of imputed righteousness makes about as much sense as saying that the gospel is the pre-tribulation rapture. Furthermore, if we look at the most concise summaries of the gospel in the NT (e.g. Rom 1:3–4; 1 Cor 15:3–8; 2 Tim 2:8), justification language is entirely absent. It comes as no surprise, then, that in one instance Luther defined the gospel as “[t]he gospel is a story about Christ, God's and David's Son, who died and was raised and is established as Lord. This is the gospel in a nutshell.”⁴⁰ Indeed, Luther's definition here (with no reference to imputed righteousness) resonates with Wright's suggestion of the gospel as the declaration of Jesus' messiahship.⁴¹ Of course, Wright commits the opposite error in *Saint Paul* by dislocating justification too far from the gospel. Yet, in Galatians, Paul fervently warns this church that they are in danger of departing from the gospel (Gal 1:6–9), and what follows in the succeeding chapters are a concerted defense of justification by faith without Torah observance. Again, in Rom 1:16–17 Paul sees the righteousness of God as revealed in the gospel, and in Gal 3:8 the apostle believes that the justification of Gentiles was prefigured in the gospel promise given to Abraham. Thus, the gospel and justification are conceptually closer than Wright first admitted.⁴² I am inclined, then, to think that although justification by faith is not strictly identifiable with the gospel, it remains

³⁹ Alister E. McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (ed. John G. Stackhouse; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 31.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, “A brief instruction on what to look for and expect in the Gospels,” in *Luther's Works* (ed. E. Theodore Bachmann; 55 vols.; Fortress: Philadelphia, 1960) 35.118.

⁴¹ Wright, *Saint Paul* 40–62, 114–15.

⁴² In fairness to Wright, in a work subsequent to *Saint Paul* (“The Shape of Justification”) he clarifies his position when he says, “Let me make it clear that I do not, in any way, drive a wedge between ‘the gospel’ and ‘justification.’ They belong intimately together, like fish and chips or Lindwall and Miller . . . *But they are not the same thing.*” This is a far more balanced and guarded statement than what we find in *Saint Paul* and one that I think is right.

nonetheless the most concrete theological expression of its meaning and application.⁴³

Third, the notion of “imputation” is entirely legitimate within the field of systematic theology as a way of restating the forensic nature of justification over and against alternative models.⁴⁴ However, it is not the language of the NT. What is proposed below is that justification is forensic, eschatological, effective, and covenantal. The basis of justification lies exclusively in Jesus the Messiah, who is our substitute and representative, whereby God’s *verdict* against us is transformed into God’s *vindication* of us and culminates in God’s cosmic *vivification* of believers in the last day.⁴⁵ Moreover, justification consists of an alien righteousness. But how is that righteousness apprehended? Imparted righteousness is to be rejected for sure, but in the words of G. E. Ladd, “Paul never expressly states that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers.”⁴⁶ What is set out below is that believers are *incorporated into the righteousness of Christ*. The matrix for understanding justification is union with Christ. It is the contention of this study that several passages in the Pauline corpus support this perspective.

V. INCORPORATED RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. *Romans 4:1–25*. A critical matter is how one understands the idea of “reckon” or “impute” (λογιζόμαι) in Romans 4. According to Gundry, it is faith that is reputed/reckoned as righteousness.⁴⁷ Piper counters that: (1) By quoting Gen 15:6, Paul thinks of God’s justifying work in terms of imputing or

⁴³ Steve Motyer, “Righteousness by Faith in the New Testament,” in *Here We Stand: Justification by Faith Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986) 34–35; A. E. McGrath, “Justification,” in *DPL* 523; Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 210; K. Kertelge, “δικαιοσύνη,” *EDNT* 1.333.

⁴⁴ For instance, in the sphere of biblical theology one may ask of the Pauline corpus, “How are people justified?” (a question that Paul does address) where an appropriate answer would be, “through union with Christ and incorporation into his righteousness.” However, if one moves to the realm of systematic theology and asks, “How does union with Christ justify?” (a question that Paul does not address), then an answer along the lines of imputed righteousness is apt. See further D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and, of Course, Semantic Fields,” in *“Justification”: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates?* (ed. M. A. Husbands and D. J. Treier; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, forthcoming 2004). I wish to state that my thoughts on this point have been shaped largely by D. A. Carson’s lectures on justification at the Sydney Presbyterian Hall in 2001.

⁴⁵ On the language of verdict and vindication I am indebted to 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* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 432; Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness* 46–94.

⁴⁶ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* 491.

⁴⁷ Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse” 7–8; cf. John Ziesler (*The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972] 181–85) and Adolf Schlatter (*Romans: The Righteousness of God* [trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995] 110), who contends that God considered Abraham’s faith the equivalent of righteousness; cf. David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Contexts and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999) 183–84, 190.

crediting the work of God.⁴⁸ (2) Paul does indeed employ a book-keeping metaphor and “faith being credited for righteousness” is shorthand for, “faith being the way an external righteousness is received as credited to us by God—namely, not by *working* but by *trusting* him who justifies the ungodly?”⁴⁹ (3) The citation of Ps 32:1 clarifies what it means that God credits righteousness apart from works, namely, he credits righteousness to the ungodly. God’s justifying act in verse 5 parallels God’s crediting righteousness apart from works.⁵⁰ (4) The parallels between Rom 3:28 (“a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law”), Rom 4:6 (“God credits righteousness apart from works”) and Rom 4:5 (“justifies the ungodly”) highlight that Paul “thinks in terms of righteousness being imputed to us rather than our faith being recognized or considered as our righteousness.” Thus, faith imputed for righteousness and righteousness imputed apart from works are synonymous.⁵¹ (5) In Rom 4:11 the “seal of the righteousness of faith” is not a righteousness which consists of faith, but rather “imputed righteousness received by faith,” since the design of Abraham’s faith was that righteousness would be imputed to those who believe.⁵² (6) Piper also cites Rom 10:10 and Phil 3:8–9 in support, where faith is instrumental to attaining righteousness but is not equivalent to righteousness.⁵³

In contrast, Don Garlington acknowledges that λογίζομαι can indeed mean “credit/charge to one’s account,” but it can also mean “count,” “reckon,” “calculate,” “consider,” “conclude,” etc.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the most proximate use of λογίζομαι is in Rom 3:28, where it means “consider” or “conclude” (cf. Rom 6:11; 8:18). Garlington also disagrees with *BDAG*⁵⁵ that in Rom 4:4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 22 λογίζομαι denotes “place to one’s account” or “credit” on the grounds that in Gen 15:6 the underlying Hebrew phrase *hashab le* is idiomatic for “to consider a thing to be true.”⁵⁶ The quotation of Gen 15:6 in Romans 4 underscores that Abraham was considered righteous, viz. a covenant-keeping person, when he placed his trust in God’s promise of a seed.⁵⁷

In seeking a solution, Romans 4 must be seen in light of the preceding context, where in Rom 3:21–26 Paul locates God’s righteousness as revealed

⁴⁸ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 54–55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 55–57; cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 263–64.

⁵⁰ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 57–58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 59–60; cf. Moo, *Romans* 262; O. P. Robertson, “Genesis 15:6: New Covenant Exposition of an Old Covenant Text,” *WTJ* 42 (1980) 265–66.

⁵² Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 60–61.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 62–63.

⁵⁴ Following LSJ 2.1055.

⁵⁵ *BDAG* 597.

⁵⁶ Garlington, *Union with Christ* 3–5; see also H. W. Heidland, “λογίζομαι,” *TDNT* 4.289–91; more cautiously, C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975–79) 1.231–32; but cf. Moo, *Romans* 264; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 215 n. 8.

⁵⁷ Garlington, *Union with Christ* 4–5.

in the death of Christ.⁵⁸ This righteousness is manifested apart from the Law and yet standing in continuity with it and, importantly, availing for both Jews and Gentiles. That leads into Rom 3:27–31 where Paul begins his exposition of verses 21–26⁵⁹ and draws the immediate application as comprising the end of Jewish boasting of national privileges (esp. v. 29). The midrashic exposition of Abraham in Romans 4 is meant to highlight the example of God justifying the ungodly and doing so beyond the confines of law observance. On one level Paul can appeal to Abraham by arguing that Abraham was justified prior to the giving of the law. On a second horizon, Abraham stood in the position of a Gentile when God entered into a covenant with him and reckoned his faith as righteousness.

Paul opens in verses 1–2 by reasoning that if Abraham had been justified by works, then he had grounds for boasting. It is genuinely tempting to say that “works” refers to acts of personal righteousness completed prior to the giving of the law, rendered plausible by the contrast of gift and debt in verses 4–5.⁶⁰ But that is only half the story, for in Paul’s epistles “law”⁶¹ and “works of the law”⁶² ordinarily signifies the Mosaic legislation.⁶³ Moreover, Paul is perhaps refuting the view that Abraham was justified by keeping the law in protological form,⁶⁴ constructing his argument along redemptive-historical lines (cf. Gal 3:17) rather than offering an atemporal treatise of why good deeds cannot save. A specific work in mind is probably circumcision, since Paul appeals to Abraham’s not-yet-circumcised-state in Gen 15:6; the preceding references in 3:27–31 pertain to boasting in Jewish identity which circumcision epitomized;⁶⁵ circumcision was a sign of the Mosaic

⁵⁸ Without transgressing into the never-ending debate surrounding the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (“righteousness of God,” cf. Rom 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9; 2 Pet 1:1) the understanding laid out here is that it denotes God’s saving activity across the breadth of redemptive history in both its creational and covenantal contexts and results in a righteous status for believers before God. Concurrently, it also connotes God’s punitive judgment against sin.

⁵⁹ Moo, *Romans* 243.

⁶⁰ Cranfield, *Romans* 1.228–32; F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (TNTC; Leicester, England: IVP, 1985) 106, 109; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 370–75; Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith* 119. Alternatively, some scholars tend to underplay the significance of the work-debt contrast, e.g. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 204; J. D. G. Dunn, “Yet Once More, ‘The Works of the Law’: A Response,” *JSNT* 46 (1992) 110–12; Wright, “Romans” 10.491. See especially the discussion in Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is the Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 216–49.

⁶¹ E.g. Rom 2:12, 14, 17, 20, 23–27; 3:19, 31; 6:15; 7:1–3; 9:4; 10:5; 1 Cor 9:9; Gal 2:19; 3:10, 11, 17, 19–24; 4:4; 5:3, 4, 14, 18.

⁶² Rom 3:20, 27, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10, 12; cf. 4QMMT C 31.

⁶³ Cf. Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith* 115–21; Moo, *Romans* 211–17; Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness* 95–101; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostles of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) 110–15.

⁶⁴ Cf. Sir 44:19–21; *Jub.* 16:28, 23:10; 24:11; CD 3:2; 2 Bar 57:2; *m. Qid.* 4:14.

⁶⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 1.192–93, 214; 13.257–58; 20.38; Petronius, *Satyricon* 102.14; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.1–2; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96–106; Seneca, *De Superstitione* cited in Augustine, *Civ. D.* 6.11; Suetonius, *Domitian* 12.2. See also John J. Collins, “A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, ‘Others’ in*

covenant (Gen 17:11; Acts 7:8; *Jub* 12:26–28; *m. Ned.* 3:11); and references to circumcision buttress the passage in 3:30 and 4:9–12. Furthermore, circumcision was regarded as the very means of entering Israel for Gentiles (*Jdt* 14:10; *Esth* 8:17; *m. Shab.* 19:3) and in several Second Temple texts a necessary component for salvation (*Jub.* 15:25–34; CD 16:4–6; *T. Levi* 6:3; cf. Acts 15:1). Mark Seifrid argues that circumcision was understood in ethical terms denoting faith and piety.⁶⁶ It is thus the *social* and *soteriological* function of the law (which circumcision supremely represents) that Paul confronts as demonstrative of his thesis: justification by faith alone. The question that permeates Romans 4 is, “Who are the people of God and on what condition shall they be justified?” Paul’s argument aims to disclose that righteousness and law are to be now understood in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Notably, the direct object of the verb λογίζομαι varies. (1) In verses 3, 5, 9, faith is reckoned as righteousness (implicitly for vv. 10, 22, 23). (2) In verse 4 wages are not credited. (3) For verses 6, 11 (and implied in v. 24) righteousness is credited, while (4) in verse 8 there is the non-crediting of sin. A uniform translation of “imputed” as applied by Piper does not fit the verses where faith is the subject, since it is odd to think of faith being imputed. As Garlington observes, “If righteousness is imputed by faith, then how can faith itself be imputed? It would seem that Piper has arrived at a double imputation, that of righteousness and of faith.” By the same token, Garlington’s insistence on the translation “consider as being” does not hold in verse 4 since the commercial accounting metaphor dictates a sense of “credit” (cf. Phlm 18).⁶⁷

This raises two further questions. First, in what sense can faith be reckoned as righteousness? Piper is adamant that it simply is not. Gundry and Garlington think that righteousness consists of faith. Garlington further unpacks that as meaning that righteousness is, analytically, “conformity to the covenant relationship; it *consists of* a faithful obedience to the Lord whose will is enshrined in the covenant.” Faithfulness begins with faith which leads to righteousness (cf. Rom 10:10).⁶⁸ Granted that πιστίς can de-

Late Antiquity (ed. Jacob Neusner and E. Frerichs; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) 163–86; Paula Fredriksen, “Judaism, the Circumcision of the Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2,” *JTS* 42 (1991) 536; idem, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” *HTR* 82 (1989) 26–30; idem, “Respect for Judaism by Gentiles According to Josephus,” *HTR* 80 (1987) 409–30; idem., *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999).

⁶⁶ Mark A. Seifrid, “Blind Alleys in the Controversy over the Paul of History,” *TynBul* 45 (1994) 77–79.

⁶⁷ Garlington, *Imputation or Union with Christ* 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 6; cf. Wright, “Romans” 10.487–88 who takes “righteousness” to be the virtual equivalent of “covenant.” Of course, Wright is correct that in 4:11 Paul sees the “sign of circumcision” as synonymous for the “seal of righteousness” (*Romans* 10.494), but rendering “righteousness” as “covenant membership” faces the problem of how “covenant membership” can be credited (or imputed?) to those who believe. Righteousness here must function in a soteriological sense, not an ecclesiological one. Furthermore, commenting on 4:22, Wright (*Romans* 10.501) takes “reckoned

note both faith and faithfulness, yet the idea of righteousness as covenant faithfulness is problematic. If faith is reckoned as righteousness (and righteousness = faithfulness to the covenant), it means that faith is reckoned as faithfulness. But that amounts to a tautology. Furthermore, the issue at hand is, what forms the grounds of Abraham's righteousness before God? In contemporary Jewish interpretation it was Abraham's faithfulness and obedience that constituted his righteousness (combining Gen 15:6 with 17:4–14 and 22:1–19). For Paul, the contrast is not between faith (trust) and faithfulness (fidelity), but faith (trust) and works (Mosaic legislation).

What is proposed is a *via media* between Piper and Gundry. (1) Certainly, there is a *covenantal* dimension, as righteousness here stands for covenant-vindication, *viz.* the righteous status that one has in the covenant.⁶⁹ (2) The zealous action of Phinehas in Ps 106:31 (105:31 LXX) was ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην (“reckoned to him as righteousness,” cf. Num 25:6–13). That does not mean that Phinehas's deed was morally righteous or that Phinehas was merely reckoned as being in the covenant. Rather, the action and the actor are vindicated in light of the covenantal arrangements with respect to the divine requirements. To reduce “righteousness” to membership status, though not entirely untrue, is not the whole story. In Romans 4, Paul contends that it is faith that comprises the basis of covenantal-vindication, for both Abraham and all believers. (3) In 4:11 circumcision was the validation of the δικαιοσύνης τῆς πίστεως (“righteousness of the faith,” cf. NASB; KJV). The genitive construction could be construed as being in apposition (“the righteousness that consists of faith”) or else as a genitive of origin (“the righteousness that he had by faith,” cf. ESV; NRSV; NIV; NEB; GNB; NET). Taking the latter, this substantiates Paul's thesis of justification by faith through an appeal to Abraham as being justified prior to circumcision. (4) Paul elucidates this point by drawing attention to the purpose of the Abrahamic narrative,

as righteousness” to mean that Abraham's faith as evoked by grace is evidence of the “redemption and renewal of humanity” which comprises the basis of his covenant membership. As a result, “Justification is God's declaration that where this sign of life appears, the person in whom it appears is within the covenant.” This unfortunately reduces justification to being a mere analytic judgment of God based upon regeneration (cf. Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness* 176 n. 13).

⁶⁹ On the relationship between “justification” and “new covenant” see William J. Dumbrell, “Justification in Paul: A Covenantal Perspective,” *RTR* 51 (1992) 91–101; idem, “Justification and the New Covenant,” *Churchman* 112 (1998) 17–19; Robert Smith, “A Critique of the ‘New Perspective’ on Justification,” *RTR* 58 (1999) 98–99, 104. Justification cannot be reduced to mere descriptions of who is in the covenant. By the same token, those who share the Abrahamic faith belong in the Abrahamic family. Similarly, Alister E. McGrath (*The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1999] 39) 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.” See also Eduard Lohse, “Theologie der Rechtfertigung im kritischen Disput—zu einigen neuen Perspektiven in der Interpretation der Theologie des Apostels Paulus,” *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* 249 (1997) 66–81; Eveson, *The Great Exchange* 142.

namely, that those who believe like Abraham will also be credited righteousness. This is clarified in verse 24: “It will be counted to us who believe.” (5) Therefore, faith reckoned as righteousness means that Abraham’s faith was *de se* justifying⁷⁰ or considered the grounds of his covenant-vindication. Thus the statement, “faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness,” is equivalent to “Abraham was justified by faith.”⁷¹

Second, what does it mean that righteousness is credited (e.g. 4:6)? (1) It is conceptually located with the forgiveness of sins (cf. Luke 18:14; Acts 13:38–39) and the non-accounting of sin in 4:5–8 (cf. Q504 4:6–7; *Jos. Aсен.* 11:10; *Pss. Sol.* 16:5) which suggest that its meaning is forensic. (2) “God credits righteousness apart from works” uses the language of Gen 15:6 to reiterate what Paul says in 3:28 that God “justifies apart from works” rendering the phrases co-terminus. (3) Douglas Moo points out that in Gen 15:6 (LXX) ἐλογίσθη bears a declarative sense,⁷² therefore its co-location with δικαιοσύνη may evoke a connotation similar to δικαιώω (“justify”). (4) Yet “to credit righteousness” is not communicating the mechanism of *how justification occurs* as much as it is stating in biblical terms *that justification does occur*.

Christ’s righteousness is simply not mentioned, so what is the origin of this credited righteousness? Paul provides the answer in 4:25.⁷³ There Paul employs a traditional Christological formula that states the grounds of justification: Christ’s death and resurrection. The parallelism between the two prepositional διὰ-clauses should not be dogmatically retained so as to effect a translation of “he was handed over *because* of (διὰ) our sins and raised *because* of (διὰ) our justification” (e.g. NASB).⁷⁴ Granted that the resurrection vindicates Christ’s sin-bearing death (cf. Acts 2:24, 32–33; 3:15; 5:30; Rom 1:3–4; Phil 2:5–11), but it seems strange to think of justification as causing

⁷⁰ Fitzmyer, *Romans* 373.

⁷¹ See also John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 136.

⁷² Douglas Moo, *Romans 1–8* (Chicago: Moody, 1991) 265; cf. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* 205.

⁷³ Cf. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* 154–57; Markus Barth and Verne H. Fletcher, *Acquittal by Resurrection* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964); Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Baker Biblical Monograph; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); idem, “Redemption and Resurrection: An Exercise in Biblical-Systematic Theology,” *Them* 27 (2002) 17–18; L. M. Kreitzer, “Resurrection,” in *DPL* 806; Moo, *Romans* 288–90; Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness* 71, 77; Wright, “Romans” 10.502–5, 507; Michael Bird, “‘Raised for our Justification’: A Fresh Look at Romans 4:25,” *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 35 (2003) 31–46; Peter Head, “Jesus’ Resurrection in Pauline Thought: A Study in the Epistle to the Romans,” in *Proclaiming the Resurrection: Papers from the First Oak Hill College Annual School of Theology* (ed. P. M. Head; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) 58–80; Morna D. Hooker, “Raised for our Acquittal (Rom 4:25),” in *Resurrection in the New Testament* (ed. R. Bieringer, V. Koperski, and B. Lataire; FS J. Lambrecht; Leuven: Peeters, 2002) 321–41.

⁷⁴ Cf. Godet, *Romans* 1.311–12; Schlatter, *Romans* 118; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 215–16; Schreiner, *Romans* 243–44; N. T. Wright (*The Resurrection of the Son of God* [COQG 3; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003] 247–48) argues for a translation of “he was given up *because of* our sins and . . . he was raised *because of* [God’s plan for] our justification.” Although I agree with Wright’s basic argument, he overtranslates the verse in his attempt to reconcile grammar and theology.

Christ's resurrection. Rather, the second *διά*-clause should be understood as being prospective, i.e. "he was raised for (the purpose of) our justification." What stands behind this passage is Isa 53:11. There, the Servant of the Lord suffers and is justified in the heavenly courtroom upon seeing "the light of life."⁷⁵ The result of the Servant's own resurrection-justification is that he will "justify many." Hence, justification is primarily a function of Christ's resurrection.⁷⁶ Without driving a wedge between Christ's death and resurrection, the rhetoric of the verse suggests that Christ's resurrection does something which his death does not. The death of Christ constitutes the divine verdict against sin, whereas the resurrection transforms that verdict into vindication.⁷⁷ While Christ's resurrection is the "first-fruits" of the general resurrection (cf. Rom 1:3–4; 1 Cor 15:20–22; Col 1:18), similarly his justification through resurrection comprises the initial execution of the justifying verdict. Through faith, believers are incorporated or identified with the risen and justified Messiah, and they are justified by virtue of their participation in him (cf. Col 2:12; 1 Cor 15:17). Along this line Morna D. Hooker comments,

Paul spells out this idea there: just as the verdict pronounced on Adam is shared by those who are "in Adam," so the verdict pronounced on Christ at the resurrection is shared by those who are "in him." It is because Christ is acknowledged as righteous that those who are "in him" are also reckoned to be righteous—and *will* be reckoned to be such on the Last Day.⁷⁸

In sum, Romans 4 does not assert that one is justified because of the imputed righteousness of Christ or that God reckons faith as covenantal conformity. Instead, God regards faith as the condition of justification (reckons faith as righteousness) and justifies believers (credits righteousness) because of their union with Christ (raised for our justification).

2. *Romans 5:18–19.* The coming of Jesus Christ elicits an epochal transformation for believers who are no longer identified with the transgression and condemnation of the first Adam but with the righteousness and justification of the second Adam. The juxtaposition of Adam's sin and condemnation with God's gift, grace, righteousness, and life manifested in Jesus Christ dominates Rom 5:12–21 in particular. It is on Rom 5:18–19 that arguments for imputed righteousness largely depend.

In verse 18 Paul resumes the argument broken off in verse 12 concerning the contrast of the reign of the first and second Adam. In distinction to Adam's trespass and the ensuing condemnation, Christ's "act of righteousness" issues in "justifying life." The thought is repeated in different terms in verse 19 by contrasting Adam's disobedience and many being constituted as

⁷⁵ On the possible link of "life" and "resurrection," cf. Job 33:28, 30; Ps 49:19; *1 Enoch* 58:3; 92:3–5; 108:12–13; *Pss. Sol.* 3:12; John 8:12; *1 Clem.* 16:12; *Sib. Or.* 1:379.

⁷⁶ That is not to say that it bears no relation to the cross, since Paul can talk about justification solely in terms of Christ's crucifixion, e.g. Rom 3:24; 5:9.

⁷⁷ Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness* 77.

⁷⁸ Hooker, "Raised for our Acquittal (Rom 4,25)" 339–40.

sinners with Christ's obedience and many being constituted as righteousness. Thus we are confronted with two sets of terms to explain: (1) Christ's "act of righteousness"⁷⁹ and "obedience." Although some scholars contend that Christ's entire life of obedience to God is the referent, the contrast with "transgression" more readily suggests that Christ's obedience and submission to God in going to the cross are in view (cf. Phil 2:6–8; Heb 5:8).⁸⁰ (2) The phrases "justifying life" and "many will be constituted as righteous" denote the saving effect of Christ's obedience. The δικαίωσιν ζωῆς (lit. "justification of life") could be a genitive of result ("justification resulting in life")⁸¹ or epexegetical ("justification consisting of life").⁸² Here one should avoid either/or equations, as both may be in mind.⁸³ In the final reckoning, God's justifying verdict cannot be separated from its vivifying outcome (cf. Rom 1:17 [Hab 2:4; Gal 3:11]; 2:7; 4:17; 14:9). Hence, Paul speaks in 5:21 of "righteousness leading to eternal life." In Rom 5:19 the word κατασταθήσονται ("will be constituted") is a real future as opposed to a logical future.⁸⁴ Since 5:1–9, Paul has shifted his attention from the realized component of justification to its eschatological dimension. Based on usage in Matt 24:45, 47; Luke 12:14; Acts 6:3; 7:10; Titus 1:5, Piper opts for a meaning of "appointed" which then becomes tantamount to imputation.⁸⁵ However, the word appears to be both forensic and refer to an actual state of affairs.⁸⁶ As Schreiner comments, "One cannot separate the representative and constitutive roles of Adam and of Christ in these verses."⁸⁷ Thus the forensic should not be overemphasized at the expense of the real change wrought at the terminus of the salvation event. The constitution has in mind, not the completion of sanctification

⁷⁹ A translation of "one act of justification" is possible, particularly given the usage of the same word (δικαίωμα) in verse 16. However, the contrast with Adam's transgression surely supports a translation of "righteousness." See further Adolf Schlatter, *Romans* 131; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* 200–202; BDAG 249; Cranfield, *Romans* 1.289; Käsemann, *Romans* 156–58; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 283–84; Moo, *Romans* 341 n. 127; Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier) 185.

⁸⁰ See arguments in Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 284–85; cf. Schlatter, *Romans* 131.

⁸¹ F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (trans. A. Cusin; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880) 1.382; Murray, *Romans* 202; Cranfield, *Romans* 1.289; Byrne, *Romans* 185; Moo, *Romans* 341.

⁸² James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 3.214.

⁸³ Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 283; cf. Moo, *Romans* 341 n. 126; Schlatter, *Romans* 131: "life-granting-justification."

⁸⁴ Godet, *Romans* 1.384–85; Schlatter, *Romans* 130–31; Käsemann, *Romans* 157; H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief: Kommentar* (HTKNT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1977) 175; Martinus C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) 164; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 285; Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness* 71; for the opposite view, cf. Murray, *Romans* 205; G. Schrenk "δικαίο," *TDNT* 2.191; Cranfield, *Romans* 1.291; Fitzmyer, *Romans* 421; Moo, *Romans* 345 n. 142.

⁸⁵ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 107–10.

⁸⁶ A. Oepke "καθίστημι," *TDNT* 3.445; Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness* 199; Don Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (WUNT 79; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994) 104–7.

⁸⁷ Schreiner, *Romans* 288.

in becoming morally righteous, but the eschatological re-constitution of humanity at the resurrection. As Seifrid argues, the resurrection of the ungodly comprises the incarnation of their justification. It is the formal enactment of that verdict in their own resurrection.⁸⁸

Wright offers a fitting summary: “Christ’s *dikaiōma* in the middle of history leads to God’s *dikaiōsis* on the last day.”⁸⁹ Piper is similar: “Adam acted sinfully, and because we are connected to him, we are condemned in him. Christ acted righteously, and because we are connected to Christ we are justified in Christ. Adam’s sin is counted as ours. Christ’s ‘act of righteousness’ is counted as ours.”⁹⁰ The objection I have is that Piper wants to move from “connected” to “imputed,” which is more than the text says. Of course, nothing in the text denies the notion of imputation, but it hardly proves it. Gundry states that “the verse does not say that this making sinful and this making righteous happened by means of imputation; and like the verb ‘were made’ the preceding language of giving and receiving a gift, though it would be compatible with imputations, neither demands it nor equates with it.”⁹¹ Inevitably, the notion of representation and participation may be more accurate than imputation regarding how this righteousness is applied to believers. Christ, the representative of believers, has demonstrated his righteousness in his sacrificial death and has been vindicated as righteous in his resurrection, and it is exclusively by connection with him that believers apprehend a righteous status in God’s eyes. I contend that once more Isa 53:11 lies in the background with the frequent allusion to the “one” justifying the “all/many.”⁹² Similarly, the resurrection may tacitly be in view given the concept of being saved “through his life” in 5:10 and the fact that here justification is a function of the second Adam, significantly, a role Christ has only by virtue of his resurrection.

3. *1 Corinthians 1:30, Philippians 3:8–9.* In 1 Cor 1:18–31, Paul opposes the Corinthians in their preference for pneumatic and acculturated wisdom and instead extols Christ as the locus of God’s wisdom and salvific power. Paul states that Christ became our “righteousness” and this is frequently taken as evidence of imputed righteousness.⁹³ Alternatively, Wright states:

It is the only passage I know where something called “the imputed righteousness of Christ” . . . finds any basis in the text. But if we are to claim it as such, we must also be prepared to talk of the imputed wisdom of Christ; the imputed sanctification of Christ; and the imputed redemption of Christ.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness* 71.

⁸⁹ Wright, “Romans” 10.529.

⁹⁰ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 107, cf. 93–94.

⁹¹ Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse” 8–9.

⁹² Cf. Bruce, *Romans* 124; Fitzmyer, *Romans* 421; Wright, “Romans” 10.529; *pace* Käsemann, *Romans* 157.

⁹³ E.g. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 3.157; Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 726; Eveson, *The Great Exchange* 150–51.

⁹⁴ Wright, *Saint Paul* 123; cf. Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse” 7; Garlington, *Imputation or Union with Christ* 25.

Piper may be correct in retorting that there is nothing that necessitates that Christ must become righteousness for us in the exact manner that he becomes our wisdom, sanctification, or redemption, but the “natural progression” he proposes in a quasi-*ordo salutis* is itself suspect.⁹⁵ Thiselton suggests that the four qualities (wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption) “both characterize Christ and are imparted by Christ.”⁹⁶ Righteousness here is to some extent ethical,⁹⁷ particularly in view of Paul’s indignation towards the rampant immorality within the Corinthian church. The possibility of holiness in a corrupt and perverse world derives exclusively from union with the one who himself was fully righteous and empowers others with righteousness. Since Christ’s righteousness was ἡμῖν (“for us”), Paul evidently has in mind also the righteous status believers enjoy by virtue of being in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:11). Additionally, as Schrage observes the righteousness in question, like the corresponding category of wisdom, is ἀπο θεοῦ (“from God”) and is demonstrative of an *iustitia aliena* that has its origination in God and is realized in the believer.⁹⁸ The echo of both ethical and forensic righteousness is not constitutive evidence of transformative righteousness⁹⁹ as much as it testifies that real and declared righteousness are not as neatly separated in Pauline thought as some would like. Furthermore, although the believer’s personal transformation and his or her righteous status *coram Deo* cannot be absorbed together under the aegis of justification, they are equally located in union with Christ.

In Phil 3:8–9 Paul writes, “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as human filth, in order that I may gain Messiah and be found in him (ἐυρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ), not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but one that comes through the faithfulness of the Messiah, the righteousness from God based upon faith (τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει).” In this passage a few things should be noted: (1) The “righteousness from God” with the distinctive preposition ἐκ (“from”) is frequently taken as denoting imputed righteousness. To the contrary, the most that can be said is that this righteousness has its origin in God and comes

⁹⁵ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 84–87; for criticism of seeing a progression; cf. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* 220; Garlington, *Imputation or Union with Christ* 24–25.

⁹⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 191, italics original.

⁹⁷ Contra Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 86, who takes δικαιοσύνη here to be forensic rather than ethical.

⁹⁸ W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKKNT; 3 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991–99) 1.216.

⁹⁹ For a critique of transformative righteousness, see the illuminating study by Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* 205–9, who changed his mind on this issue. While evangelicals are generally critical of attempts to draw anything other than “declare righteous” under the umbrella of justification, attempts continue (as since the reformation) to relate justification to being “made righteous.” Recently, the German scholar Eberhard Jüngel (*Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* [trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer; Edinburgh/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2001] 204–24) has argued for both imputed and imparted righteousness. According to Jüngel, imputed righteousness is only grasped when it is understood as God graciously bestowing divine righteousness in such a way that it also includes the effective renewal of the believer.

to be the personal possession of the believer. If one wishes to talk of a righteousness imputed from God, one must also consent to a righteousness imputed from the law which the parallelism would imply.¹⁰⁰ (2) There remains the question of the relationship between “being found in Christ” and “righteousness.” In this context, being “in Christ” is eschatological, and Paul hopes in the final assize to stand before God based on the faithfulness of Christ and his faith in him, rather than with his own righteousness. It is possible that the participle clause *μη̄ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην* (“not having my own righteousness”) is causal, indicating that Paul is in Christ because he possesses the righteousness of God. However, the opposite is genuinely tempting, *viz.*, that “righteousness” is contingent upon being “in Christ.”¹⁰¹ More likely, the clause is modal and relates to how Paul will be found in Christ.¹⁰² Consequently, “be found in Christ” and “righteousness” are intimately related, not through being synonymous or consecutive ideas, but because they are analogous images drawn from Paul’s soteriological kaleidoscope pronouncing the end of God’s contention against sinful humanity and its restoration before God through God’s own righteousness revealed in Christ. Thus, Phil 3:9 comprises robust evidence for the juridical nature of union with Christ. One could easily add here also Gal 2:17 where Paul talks of being *δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ* (“justified in Christ”).

4. *2 Corinthians 5:21.* In 2 Cor 5:17–6:2, Paul notes that the result of his ministry has been the inauguration of people who are a “new creation,” products of God’s reconciliation proclaimed through his ambassadors of reconciliation. However, those who reject God’s message and his messengers should not presume upon his mercy and instead are to be reconciled to God. At this point Paul incorporates some traditional material into his plea (vv. 19–21) in order give content to his gospel of reconciliation.

According to Gundry, the passage does not mention Christ’s righteousness but God’s. Christ’s not knowing sin is set in contrast to his being made sin, highlighting his innocence. Additionally, nothing is mentioned pertaining to the imputation of Christ’s sinlessness or righteousness. Imputation is mentioned but only in the sense of “not counting” the world’s transgressions. Gundry declares, “Apart from the imputation of transgressions to Christ, Paul uses the language of union, reconciliation, being made and becoming rather than the language of imputation.”¹⁰³ Piper replies that Gundry’s language concerning union with Christ is in “vague terms.” Instead, Piper advocates that there is nothing contrived about seeing a reference to the

¹⁰⁰ See the chiasmic structure proposed by Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus: Kommentar* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1984) 250–51.

¹⁰¹ David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 143; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 504–5; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* 234.

¹⁰² BDF §418.5; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1991) 393, 415–17; Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 84.

¹⁰³ Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse” 7.

imputation of God's righteousness in the words "become the righteousness of God," since it seems the reverse side of Christ's becoming sin, which he takes to mean the imputation of sin. He states, "We 'become' God's righteousness the way Christ 'was made' our sin."¹⁰⁴ More specifically Piper, following Charles Hodge and G. E. Ladd, contends that the righteousness that is imputed to believers is Christ's righteousness.¹⁰⁵ He notes that the passage does not explicitly say this, but "the absence of doctrinal explicitness and systematization in Paul may be no more problematic for the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness than it is for the doctrine of the Trinity."¹⁰⁶ He substantiates this importation on the grounds that: (1) The combination of divine righteousness becoming ours is the same way that sin became Christ's; (2) the divine righteousness is ours only "in Christ"; and (3) the close parallel with Rom 5:19, where through the obedience of the One many will be appointed as righteous.¹⁰⁷

Several things can be said by way of response. First, Gundry's bifurcation between God's righteousness and Christ's righteousness is too pedantic, particularly in view of what Paul says in verse 19 that "God was in Christ,"¹⁰⁸ not to mention the trinitarian benediction found in 2 Cor 13:14.

Second, against Piper, λογίζομαι in verse 19 ("not counting men's sins against them") does not refer to the imputation of sin but rather to the non-accounting of sin against those whom God reconciles. The usage here is similar to 1 Cor 13:5 where love οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν ("does not keep account of wrongs").¹⁰⁹ Piper has drawn a conception of imputation from Romans 4 and sought to impose it here. Third, that Christ *was made* sin is not a reference to imputation (though it does not deny it). More likely, it echoes Paul's thoughts elsewhere, where Christ was sent by God "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3) and "became cursed for us" (Gal 3:13). It espouses only Christ's participation in the sum of sinful humanity without extrapolating how and without recourse to the imputation of sin. In fact, the prepositional phrase ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ("for us") expresses the thought of representation (*Stellvertretungsgedanken*).¹¹⁰ If so, then a key premise in Piper's argument crumbles, for if sin was not imputed to Christ then one cannot say that the reverse, *viz.*, the imputation of righteousness, is what is meant by "becoming the righteousness of God." Moreover, unlike Romans 5, there is no reference to Christ's obedience nor does Adam appear as a foil for Christ's faithfulness and submission to God.¹¹¹ Piper's disregard for the "explicit-

¹⁰⁴ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* 69.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 81–83; cf. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* 491, who writes, "It is an unavoidable logical conclusion that people of faith are justified because Christ's righteousness is imputed to them."

¹⁰⁶ Piper, *Righteous in Christ* 81 n. 26.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 82.

¹⁰⁸ Garlington, *Imputation or Union with Christ?* 10.

¹⁰⁹ Note here the echo of Ps 31:2 (LXX): μακάριος ἄνθρωπος, οὗ οὐ λογίσθηται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν; cf. BDAG 597.

¹¹⁰ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 75.

¹¹¹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1986) 144–45.

ness of language” in favor of the “reality revealed through language” sounds like special pleading.¹¹²

Nonetheless, if imputation is not being spoken of, then how is it that Paul can think of believers as becoming the “righteousness of God”?¹¹³ If this does indeed refer to the righteous status granted to believers, how is such a status attained? The problem is exacerbated as Paul does not explicitly say how.¹¹⁴ What Paul does say reflects what Morna D. Hooker calls “interchange.” Hooker writes, “The interchange of experience is not a straightforward exchange, for we become the righteousness of God *in him*. If Christ has been made sin, he has also been made our righteousness.”¹¹⁵ This stems from being “in Christ,” and the GNB is probably correct in opting for a translation of “*in union with him* we might share the righteousness of God.”¹¹⁶ Evidently, becoming God’s righteousness is tied to union with Christ, not imputation. James R. White thinks that being justified through an imputed righteousness is an antecedent condition of being in Christ.¹¹⁷ But this misses the whole point that union with Christ is itself a forensic event. For Paul, being “in Christ” means identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection where union with him is in the sphere or realm of justification.¹¹⁸ Far from being “vague” the righteous status believers possess derives from union with the “Righteous One” (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 John 2:1), who is also the very locus of righteousness (1 Cor 1:30) and was justified upon his exaltation into glory (1 Tim 3:16). To resort to imputation at this stage is to skip an important element.¹¹⁹ Isaiah 53 should provide our paradigm as Paul perceives justification as occurring *in* the one whom God has justified.¹²⁰

¹¹² Piper, *Righteous in Christ* 68.

¹¹³ The argument by Wright, *Saint Paul* 104–5, that the righteousness of God here designates Paul’s ministry as “an incarnation of the covenant faithfulness of God” is simply bizarre, particularly given that Paul’s point is not only about his ministry but also concerns his message. See further Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 315 n. 69 and Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* 201 n. 22. Seifrid (*Christ, our righteousness* 86) sees God’s making Christ “sin” as comprising a reference to his death while God’s making believers “the righteousness of God” refers to the resurrection from the dead. Though quite appealing, I do not think that a future resurrection can be drawn out of the text.

¹¹⁴ Noted also by Martin, *2 Corinthians* 145 and W. Hulitt Gloer, *An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Understanding of New Creation and Reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5:14–21* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1996) 151.

¹¹⁵ M. D. Hooker, “Interchange in Christ,” *JTS* 22 (1971) 353; cf. Martin (*2 Corinthians* 144), who uses the term “transference.”

¹¹⁶ A. Plummer (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915] 188) provides an apt summary: “It is in Christ, *i.e.* through union with Him and our sharing His Death and Resurrection, and not in our own right, that we become righteous in God’s sight.” Similarly, Linda Belleville (*2 Corinthians* [IVP-NTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996] 159) speaks of Christ *identifying* with our sin and believers becoming *identified* with God’s righteousness.

¹¹⁷ White, *The God Who Justifies* 365–66.

¹¹⁸ Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings* 141–43.

¹¹⁹ Margaret E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 1.444.

¹²⁰ On parallels of 2 Cor 5:21 with Isa 53:9–11 (LXX) cf. Gloer, *An Exegetical and Theological Study* 156; Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 1.445–49.

Justification ensues, because believers are now identified with the crucified, risen, and vindicated Christ and, furthermore, believers participate in that vindication.¹²¹ Thus, whether it is reconciliation, justification, or new creation—all are ἐν αὐτῷ (“in him”).¹²²

VI. CONCLUSION

The ferocity of the debate concerning the imputation of Christ’s righteousness will continue while those within the evangelical camp persist in questioning its biblical integrity. It is no surprise, then, that Gundry has opened a can of worms and some suppose he is attempting to undo Luther’s courageous stand at the Diet of Worms, resulting in some strongly-worded argumentation. Nevertheless, whether for or against, Gundry and Piper have performed a sterling service in forcing evangelicals to return to the text of the NT to weigh and assess the relevant passages to see if they really are proof texts for imputed righteousness. In my estimation, they are not. Furthermore, the notion of imputation fails to grapple with Paul’s “in-Christ” language that gravitates more towards the concepts of incorporation, substitution, and representation. Given the supremely Christocentric ingredient in Paul’s formulation of justification, it is far more appropriate to speak of *incorporated righteousness*, for the righteousness that clothes believers is not that which is somehow abstracted from Christ and projected onto them, but is located exclusively in Christ as the glorified incarnation of God’s righteousness.¹²³ In my judgment this term represents a reasonable description of what is happening *at the exegetical level* in the Pauline corpus regarding how the believer attains the righteousness of Christ.

Additionally, I think much of this debate is spurred on by a profound failure to grapple with two things. (1) The first is the crucial role of the resurrection in procuring justification. The resurrection is more than a divine apologetic, since God’s justifying verdict is intimately bound up with the raising of the crucified (Rom 4:25; 5:10; 1 Cor 15:17). This facet of justification was lost on neither Jonathan Edwards nor Karl Barth, both of whom were aware of its importance.¹²⁴ Without diminishing the centrality of the cross, it is important that this component of justification be recovered. (2) The second element is the forensic dimension of union with Christ. Since Albert Schweitzer, and more recently with E. P. Sanders, it has become common to divide Paul’s soteriology into “participationist” and “juridical” categories

¹²¹ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 314–15 n. 67; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 236.

¹²² Gloer, *An Exegetical and Theological Study* 167; Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness* 86–87.

¹²³ I think Piper (*Counted Righteous in Christ* 84–85) may well agree here in part; concerning 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9; Gal 2:17; and 1 Cor 1:30 he writes, “The implication seems to be that our union with Christ is what connects us with the divine righteousness.” I could not sum up the matter better myself, yet if so, what need does one then have for imputation?

¹²⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; 4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1974) 4.1.304–9; Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (2 vols.; Great Britain: Banner of Truth, 1975) 1.585, 623.

(while admitting that Paul himself did not make this distinction) and assert the centrality of participationist elements. Justification is subsequently removed to the periphery of Paul's thought and, according to Schweitzer, justification by faith is reduced to a "fragment," "subsidiary crater" and is "incomplete and unfitted to stand alone."¹²⁵ Yet as soon as an understanding of union with Christ is divided as forensic and issuing forth in a transformed status, such a bifurcation becomes a grossly inadequate generalization. Justification cannot be played off against union with Christ, since justification transpires in Christ. To be sure, union with Christ is not something that is entirely synonymous with justification. Yet neither is union with Christ an ancillary concept subsumed under justification or *vice versa*.¹²⁶ Rather, union with Christ comprises Paul's prime way of talking about the reception of the believer's new status through incorporation into the risen Christ by faith.¹²⁷

It still remains fitting within the discourse of systematic theology, for the sake of the historical continuity with Reformation thought, and when stressing the forensic nature of justification against an infused righteousness, to speak of imputed righteousness. Yet in more finely nuanced discussions of the topic, especially in preaching, teaching, and exegesis, we must be prepared to use language that more readily comports with Paul's concept of justification.

Finally, it is my sincere hope that evangelicals on both sides of the debate would be able to unite and sing, "When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found, Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne."¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* 463–72, 502–8, 520; Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. William Montgomery; Baltimore/London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998 [1931]) 220, 225–26. Conversely, Peter Stuhlmacher (*Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001] 60) thinks that a separation of the "juristic and participatory aspects in the apostle's doctrine of salvation" is "superfluous." Likewise, Seifrid (*Justification by Faith* 53) contends that it is ludicrous to assert that Paul did not distinguish juridical and participationist concepts and then to argue for the priority of one over the other.

¹²⁶ We need not follow Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* 506) when he writes, "This means, further, that righteousness by faith and participation in Christ ultimately amount to the same thing." A conceptual overlap cannot be denied, but what I have attempted to argue for in this essay is not their *equivalence* but their *interrelatedness*. Even if "union with Christ" is Paul's metaphor of choice, righteousness/justification language could never be superfluous, since it unpacks what "union with Christ" means in terms of one's present status before God, its implication for the eschatological judgment, and comprises the nexus for entering the cosmopolitan messianic community.

¹²⁷ Richard Gaffin (*The Centrality of the Resurrection* 132) remarks, "Not justification by faith but union with the resurrected Christ by faith (of which union, to be sure, the justifying aspect stands out most prominently) is the central motif of Paul's applied soteriology."

¹²⁸ Edward Mote, "The Solid Rock."