

## Justification: The Biblical Basis and its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism

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by Tom Wright

### I. Introduction: The Shape Of The Doctrine

Imagine asking a jeweller to describe a watchspring. He might simply talk about the spring itself: he might demonstrate how it was related to the rest of the mechanism: he might even explain the value of knowing the right time, and the significance of the watchspring as part of achieving that end. Now being asked about justification is like being asked about a watchspring.<sup>1</sup> We could confine our attention to the relevant words and concepts themselves. We could show how justification is related to other doctrines, being (as it were) wound up by some and (as it were) driving others, or we could outline God's whole plan of salvation, and indicate the place which justification has at the heart of that plan. This distinction between different levels of explanation warns us that when we talk about justification we easily get lost in a mass of cogs and wheels and nuts and bolts—grace and faith and works and history and righteousness. We need to see how justification is related to all these—but we also need to see what it is in itself. There is no point in the jeweller telling you what a marvellous thing a watch is and leaving you with the impression that the spring is used to hang it on your watch chain. I shall therefore begin by looking at justification itself in general terms, continue with an examination of certain biblical passages, and end with some conclusions for our contemporary theology and practice.

To start with, a bare definition: justification is the declaration that somebody is in the right. It is a term borrowed from the lawcourt—that is what people mean when they say it is 'forensic'.<sup>2</sup> In the lawcourt, justification is the judge's verdict in favour of one party or the other (cases in Jewish law were simply between accuser and accused, there being no Director of Public Prosecutions). The basic meaning of the term is therefore not 'forgiveness': a favourable verdict implies that justice, not (at this stage) mercy, is being carried out. Nor is 'acquittal' quite strong enough: justification has a positive sense, indicating not merely absence of guilt but a positive standing in the right. This status is termed 'righteousness', which in this context does not refer primarily to the character or morals of the person concerned, but simply to his status in the court on the basis of the judge's declaration. Justification is the judge's verdict that someone is in the right. Righteousness is the status before the court which results from that declaration.

In theology, therefore, justification is not the means whereby it becomes possible to declare someone in the right. It is simply that declaration itself. It is not how someone becomes a Christian, but simply the declaration that someone is a Christian. It is not the exercise of mercy, but the just declaration concerning one who has already received mercy. This is a crucial distinction, without which it is impossible to understand the biblical material. Not to make it is as if the jeweller were to talk about the watchspring when he meant the winding mechanism.

In the Bible, of course, the judge is God himself, and the verdict is to be issued on the day of judgement.<sup>3</sup> But with the Gospel of Jesus Christ a dramatic new turn has been taken. God's verdict has been brought forward into the present. Even now God declares that certain people are in the right. Even though this declaration concerns sinners, it is itself righteous, because of two things: grace and faith. We can therefore expand our definition as follows: justification is not only God's declaration on the last day that certain people are in the right: it is also his declaration in the present that, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the person who believes the Gospel is in the right.

We begin to understand what this means if we take a further step in the argument. In the biblical lawcourt the law, which the judge himself has promulgated, is the covenant between God and his people. For God, to act righteously means to act in accordance with the covenant. For his people, to appeal for vindication in the heavenly lawcourt is to appeal to the covenant. Justification is therefore God's declaration that certain people are within the covenant. And the significance of this is that God's covenant people are a forgiven people: the covenant was designed in the first place as the means of undoing the sin of humanity. God called Abraham to reverse the sin of Adam.<sup>4</sup> And when Israel herself sinned, and turned her vocation (to be a light to the world) into the arrogant boast that she and she alone was within the covenant, God promised to establish the covenant by renewing it so that Israel would be transformed and sin dealt with once and for all.<sup>5</sup> The Gospel will do what the law could not do so that God's covenant promises may stand. The Gospel, in other words, will provide justification for the ungodly, whereby Gentiles and sinners will be declared 'righteous'—that is, within the covenant. The language of the lawcourt, of the 'wondrous exchange' whereby Christ takes my sin and I take his righteousness,<sup>6</sup> is not only describing individual salvation, but is the explanation of how Abraham's worldwide people are righteously declared to be in the right.

Here, then, is the watchspring of justification. It is God's declaration, in the present, that those who believe the Gospel are in the right, are members of the covenant family. But if this is the spring, we need to be clear as to what winds it up and what cogs and hands it drives. We must therefore look at the basis and the results of justification before turning to the detailed biblical evidence.

## The Basis of Justification

Justification presupposes two things, sin and grace. No sin, no need for justification: no grace, no possibility of it. Human sin is presupposed in every chapter of the Bible from Genesis 3 onwards: divine grace is revealed in God's covenant promises, finding their climax in the work of Jesus Christ and of the Spirit. We must look at each in turn.

First, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the focal point of the covenant, anticipated in the Old Testament and remembered in the New. Justification is made possible by grace incarnate: sins are dealt with on the cross, the blood of the new covenant is poured out. In biblical terms, the way to deal with sin is to punish it:<sup>7</sup> in Gethsemane, and on the cross itself, Jesus obeys his Father's saving purposes by drinking the cup of the wrath of God, so that his people may not drink it.<sup>8</sup> Justification and atonement are not the same thing: justification presupposes an objective dealing with sin. There can be no present justification if atonement is merely a process within the sinner, or merely a readiness on God's part not to take sin seriously after all. Justification safeguards, because it presupposes the centrality of the cross and resurrection.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, secondly, justification presupposes the work of the Spirit, promised in the Old Testament as the one who would write God's law on the hearts of his new covenant people.<sup>10</sup> Justification takes place on the basis of faith because true Christian faith—belief that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead<sup>11</sup>—is the evidence of the work of the Spirit, and hence the evidence that the believer is already within the covenant. If a man believes this Gospel, his religious stance is clear. He can be neither Jew nor Greek, but only Christian. This is where it is vital to distinguish justification from regeneration. Justification is not how God makes someone a Christian: it is his righteous declaration that someone is already a Christian. Faith is not an achievement which earns salvation,<sup>12</sup> but the evidence of saving grace already at work. Only the renewed heart can believe in the resurrection: only the penitent heart can submit to Jesus as Saviour and Lord.<sup>13</sup> Because of the work of the Son and the Spirit, God rightly declares that Christian believers are members of the covenant family. The basis of justification is the grace of God freely given to undeserving sinners.

## The Results of Justification

The watchspring of justification is thus wound up by grace, by the love of God Incarnate dying on Calvary and by the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The mechanism driven by this spring has positive and negative aspects: on the positive side, holiness and assurance, and on the negative side the critique of alternative means of justification.

The positive result of justification is that we live for God because Christ has died for us. Good works, as the Reformers never tired of saying, are done not to earn salvation but out of gratitude for it: not out of fear lest we should be lost after all but out of joy that we are saved after all. Sanctification is the completion, not of justification, but of regeneration: holiness is the continuation and bringing to perfection (in the resurrection of believers) of the good work which God has begun by the new birth. Justification is a different kind of event altogether: regeneration and sanctification are acts of grace to change the heart and life, whereas justification is the declaration, anticipating the verdict of the last day, that the believer is in the right. Justification results in holiness because it presupposes the new birth. It is therefore also the basis of Christian assurance, the certain hope of eternal life. Assurance is not an extra blessing over and above justification, but simply the outworking of justification itself, the realization that the Spirit who inspired faith and now inspires love will continue until, in the resurrection, he has produced the full harvest of which he himself is presently the first fruits.<sup>14</sup>

Justification thus results in holiness and hope. And this proves already that the doctrine is neither immoral, nor incoherent, nor scandalous. It points back to the cross of Christ, forward to the resurrection of the Christian. It is not a fiction, a pretence or a process: it is God's righteous declaration in the present that the person who believes in the risen Lord Jesus Christ is a member of the covenant family, whose sins have been dealt with on the cross and who is therefore assured of eternal life.

By declaring that certain people are within the covenant, the biblical doctrine of justification inevitably declares that others, at least for the moment, are not. Broadly speaking, that means unbelievers:<sup>15</sup> Paul is concerned with the attempt to seek justification on grounds other than those set out above, grace and faith, the cross and the Spirit. The negative result of the doctrine is polemic against all spurious justification.

The central claim against which this polemic is aimed is the boast that covenant membership is for Jews and Jews only, with very few exceptions.<sup>16</sup> Paul would have approved of John the Baptist's warning against reliance on physical membership of Abraham's family.<sup>17</sup> Jewish birth, circumcision and possession of the law are in fact, in themselves, neither necessary (Romans 4) nor sufficient (Romans 9) qualifications for membership within the covenant. 'Works of the law' were not, as is usually thought, the attempt to earn salvation *de novo*: they were the attempt to prove, by obedience to the law given to the Jews, that one was already a member of Abraham's family.<sup>18</sup> Such an attempt is both misguided (because the covenant was always designed to include Gentiles as well as Jews) and impossible (because of universal sin, which the law merely showed up). The doctrine of justification therefore provides both a positive and a negative answer to the question 'Who are the true children of Abraham?' And that, as we shall now see in turning to the details of the biblical evidence, is the really crucial question.

## II. The Biblical Material

### Old Testament

Justification is not a subject in its own right in the Bible, but always one aspect of a larger subject, namely God's covenant purposes for his worldwide people. Whilst, therefore, justification itself only emerges in certain key books and passages, other doctrines correlated with it are to be found almost everywhere. The passages where the subject does occur explicitly (particularly, of course, Romans and Galatians) bear out our assertion that it is essentially a polemical doctrine, needed when one particular battle is to be fought. When Paul fights other battles— as, for instance, in 2 Corinthians—he uses other weapons.

Paul himself, who has most to say about justification, sends us back to Genesis to understand it. God calls Abraham to be the means of saving the world. Reading Genesis as it stands, we find that in chapters 15 and 17 God establishes his covenant with Abraham: this is the context of 15:6, the first biblical mention of justification. Abraham believed God's promise concerning his descendants, and God 'reckoned this faith as righteousness'. This does not mean that Abraham's faith was regarded by God as a sort of moral virtue which earned him a reward:<sup>19</sup> the promise had already been made. 'Righteousness' means 'status within the covenant'. Abraham's faith was the evidence that he was already, by the grace and call of God, entering into that partnership with God which is then embodied in the covenant described in the next verses, followed in chapter 17 by the covenant sign of circumcision.<sup>20</sup> And the covenant envisages both the restriction of blessing to some, not all, of Abraham's children and the extension of blessing to the Gentiles.<sup>21</sup>

The covenant also envisaged the Exodus from Egypt, and Israel therefore looked back to the events of Passover night and the giving of the law as the development and fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham.<sup>22</sup> The covenant was put into operation to redeem the people under the blood of the lamb. But life under the law could not result in the true fulfilment of the covenant, because Israel both shared the sin of the nations and boasted of her superiority to them. The prophets therefore looked forward to the time of covenant renewal, of the blessing of Abraham reaching out even to the Gentiles in the future revelation of the righteousness of God.<sup>23</sup> The Old Testament is the book of the Old Covenant: it points beyond itself, waiting for God to fulfil his promises to Abraham and so to undo the sin of Adam and the consequent misery of the world.

### The Gospels and Acts

Though the language of justification only occurs briefly in the gospels,<sup>24</sup> the wider issues associated with it are central there. The narrative begins with John the Baptist, whose task is clearly to redefine Israel, Abraham's family, in terms of repentance and of readiness for the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself proclaims the Kingdom, which can best be understood, I believe, as the re-establishment of God's sovereign rule through the one who is in himself God's obedient Man, his true Israel.<sup>25</sup> In his baptism, temptation, miracles, preaching and promises Jesus took on himself Israel's destiny and mission, and became the light of the nations and the glory of Israel by dying for the sin of the world and (like Israel after the exile)<sup>26</sup> rising again, demonstrating that sin had indeed been dealt with on the cross. He thus inaugurated the new covenant, redefining Israel around himself, around the twelve, around the covenant signs, above all around the cross where the new covenant blessing of forgiveness is attained. Then, having ascended on high, Jesus sent the Spirit to write the law of God on the hearts of his people and to empower the gentile mission through which Abraham's family is to become the promised worldwide people of God.<sup>27</sup> Since justification answers the question 'Who are the true children of Abraham?'—a question raised in gospels and epistles alike— Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, seen especially in terms of the inauguration of God's Kingdom (that is, God's eschatological sovereign rule) by the renewal of the covenant, are in fact all about justification though it is left to Paul to develop this particular implication.

The difference between the teaching of Jesus and Paul is therefore one of function and perspective, not of theological substance.<sup>28</sup> The Apostle has not altered or muddled the Gospel of the Master. Though he does not often refer to the

Kingdom of God,<sup>29</sup> it is clear that the meaning of the phrase (God's rule of the world through his true Israel, his true humanity) is at the heart of his thought, emerging particularly when he allows himself a glimpse of the cosmic scope of God's purposes.<sup>30</sup> For Paul, as for Jesus, the salvation of the individual is set in the context of

God's redefinition of Israel, his call of a worldwide family whose sins are forgiven in the blood of the new covenant.

## Paul: Galatians

From this perspective one of the most fascinating Pauline problems can be resolved. Theologians are divided over the mutual relationship of Romans and Galatians. Some treat Galatians as basic<sup>31</sup> and so emphasize Paul's critique of the law and Israel, while others take Romans to be central and thus appear to soften or flatten out the sharp edges of that critique.<sup>32</sup> Others simply declare the two to be at odds and postulate a development or change of mind between them.<sup>33</sup> But with the analysis of justification we have developed so far, a more satisfying possibility emerges. Both letters are concerned with the question as to who are the true children of Abraham, though their different approaches reflect the needs of the particular congregations being addressed. Galatians is written to convince converted pagans that they have nothing to gain by becoming Jews physically which they do not already possess through belonging to Jesus Christ. On the contrary, to go on from Christianity into Judaism is to step down into a realm under sentence of death because of the law and the cross. Romans, however, is written to convince Christians from a mixed background that they do indeed inherit all the blessings of Israel, but issues at the same time the warning (which the Galatians scarcely needed) not to lapse into anti-Semitism. From the same theological position Paul argues two different, though fully compatible, cases.

The debate about table-fellowship recorded in Galatians 2 is therefore no peripheral issue, loosely related to the real question.<sup>34</sup> It raises precisely the question of justification—who is within the covenant family? Peter's behaviour at Antioch had implied that only Jews were really within the covenant, and that Gentiles were at best second-class citizens. Paul's reply in 2:15ff, often taken completely out of this context and so robbed of its true meaning, is this: justification is not based on the fact of being a Jew, nor on keeping the Jewish law, but on faith: and, if Jewish Christians have thereby technically become 'sinners' by eating with Gentiles,<sup>35</sup> this does not involve actual sin, whereas if they insist on living under the law they will be shown up as transgressors. The crucified and risen Messiah means a crucified and risen Israel, so that Christian Jews like Paul have left behind on the cross the fleshly status defined by possession of the law. To go back to the law as the basis of one's own righteous status would be to spurn the grace of God, to behave as though the crucifixion of the Messiah were unnecessary.

From this point of view the argument of Galatians flows as smoothly as Paul's agitation will allow. The quotation from Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:6 is not an arbitrary proof-text or a subtle Rabbinic ploy: the whole chapter deals with the question as to who Abraham's children really are, as becomes clear when we reach the conclusion in 3:29. Abraham's family cannot be the people of the law: the law only brought a curse, and anyway was only a temporary provision until the coming of the Messiah. Jesus has taken the curse on himself, enabling God to fulfil the purpose of the covenant, which was that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles.

Israel has therefore come of age with the arrival of the Messiah (3:23-5; 4:1-7). The sending of the Spirit enables all who believe to share Israel's inheritance, to be called sons of God.<sup>36</sup> It is Christians, not Jews, who are of the line of Isaac, because they are the children of promise, not of the flesh (4:21-31).<sup>37</sup> They can therefore confidently await the public proclamation of the verdict on the last day (5:5), knowing that it will conform to the one already pronounced over their faith, since what matters is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision but 'faith working through love' (5:8).<sup>38</sup>

## Philippians

Philippians 3 follows a similar course. Again, Paul is attacking those who make membership in the covenant community a matter of racial descent and privilege, as he had once done himself. The cross has changed all that. Christians are the 'true circumcision' (i.e. the real covenant family), because the verdict 'righteous' is already pronounced over them when they believe. The Messiah's death and resurrection become theirs:<sup>39</sup> they can confidently look forward to the resurrection of the dead as part of God's plan in Christ for the renewal of all things.<sup>40</sup> Justification is here the central feature in Paul's picture of the new Israel through whom the Kingdom of God, his sovereign rule over the world, is being realized.

## Romans

The polemical tone of Galatians and of Philippians 3 is largely absent from Romans.<sup>41</sup> Paul has not, however, changed his mind about the importance of justification;<sup>42</sup> he is merely developing it to deal with a different set of questions. He

is now arguing that God is in the right in his dealings with man, Israel and the world, and is pointing up consequent lessons for the church at Rome.

In Romans, therefore, Paul presents justification as God's answer to his own, not merely to man's, problem. Faced with universal sin (1:18-3:20) and with the just demand for impartiality, (2:9-11), God must nevertheless be true to his covenant with Abraham. This is the problem of the righteousness of God.<sup>43</sup> Paul's exposition of God's solution is his demonstration that the Gospel of Jesus Christ proves God to be in the right.<sup>44</sup> He has dealt with sin: he has made a way of salvation without regard to racial background, and in so doing he has fulfilled his covenant promises to Abraham. When he justifies believers, he is therefore absolutely right so to do. This must now be set out in more detail.

First, God has dealt with sin. As we saw earlier, justification in the present depends on the achievement of an objective atonement in which sins are not ignored but dealt with in the proper way, by punishment. That punishment had not been meted out before (3:24 ff). Now, on the cross, it has. The Messiah's role as Israel's representative, taking on himself Israel's destined role as representative of the world, enabled him to stand in the place of sinners of all races and justly to take on himself what they had deserved.<sup>45</sup> Only so can God be what Paul declares him to be — just, and the justifier of those who believe.

Second, God has renounced all partiality, and made one way of salvation for all men alike.<sup>46</sup> Justification by faith therefore eliminates boasting (3:27-31) not the boasting of the legalist earning his own salvation (though it eliminates that too), but that of the Jew, as in 2:17 ff. If this is not so, the question of 3:29 ('Is God the God of the Jews only?') is a total non sequitur. 'Works' are done not to earn privilege but to demonstrate it: they are the attempt to confine grace to one race. But the Gospel presents Israel with the knowledge that all alike have sinned,<sup>47</sup> and with the fact of a crucified Messiah, who spells death to nationalistic pride. The Gospel is revealed 'apart from the [Jewish] law' (3:21), since only so could it benefit both Gentiles (who do not possess the law) and Jews (who stand convicted by it).

Third, God must be true to his covenant. Like Galatians 3, Romans 4 is not simply a clever and arbitrary Rabbinic 'proof from Scripture': it is the climax of the epistle so far.<sup>48</sup> Abraham is no mere example of faith. He is the father of the worldwide covenant family which God has always promised and now has established in Christ. Paul quotes extensively from Genesis 15 and 17 to prove that covenant membership always depended on grace and faith, since it was always intended for Gentiles as well as for Jews.<sup>49</sup> And the theme of God's covenant faithfulness reveals yet another dimension in 3:21-26: as God 'redeemed' his people from Egypt with the covenant blood, so now the blood of Jesus Christ becomes the blood of the new covenant, shed for the worldwide forgiveness of sins, achieving the redemption (3:21) of the true family of Abraham.<sup>50</sup> God has dealt with sin: he has renounced partiality: he is true to his covenant. The Gospel of Jesus Christ reveals that God is in the right (Romans 1:16 f).

But why should Christian faith (with which Abraham's faith is identical, 4:19 ff) be the reason for God's declaration that the believer is in the right? And how can it be certain that God's verdict on the last day, to which Paul has already referred in 2:1-16, will correspond with the verdict 'righteous' issued over believers in the present?

The answer is that Paul understands faith to be the true fulfilling of the law. The difficult argument of Romans 9:30-10:13 may be summarized thus: the failure of the Jews lay in their abuse of the law as a charter of national privilege, which caused them to reject the Gospel of the crucified Messiah; the law was actually intended to evoke faith.<sup>51</sup> When, therefore, Gentiles come to believe in Jesus Christ, they are in fact fulfilling the law, whether or not they have even heard of it,<sup>52</sup> and they are therefore rightly to be regarded as within the covenant, i.e. they are to be justified. Abraham's family has been redefined (9:6-29), with the result that the Spirit is poured out on all flesh (10:13 refers to Joel 2:28-32), and Jew and Gentile who call on the name of the Lord alike will be saved.<sup>53</sup> God is shown to be in the right in his treatment of Israel and the nations.<sup>54</sup>

This also explains the difficult phrase 'the law of faith' in 3:27. *Nomos* is here to be translated not 'principle', but 'law' in its full sense.<sup>55</sup> Faith in Jesus Christ turns out to be the fulfilment of the law, not its abolition.<sup>56</sup> This faith is of course not a 'work' done to earn God's favour, nor is it to be equated with 'righteousness' understood as a moral quality.<sup>57</sup> It is simply the evidence of the work of grace in the heart.

The theme of the renewed heart ties in this exposition with Romans 2:25-9 (compare also 2:14 f). Here, and in parallel passages (Romans 7:4-6; 2 Corinthians 3; Philippians 3:2 ff), Paul argues that Christians are the true Jews, circumcised spiritually and not literally. Here again we find 'new covenant' language.<sup>58</sup> Belief in the risen Lord is in fact the fulfilment which the law sought, and this belief is therefore evidence of the work of the Spirit in writing God's law on the hearts of his people. This is the answer to the question 'Why faith?' Faith is the evidence of grace, and when God sees it he therefore rightly declares that the believer is in the right. This faith is not a 'work' done to earn favour: it is the evidence within the believer, that God himself has already been at work.

The work of the Spirit also solves the problem of the correspondence between the present verdict and that to be given on the last day. In Romans 5-8 Paul argues that all Israel's privileges have now been transferred, via the Messiah, to the worldwide people of God, the true family of Abraham.<sup>59</sup> As God's true people, they are therefore assured of eternal life. Chapters 5-8 are one long argument for assurance, based on the new covenant blessings of forgiveness and the Spirit. The same Spirit who inspired justifying faith is at work in believers to do 'what the law could not do' (8:3)—to complete, in other words, the renewal of the covenant.<sup>60</sup> He will give life in place of death (8: 1-11),<sup>61</sup> holiness in place of sin (8: 12-13), sonship in place of slavery (8:14-17),<sup>62</sup> the new creation in place of the old, and therefore hope in the midst of sufferings (8:18-27).<sup>63</sup> Chapter 8 thus rounds off the train of thought that began in 2:1-16, and proves that the present verdict of 'righteous' will indeed be reaffirmed on the last day. Christians are those who 'by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality' (they seek for it, even now they do not earn it<sup>64</sup>), those to whom God 'will give eternal life'. The last paragraph of chapter 8 looks on once more to the future judgement day, when this shall be all my plea; Jesus hath lived, hath died for me and, says Paul, has been raised from the dead and even now intercedes on behalf of his people.

Romans 8 thus points to the crowning glory of Paul's doctrine of justification. It demonstrates that the assurance which is contained in the doctrine is found not in looking at anything in oneself, not even at one's faith, but in faith itself, which is looking to Christ. There is no mention of faith in 8:31-39: rather, the whole passage is faith, faith looking to the grace of God revealed in the work of the Son. It is God who justifies: who is to condemn? The chapter demonstrates that justification by faith is not a legal fiction, imputing something to man which he does not really possess; nor is it a process, imparting to man a quality he did not have before. That is to confuse justification with regeneration. Justification is the correct and proper anticipation, in the present, of the righteous verdict which will be delivered on the last day, when death will have swallowed up all that now remains of our sinful nature and when we shall stand before God in the full likeness of his risen and glorified Son—when the whole world will be renewed because the people of God have been renewed, so that God, the King, will be all in all.<sup>65</sup>

The doctrine of justification by faith is that all this is even now certain for those who believe in the Gospel; the experience of justification by faith is the steadfast looking away from oneself at the objective facts of incarnation and atonement, revealing as they do the unchanging and unshakeable love of God for his people. This is justification: because of the work of the Son and the Spirit, God pronounces in the present the future verdict of 'righteous' over all who believe. Irrespective of moral or racial background, believers are declared to belong for all eternity to the true people of Abraham, the family of the renewed covenant, the people whose sins are forgiven. And from this perspective, Romans 9-11 falls into place: God is redefining Abraham's family as the worldwide covenant community, formed now by means of the gentile mission and the constant invitation to Jews to become in truth what they are according to the flesh. The climax of Romans 11 is the fulfilment of justification: God in his inscrutable wisdom has provided in the Gospel of Jesus Christ the way by which Jew and Gentile together inherit all the blessings of the covenant with Abraham—the way in which God, by establishing his Kingdom, undoes the sin of Adam and the consequent misery of the world.

## Other New Testament Books

We are left principally with the question of James 2:14-26. One might have thought that this passage would no longer present a problem, so often has it been shown that when James says 'faith' he means a dead orthodoxy which Paul and Luther would have been equally quick to condemn.<sup>66</sup> But, since the debate still rumbles on in some quarters,<sup>67</sup> two additional points (arising out of what has been said so far), may be in order.

First, James was no Judaizer. Although one of the most Jewish writers in the New Testament, there is not the slightest suggestion that he regarded Gentiles as second-class citizens, or circumcision as necessary for membership in the people of God. Paul's polemic against national pride, with the law as the charter of national privilege, leaves James totally unscathed; and since this is the context of Paul's polemic against 'works', he and James have no fundamental disagreement.

Second, if justification means not how one becomes a Christian but rather God's declaration that one is already Christian, the whole argument of James 2 looks very different. James, like Paul, goes back to Genesis 15:6 as God's initial declaration that Abraham is in the right: and, just as Paul looks ahead to the future declaration which will be in accordance with, though still not earned by, the good works which result from the indwelling of the same Spirit who inspired faith, so James sees that Abraham's works after his initial justification demonstrate simply that God's initial declaration was correct. Problems only arise if we fail to distinguish between justification and regeneration.

Our treatment of justification shows that the rest of the New Testament, while not discussing the subject explicitly, is likewise completely in accordance with Paul. Whereas Galatians warned Gentile Christians not to become Jews, Hebrews warns Jewish Christians not to go back to Judaism, and for precisely the same reasons: the covenant has been

renewed, sins have been forgiven once and for all in the death of Jesus, and all may draw near not through the Torah but through that faith which, like Abraham's, leads to certain hope.<sup>68</sup> The First Letter of Peter encourages Christians undergoing persecution with the knowledge that they are God's true Israel, formed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>69</sup> The letter to the church in Smyrna, in Revelation 2, mentions 'those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan'<sup>70</sup>—presumably because the Church is to be seen as the true people of God, called out of every nation and kindred and tribe and tongue by the obedient death of the Lamb, who has made them his true Israel, kings and priests to our God.<sup>71</sup> If justification is God's assurance that those who belong to the Messiah are indeed members of his covenant family, then the whole New Testament is all about justification<sup>72</sup>—which is, after all, what we should expect from a book whose collective title indicates that it is the documentation of the new covenant. This is the book which tells how it is that sinful men and women from every race under heaven are redeemed by God to belong to his people, because of the death and resurrection of his Son and the life-giving work of his Holy Spirit.

### III. Justification and Current Questions: Protestant and Catholic

If I have been right in my analysis of the biblical material, several important consequences follow. The most important in the realm of doctrine is still undoubtedly the debate between Catholic and Protestant.<sup>73</sup> Here I believe that my argument has some real light to shed. First, though, we must distinguish the two classic Protestant positions.

The Reformed school have tended to stress the objectivity of justification, the fact that it concerns the total achievement of Jesus Christ. Faith is not the reason why I am declared to be in the right so much as the means whereby I am joined to Christ so that his merits and death become mine. This is in some ways a neat scheme, but it is not what Paul says about faith, and it tends to merge justification with the events which it presupposes, thus virtually making faith appear to be a luxury which follows from the justification which occurs in the cross and resurrection.<sup>74</sup> This is symptomatic of a standard weakness in the Reformed approach, however valuable it may be in other ways as a corrective to faulty views elsewhere within Protestantism.<sup>75</sup>

If the Reformed merge justification and atonement, the Lutheran school (including, I suspect, most English evangelicals) have tended to confuse justification and regeneration, to think of 'justification' as the means whereby one becomes a Christian. This looks back, of course, to Luther's insistence, arising out of his own experience, that one cannot earn salvation by good works, but only receive it through faith. But this has raised all sorts of problems.

First, it easily leads to a neo-Marcionite rejection of the law, suggesting in effect that God had one way of salvation for the Jews and another for Christians.<sup>76</sup> Popular though that strange theology may be, it makes nonsense of Paul and of the Old Testament itself.<sup>77</sup> The renewal of the covenant in no way implies a change in the way of salvation or the abolition of God's holy law. Second, by asking 'How can I find a gracious God?' and answering 'By faith', Luther not only confused justification and regeneration but consequently put faith in the position of a work, the one thing which God requires as a condition of grace. Third, because Luther realized at the same time that justification belonged to the language of the lawcourt, his statement of the doctrine could easily be misunderstood as a legal fiction, in which God declared people to be something they were not.

Our analysis of justification avoids all these pitfalls. Faith is not a ladder to salvation, an alternative to the law: salvation remains a gift of grace, free and undeserved.<sup>78</sup> Justification is no legal fiction, but God's righteous declaration that the believer is within the covenant. I have no desire, as some appear to have, to play down the value of our Reformation heritage: but I believe we are most faithful to the Reformers when we go back to the New Testament and see whether we can understand it even better than they did.

When we come to the debate between Catholic and Protestant we find that the confusions we have just noted have bedevilled it all through. Because justification has not been separated from regeneration, Roman Catholics have accused Protestants of constructing an antinomian doctrine, an immoral legal fiction, or a hopelessly subjective Christianity in which 'my religious experience' takes the place of the objective facts about Jesus Christ.<sup>79</sup> And a good deal of Protestantism over the last four hundred years, including twentieth-century evangelicalism, must plead guilty to these charges.

But these matters have nothing to do with the real point. The charge of antinomianism or of a 'legal fiction' cannot be levelled at the true Pauline doctrine, as we have seen; and, as the Reformed position has always emphasized, 'my religious experience', important though that ultimately may be, is not the centre of Christianity. Because Catholics, like many Protestants, have traditionally used the language of justification to describe the much wider realities of regeneration and sanctification, they have usually simply ignored the reality of which the word actually speaks, namely, the assurance in the present that my sins are forgiven because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that I have a sure and certain hope because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And where that assurance is lacking, other elements come in to usurp its place, and all the things in Roman theology to which true Protestantism rightly objects

grow from this root. This, I suggest, is the way forward in the current debate: not by broadening the term 'justification' so that it refers to the whole range of doctrine from atonement to final redemption, but by using it with its precise and Pauline meaning.<sup>80</sup> The tragedy of the situation is that there must have been countless Christians down the years in all churches who really did believe in Jesus Christ as their risen Lord, but who failed in this life to enjoy the assurance of salvation which was theirs for the taking, because they were never told that believers are declared 'righteous' in the present because of the death of God's son. 'Legal' categories, which some want to do away with today, are not sterile or irrelevant—they are the key to Christian assurance.

The inadequacies of much traditional Protestant understanding of justification can be seen in their modern developments in what evangelicals normally call 'radical' circles. A wedge has been driven between justification and the idea of the historical covenant people of God, and a choice has been forced as to which is primary. Wrede and Schweitzer asserted that justification was polemical and therefore peripheral in Paul's thinking, while 'being in Christ', and the idea of the people of God, were primary. They have their modern followers.<sup>81</sup> Bultmann and Käsemann, on the other hand, make justification primary, and then argue that therefore the covenant, the historical people of God and all that goes with it, including the close relationship of faith and history, are secondary elements to be pushed to the sidelines as irrelevant or even dangerous.<sup>82</sup> I hope it is clear to evangelicals, as it certainly is to Catholics, that this position is not a bizarre distortion of traditional Protestantism, but an authentic development of it, particularly in its emphasis on individual faith and religious experience over against the historical Church. I hope it is also clear that it does great violence, exegetically and theologically, to the thought of Paul, for whom justification and the covenant were two ways of talking about the same thing, the declaration of God concerning his true people.

## Contemporary Evangelicalism

Modern evangelicalism is not in a position to be smug about the weakness of others, as though we had kept on the high road while our Catholic or radical brethren wandered about in the fog. We have tended to stand closer to Bultmann than we like to realize, with his emphasis on faith as experience unconnected with history, his existentialist call for decision, his view of justification as the establishment of a personal relationship with God, his wedge between justification and the historical people of God. That is why the charismatic movement, and movements for whom assurance is a matter of religious feelings (and what a pastoral disaster that is!), have gained such a ready following;<sup>83</sup> why we have problems with our theology of evangelism; why we lose assurance if for any reason God seems remote; why we find ecclesiology so difficult and apparently compromising, and imagine that we can safeguard the doctrine of justification by insisting on low churchmanship, which is only marginally better than attempting to safeguard low-church traditions by insisting on the doctrine of justification.

All these things happen because we have taken the doctrine of justification out of the context of the covenant and reduced it to the idea that what God wants is inward religion instead of outward performances, churchgoing, sacraments and the like (and then we wonder why the House Church movement has such an appeal!). But this reduction of Christianity is an attractive and dangerous mistake. It is attractive because it fits in so well with the Spirit of the Age — with the remnants of the Romantic movement, the heritage of Idealism, the popular existentialism which leads to the cult of sincerity over against objective truth, the current emphasis on doing one's own thing instead of conforming to external norms. We latch on to the idea of inner personal religion (which we flatter ourselves is the same thing as justification by faith) because we find it a place where we can enjoy a good deal of Christianity (quietly forgetting the awkward bits, the Church and sacraments, that don't fit) and a good deal of the twentieth century. And this mistake is dangerous because it sets up a false either-or which precipitates evangelicals into being anti-Church and anti-sacraments: it is dangerous because it devalues propositional faith and objective truth, leaving doctrines like the incarnation as mere shibboleths without significance for our actual theology.

The irony of all this, and to my mind our great danger at the moment, is that in many evangelical circles people are preaching existentialism in Pauline dress and imagining it to be our biblical and Reformation heritage. But the real test for evangelicalism today is this: are we prepared to be reformed under the Word of God, as we traditionally insist that everyone else ought to be? Or have our traditional ways of thinking become the norm into which the Bible must be made to fit? If we are to be true evangelicals, we must, as John Stott said at Nottingham,<sup>84</sup> be Bible people and Gospel people — and I have set out what I believe that means in relation to justification.

It means in particular that we must also be Church people. Justification is to be understood in the context of the historical people of God, the one family of Abraham: as the doctrine of covenant membership, it cannot be separated from the covenant signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper. I believe that to call myself an evangelical Anglican, and/or an Anglican evangelical, is not to precipitate an identity problem, let alone a crisis, but rather to place myself at that point on the ecclesiological map where I am free to learn how to be a Bible person, a Gospel person, a Church person. I want in concluding this section to look at some of the implications of this position.



First, if justification is a polemical doctrine, against which positions does it militate today? Not primarily, I think, against the heirs of the Tractarian movement, as is sometimes implied.<sup>85</sup> I disagree with Anglo-Catholic theology at several very important points, but I do not believe that it is the real opponent of justification today. I suggest that the real cutting edge of the doctrine is against those who most nearly coincide with the Jews of Paul's day. I refer to those who say that membership in the people of God is not a matter of believing certain things to be true, but merely of historical continuity, with a bit of ethics thrown in.<sup>86</sup> I refer to those who say that there are different ways of salvation for different nations or races, and who, in order to maintain their position, stumble as did the Jews over the doctrines which are the basis of justification, namely, the incarnation, cross and resurrection of the one who is Lord of all.<sup>87</sup> In so far as this theology, with its subjectivism and its opposition to historical Christianity, has a claim to be called 'Protestant' — and I am afraid it has — we must beware lest in seeking to be Protestants we cease to be truly evangelical. Without leaving behind any aspect of our true heritage, Paul's doctrine of justification calls us to oppose the present trend away from historical Christianity, and to wake up to the treasures of membership in the historical and visible people of God, to which we have for so long been blind.

Second, then, if God has declared that we belong to his covenant family, it is time that we as evangelicals started to take that family seriously. Precisely because we believe in justification, we must get our view of the Church sorted out, and have done once and for all with the watery semi-Baptist theology which has been creeping into evangelical Anglicanism over the last decade or two. Justification belongs with the covenant signs: baptism is the sacrament of entry into God's people, the sign of regeneration (in fulfilment of God's covenant promises), and thus faith, which follows and does not precede regeneration, need not precede baptism, though if it does not follow afterwards there will consequently be no justification. Again, the Lord's Supper is the great covenant sign, the physical embodiment of the doctrine of justification. As Cranmer saw so well, God declares in the eucharist that those who eat with faith really do belong to the Messiah's people. The people of God are an historical and visible family, demonstrating their historical nature in the sacraments and in that continuity of ministry, in the context of life under the Word of God, for which the later writings of the New Testament show so much concern. Justification is not an individualist's charter, but God's declaration that we belong to the covenant community. If we are not taking that community seriously, we have not understood justification.

But I want to end on a more positive note. The third implication is this: if justification declares that the believer is a member of the covenant community, that community itself is called to live as the family who accept one another in love. Romans 14 is the application of justification to communal Christian living, in which the members welcome one another because God has already welcomed them.<sup>88</sup> The church is thus to be a living demonstration of justification by faith, in which each member is given by the whole community the security of acceptance not on the basis of who they are in human terms of race, class or colour, not on the basis of works, but simply because of shared faith in the risen Lord Jesus. Except in extreme cases of open and unrepentant sin (and then only because such sin is evidence of unbelief), we must not apply ethical tests as a basis for fellowship, particularly the little quasi-moral rules which are designed more to safeguard an insecure position than to promote genuine holiness. Justification provides all the security anyone needs: and the church is to be the community which will be secure enough to welcome into its fellowship all those who, however simply, and however naïvely or unclearly, share its faith. This is the clue to what a friend of mine called 'the mental health of justification by faith': to believe that God really does accept you, and to believe that and practise it as a church in our acceptance of one another, is to turn away from paranoid self-justification and self-defence and to experience the deepest possible personal and corporate security. And if we dare to apply that to our current identity problems, and to our relationships with non-evangelical Christians in our church and outside it, I believe that our whole approach to such relationships, and to the church politics they involve us in, will become radically different from what they are. This is in no way to advocate doctrinal indifference. Precisely because I take doctrine, and particularly justification by faith, with the utmost seriousness, I long to see evangelicals, and the Church as a whole, becoming in this way a living embodiment of the Gospel.

The message of justification by faith for us as individuals, as evangelicals, as churchmen, is this. Because God is the covenant God, he has kept his covenant with Abraham, and is even now restoring his kingly rule over the world by creating us in Christ as a renewed people for his own possession. Because God is love, he sent his own Son to die for us, and his own Spirit to live in us. Because God is righteous, he declares in the present time that all who believe in the risen Lord Jesus are in the right, that their sins are forgiven. To anxious individuals, to a troubled world, to a divided Church, and to muddled evangelicalism, the biblical doctrine of justification declares: God is God; trust in him; be glad and rejoice in him; and do not be afraid. God is God: therefore relax.

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<sup>1</sup> It is also like being asked for the moon. So much literature has appeared on this and related topics in recent years that all we can do here is to indicate where useful material can be found. The articles by J. I. Packer in the *New Bible Dictionary* (ed. J. D. Douglas et al., IVP, London, 1962), pp. 683ff, and by H. Seebas and C. Brown in the *New*

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*International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. C. Brown, Paternoster, Exeter, 1978), Vol. 3, pp. 352ff are, at their different levels, useful introductions. The latter has a good bibliography, and another can be found in the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (ed. G. Friedrich), Vol. 10, part 2 ('Literaturnachträge'), pp. 1048-53, supplementing that in Vol. 2, pp. 176-229. I shall not attempt to enter into proper debate with the many points of view on offer, though the debate is implicit in many parts of the section; nor shall I support detailed exegesis with more than an indication of where some relevant material can be found. I hope to set out the argument more fully in the course of a substantial work on Paul now nearing completion.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion, see e.g. J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, CUP, Cambridge, 1972; D. Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, CUP, Cambridge, 1967, ch. 4; G. B. Caird, review of E. P. Sanders's 'Paul and Palestinian Judaism' in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. Vol. 29, pp. 541ff.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Romans 2:1-16; 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 17:31; etc.

<sup>4</sup> This idea was developed in later Judaism (see *Genesis Rabbah* 14:6, and the references in M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark*, SPCK, London, 1967, pp. 73ff), on the basis of the O.T. understanding of God's purposes for Israel; compare, e.g., the way in which the commands of Genesis 1:26ff are developed into the promises of Genesis 17:2, 6, 20; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:3; 35:11 and the comments of 45:27 and Exodus 1:7.

<sup>5</sup> See Jeremiah 31:31ff, Ezekiel 36:16ff, Joel 2:28ff, and the idea of the circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; 6:10; 9:25; Ezekiel 44:7).

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21.

<sup>7</sup> On the wrath of God see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1975 and 1979, pp. 106ff, especially the bibliography on p. 110 note 2.

<sup>8</sup> This is one of the biblical themes which justify the language of 'substitution' in talking about the atonement: though it is important to stress that this can only be understood within the context of the Messiah's *representative* role.

<sup>9</sup> From this perspective it is even possible to speak of the atonement itself as the justification of those in Christ, in that in the resurrection God declares that the Messiah, and hence his people, are in the right: see T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, SCM, London, 1965, pp. 150ff, developing the ideas of Karl Barth. But the New Testament does not, I think, speak in this way; Romans 4:25 shows the close links of justification and resurrection, but to think of justification as anticipating faith seems to contradict everything else Paul says.

<sup>10</sup> See Note 5 above.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 10:9; cf. 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. True Christian faith does not, then, consist in holding (for instance) one particular interpretation of the atonement—though it could be argued that belief in the resurrection, if properly thought through, will lead to the full biblical view of the cross.

<sup>12</sup> Faith could only be a 'work' if justification were confused with regeneration; see the doctrinal debate in the third section of the section.

<sup>13</sup> See Note 5 above. Though Paul rarely speaks of 'regeneration', we use this term in discussing his ideas to denote his regular doctrine of the renewal of the heart by God's Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Romans 8:23.

<sup>15</sup> We cannot here deal with the admittedly huge problem of unbelief, its causes and consequences. See H. Ridderbos, *Paul, an Outline of his Theology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975, pp. 91-126.

<sup>16</sup> For a few Jews being excluded from 'all Israel', see the famous passage in Sanhedrin 10 (H. Danby, *The Mishnah*, OUP, London, 1933, pp. 397ff). For the inclusion of a few Gentiles (Rahab, Ruth, etc.) see the discussion in W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, SPCK, London, 1955, pp. 63 f, and references there.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 3:9; compare too Matthew 8:11 f; John 8:37-59; etc.

<sup>18</sup> On this whole subject, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, SCM, London, 1977, pp. 33-59. Sanders's thesis is open to various criticisms, but the point here at issue can be well established: the book of Jubilees, the Letter of Aristeas, and most of the other Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament exhibit what we may call 'national righteousness', as do the Qumran scrolls. To generalize the discussion of the law, as is almost always done (particularly in the Reformation tradition), and to take it out of the context of Israel in the interests of making the doctrine 'relevant', is to demythologize Paul, and to make it impossible to understand whole sections of his thought. Witness the failure of most writers to take Romans 9-11 seriously (Bultmann and Dodd being classic examples).

<sup>19</sup> As some (e.g. the Good News Bible) imply.

<sup>20</sup> Note the way in which Paul (Romans 4:11) interprets 'sign of the covenant' (Genesis 17:11) as 'sign of righteousness'.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 17:19-21; cf. 18:10; 21:1-12; 12:3; 17:6; 22:18.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 15:3-6; cf. Exodus 2:24; 6:2-8; 19:5f.

<sup>23</sup> See especially Isaiah 40-55:e.g. 41:8-10; 42:1-9; etc.

<sup>24</sup> The classic exception being of course the parable of the Pharisee and Publican (Luke 18:9ff:cf. v. 14); compare too the use of 'righteousness' in Matthew (3:15; 5:20; 21:32; etc.), for which see Brown, loc. cit., pp. 360 f.

<sup>25</sup> We cannot here explore this huge subject. For a recent survey see Brown, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 372ff (B. Klappert). Note the openings of Matthew and Luke, both concerned with the redefinition of the people of Abraham around the Messiah.

<sup>26</sup> The phrase 'according to the Scriptures' is best taken as referring, not to isolated proof-texts, but to the whole theme of God's judgment of Israel and her restoration when sin had been dealt with. That which was spoken of Israel in the O.T. is properly applied to Israel's representative, the Messiah, in the N.T.

<sup>27</sup> Pentecost was the feast of the giving of the law, and it appears that Luke in writing Acts 2 is deliberately drawing out the significance of this fact. See J. Dupont, 'Ascension du Christ et don de l'Esprit d'après Actes 2:33', in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, ed. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley, CUP, Cambridge, 1973, pp. 219ff (English summary, p. 228), and references there; and compare G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters From Prison*, OUP, London, 1976, pp. 73ff, and the further study referred to there. For the resultant transformation of Israel into a worldwide people see Acts 1:6-8; 13:46-8; 26:20-3; 28:23-8.

<sup>28</sup> See F.F. Bruce, *Paul and Jesus*, SPCK, London, 1974; J. W. Fraser, *Jesus and Paul*, Marcham, Appleford, 1974.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Galatians 5:2 1; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5. For the idea of Christ's Kingdom see Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18; Ephesians 5:5 and 1 Corinthians 15:23-8.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 15:20ff-, Ephesians 1:17-23; Philippians 3:20 f; Colossians 1:15ff; see G. B. Caird, 'The Development of the Doctrine of Christ in the New Testament' in *Christ For Us Today*, ed. N. Pittenger, SCM, London, 1968, pp. 66-80.

<sup>31</sup> Recently, R. G. England, *Justification Today: The Roman Catholic and Anglican Debate*, Latimer Studies 4, Latimer House, Oxford, 1979, pp. 4ff.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Cranfield, op. cit.: see pp 845-62. Those who begin with Galatians tend to have trouble with e.g. Romans 3:3 1; those who start with Romans tend to soften or explain away Galatians 3:19ff.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus*, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1978; see the review by J. K. Riches in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 32, pp. 484ff.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. England, pp. 4f.

<sup>35</sup> The meaning of *hamartolos* is clear from v. 15.

<sup>36</sup> For the O.T. background, see Exodus 4:22 f; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5, 6, 18; Jeremiah 31:9; etc.; see M. Hengel, *The Son of God*, SCM, London, 1976, pp. 21ff.

<sup>37</sup> On this much-debated passage see now C. K. Barrett, 'The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians' in *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann*, ad. J. Friedrich, W. Pohlmann and P. Stuhlmacher, J. C. B. Mohr and Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Tübingen and Göttingen, 1976, pp. 1-16. Barrett's argument is a step in the right direction, but should be taken further. Paul is drawing on the actual argument of Genesis 17:18-21 and 21:1-12, as in Romans 9:6-9, to demonstrate that the true children of Abraham are the children of promise (cf. Galatians 3), not of the flesh—perhaps countering the charge that gentile Christians are the 'Ishmaels', and Jewish Christians the 'Isaacs'.

<sup>38</sup> 5:8. Galatians thus makes nonsense of the theological division, based on an atomistic view of the different sections of Romans, between justification, being in Christ, the question of Israel and the nature of Christian ethics. (See the work of Schweitzer, Kasemann and E. P. Sanders.) All four themes are in fact inextricably bound up together, and playing them off against one another merely shows that one has imported non-Pauline presuppositions into the argument.

<sup>39</sup> Philippians 3:2ff applies Philippians 2:5-11 to Paul's understanding of himself: see M. D. Hooker, 'Interchange in Christ', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 2 2, 1971, pp. 349-61, especially 355ff. Compare 2 Corinthians 5:21, etc.

<sup>40</sup> Philippians 3:10 f, 20f.

<sup>41</sup> The strongest polemic in the letter, 16:17-20, appears to be directed at a different target.

<sup>42</sup> Philippians is, of course, usually dated later than Romans.

<sup>43</sup> On this phrase see the summaries of debate in Cranfield, op. cit., pp. 92-9, and the appendix by M. T. Brauch in Sanders, op. cit., pp. 523-42. I have argued in detail for the interpretation adopted here, in my forthcoming work on Paul. 4-4. This shows the important link between Romans 1:3-4 (the Gospel) and 1:16-17 (the result of the Gospel, anticipated in the summary of 1:5). We cannot here enter into the difficult debate about the quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 in 1:17, except to note that it was a passage regularly used in the attempt of pre-Christian Judaism to understand, as Paul was trying to understand, God's strange ways with his people. For details, see A. Strobel, *Untersuchungen zum Eschatologischen Verzögerungsproblem*, Brill, Leiden, 1961.

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<sup>45</sup> See Cranfield pp. 214-17. Behind this is of course also presupposed the incarnation: in Christ God does not lay man's punishment on somebody else, but takes it on himself.

<sup>46</sup> Paul bases this argument on the central Jewish tenet of monotheism (3:30). For the idea of impartiality, compare 2:9-11.

<sup>47</sup> The significance of 'all' is 'Jew and Gentile alike': compare 3:21-3 with 10:11-13.

<sup>48</sup> Contrast the treatment of it in, e.g., C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Fontana, London, 1959, pp. 88-93.

<sup>49</sup> Packer (loc. cit., pp. 683, f) is therefore wrong to distinguish the argument of Romans from that of Isaiah; in fact, he does not need to, since 'righteousness' and salvation are not, as he is prepared to accept, synonymous there. The irony of the present debate is that, because Romans 4 has been quite misunderstood, Paul has been accused of arbitrary

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manipulation of O.T. proof-texts. Our argument also suggests a reconsideration of the place of chapters 9-11 within the whole epistle.

<sup>50</sup> 'Redemption' is therefore not just one more metaphor about salvation, this time taken from the slave-market: it carries within it the O.T. overtones of the Exodus. See D. Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, chapter 3, particularly pp. 75ff.

<sup>51</sup> See Cranfield pp. 504ff on Romans 9:30ff.

<sup>52</sup> This is a deliberate reference on my part to Romans 2:14 f, on which see Cranfield pp. 155ff. The argument of 10:5-9 is that Deuteronomy 30 provides the correct interpretation of Leviticus 18:5: 'doing the law' is to be understood in terms of faith.

<sup>53</sup> This points towards the full meaning of chapters 9-11, which are thus completely integrated into the sweep of thought of the whole book.

<sup>54</sup> The mention of God's righteousness in 10:3 gathers up the discussion of the same topic in 9:6-29.

<sup>55</sup> See Cranfield pp. 219 f, against (e.g.) R.S.V., N.I.V.

<sup>56</sup> 3:31 does not, then, merely indicate that Paul can find support for his doctrine in the O.T.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. J. C. O'Neill, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975, pp. 18ff: an interesting discussion which shows up the weaknesses of the traditional approaches but whose own suggestion is equally problematic both exegetically and theologically.

<sup>58</sup> See above, Note 5.

<sup>59</sup> Christians are the new humanity (5:12ff), God's sons (8:12ff), inheriting God's glory (8:18ff), his covenants and law (7:1-8:11), his promises to the Patriarchs (chapter 4) and so offering to God the true worship of Israel (Philippians 3:2 f). That this list fits so well with Romans 9:3f. is again indicative of the whole shape of Paul's argument.

<sup>60</sup> See Cranfield pp. 371ff, and the work of Barth there cited.

<sup>61</sup> The resurrection follows from the renewal of the covenant, picking up the sequence of thought in Ezekiel 36-7.

<sup>62</sup> Compare Galatians 4:1-7:cf. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1973, pp. 181-208.

<sup>63</sup> 8:18ff: this develops 5:1-5.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Cranfield p. 147 re Romans 2:7, and particularly pp. 152-3.

<sup>65</sup> See Note 30 above.

<sup>66</sup> See G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1974, pp. 592f. For Paul's view, see Galatians 5. For Luther's, compare 'The Freedom of a Christian', printed in *Three Treatises* Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1970, pp. 261ff.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., F. Mussner, *Der Jakobusbrief*, Herder, Freiburg, 1975, pp. 146-50; M. Dibelius and H. Greeven, *James*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976, pp. 174-80.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Hebrews 8-10, especially 10:36-9, followed by the whole argument of chapter 11.

<sup>69</sup> 1 Peter 2.

<sup>70</sup> Revelation 2:9.

<sup>71</sup> Revelation 5:9 f, with its echoes of Exodus 19:6; cf. 21:10-14.

<sup>72</sup> Compare the argument of John 1:11-13; Ephesians 2:11-22; etc.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. England, op. cit.: H. Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, Burns & Oates, London, 1964; R. T. Beckwith, G. E. Duffield and J. I. Packer, *Across the Divide: An exposition of the Open Letter on Relations between Evangelical Churchmen and Roman Catholics*, Orthodox and Old Catholics, Lyttleton Press, Basingstoke, 1977, pp. 6, 48ff.

<sup>74</sup> This appears to be the position of Barth and Torrance: see C. Brown, op. cit., pp. 371 f, and T.F. Torrance, loc. cit.

<sup>75</sup> Thus Paul never says that Christ obeyed the law: he is no legalist needing to earn anything, and even to say that he 'earns' righteousness for his people still falls short of the truth because it has not removed; but merely adjusted, the irrelevant and misleading idea of 'earning' itself. Christ is obedient to God's whole saving plan, of which the law is only a small part. Again, the idea that justification in some way *precedes* faith is the stepping stone towards universalism in Barth's theology: and to make faith the means of union with Christ is to allow it to usurp the role which Paul gives to baptism.

<sup>76</sup> It is difficult to tie Luther down on points of doctrine, because of the often hasty and over-polemical character of his writings. Yet it will hardly be denied that his thought, and that of his followers, tends in the direction of an outright rejection of the law.

<sup>77</sup> See Cranfield pp. 861f. The 'Lutheran' position has had serious results in the field of Jewish studies (see Sanders, op. cit., pp. 33ff) and of O.T. hermeneutics: in this century the distortion has been increased by the continental alliance of Lutheranism with Idealism and Existentialism, which have strengthened the Protestant tendency to set Christianity apart from history and the historical covenant community.

<sup>78</sup> As all the Reformers (and not just Calvin) saw, this of course implies a doctrine of predestination: but it is beyond the scope of this section to do more than note the fact. See Ridderbos, op. cit., pp. 341-54, for a recent discussion.

<sup>79</sup> See the criticisms made by Newman (discussed in R. A. Leaver, *The Doctrine of Justification in the Church of England*, Latimer Studies 3, Latimer House, Oxford, 1979, pp. 20f) and G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dacre Press, Westminster, 1945, pp. 635, 638f. Compare also F. Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1967, pp. 99ff, 139ff, 143.

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<sup>80</sup> Küng, op. cit., seems to me to reach agreement by so widening the meaning of justification that it includes the whole sweep of God's saving purposes. This agreement is itself a substantial achievement, but it does not seem to me to deal with justification itself.

<sup>81</sup> E.g. E.P. Sanders, op. cit.: K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976, especially pp.78ff and 129ff.

<sup>82</sup> Compare Bultmann's failure in his *Theology of the New Testament* to deal at all with Romans 9-11 as a whole, and the rejection among his followers of any organic link between Israel and the Church, so that for Käsemann Israel has only exemplary significance (*New Testament Questions of Today*, SCM, London, 1969, pp.183-7). Because faith is to be loosed from history, this school understands demythologization of the gospels as a necessary result of 'justification by faith', since to base faith on history is to turn it into a 'work'. 'Faith' then becomes the response to the bare word of the *kerygma*, and justification the word-event in which God reaches out and transforms the life of the individual (compare the work of Ebeling, Fuchs and Stuhlmacher), thus all but falling back into the Catholic idea of justification actually effecting a change in the believer! So many confusions run together here that there is not space to analyse them: but one possible conclusion must be noted. These are self-confessedly *Protestant* theories, rejecting 'story faith' in favour of personal trust. In the light of Note 18 above, the startling suggestion must be made: if Luther had not demythologized Paul, Bultmann could not have demythologized Jesus. Our whole argument provides an answer in principle to this line of thought. If justification is God's declaration that one is a member of the covenant family, the Bible is to be understood as the book of the covenant, which therefore belongs, and is to be interpreted, in the total context of the covenant community within which it both came to birth and speaks today. The Word of God is to be understood as the Book of the People of God.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Torrance, op. cit., pp.161f.

<sup>84</sup> J.R.W. Stott, *What is an Evangelical?*, Falcon, London, 1977.

<sup>85</sup> Compare *The Evangelical Succession*, ed. D.N. Samuel, James Clark, Cambridge, 1979, especially chapters 1 and 6.

<sup>86</sup> Compare the approaches outlined on pp.36ff of *Christian Believing*, SPCK, London, 1976.

<sup>87</sup> E.g. *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. J. Hick, SCM, London, 1977, in particular the work, there and elsewhere, of Hick himself and of Don Cupitt.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. J.A.T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans*, SCM, London, 1979, pp.142f.