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*A Study of
Justification by Faith*



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The righteousness of God understood as God's relation-restoring love is central to Paul's argument in Romans 3:21-26. The incarnation of the righteousness of God in the redemptive work of the cross leads to forgiveness; and forgiveness restores broken relationships. Because this is purely the act of God, Paul calls it a gift. Since a gift is ineffective unless appropriated, it must be "received by faith." The result of this gracious act of God is the justification ("setting right") of the sinner. The passage says nothing about an essential or judicial transaction; rather, it declares the restoration of the divine-human relationship through what Christ did by his death.

"RIGHTEOUSNESS" IN *DICTIONARY OF PAUL
AND HIS LETTERS* (1993)

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The doctrine of justification by faith, as familiar as it is, continues to be revisited. Just when students of the New Testament think that the last word has been said on the subject, a new study appears shedding new light on old texts or at least challenging our assumptions about those texts.¹ The following article is an attempt both to canvass some well-worn territory and to interact with the recent influential work of N. T. Wright.²

THE VERB DIKAIÔ

The characteristic Pauline verb articulating the justification of the people of God is *dikaioô*, translated traditionally as "justify" (see below the appendix on the translation of the verb) (Romans 2:13; 3:4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5; 5:1; 6:7; 8:30, 33; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 2:16, 17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4; Titus 3:7). The usage of this verb in the Greek Old Testament, the matrix of Paul's own employment of it, are complex, especially when compared with the various Hebrew words underlying it. Without providing anything like a comprehensive analysis of the verb, we may note the following settings in which it occurs (except where noted, translations are mine).

(1) Literal juridical contexts, in which human beings ren-

der judgment: Exodus 23:7: "you shall not justify/vindicate/acquit the wicked for gifts"; Deuteronomy 25:1: "justify/vindicate/acquit the righteous"; 2 Samuel 15:4: "I will give him a just judgment"; Psalm 82:3 [Septuagint 81:3]: "do justice to the low and needy"; Isaiah 1:17: "obtain justice for the widow"; 5:23: "justify/vindicate/acquit the ungodly for gifts"; Ezekiel 44:24: "rightly observe my ordinances"; Sirach 42:2: "justify/vindicate/acquit the ungodly." As can be seen, the precise translation of *dikaioō* varies according to the setting in which it is found. Several times it means to pronounce and treat as righteous. At other times, it can take on broader connotations (though still within a juridical context), especially 2 Samuel 15:4; Psalm 82:3 [Septuagint 81:3]; Isaiah 1:17; Ezekiel 44:24.

(2) Metaphorical juridical contexts, in which God renders judgment: Psalm 143:2 [Septuagint 142:2]: "no flesh will be justified in your sight"; Micah 7:9: "until he justifies/vindicates my cause"; Isaiah 43:9: "let them bring forth their witnesses and be justified/vindicated"; Isaiah 43:26: "first confess your deeds of lawlessness that you may be justified/vindicated"; Isaiah 45:25: "In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified/vindicated; Isaiah 50:8: "the one who vindicates me is drawing near"; Isaiah 53:11: "to justify/vindicate the righteous one who serves many well"; Micah 6:11: "will the wicked be acquitted by the balance or deceitful weights in the bag."

(3) Quasi-juridical contexts, in which God (or his law) is vindicated or regarded by humans as righteous: Psalm 19:9 [Septuagint 18:9]: "the judgments of the Lord are true, justified altogether"; Psalm 51:4 [Septuagint 50:4]: "That you may be justified/vindicated in your words and prevail when you are judged"; Isaiah 42:21: "The Lord God has taken counsel that he might be justified/vindicated and might magnify his praise"; Sirach 18:2: "The Lord alone will be justified/vindicated." I call these quasi-juridical contexts because, strictly speaking, human beings cannot judge God. Rather, God is justified/vindicated by them when they consider him to be righteous, i.e., committed to his relationship with his people.

"The point is to assert that God will be regarded as righteous, or in this culture much the same thing, will be righteous and the source of righteousness (cf. Isaiah 45.23-25)."³

(4) Non-juridical contexts, in which *dikaioō* signifies "be regarded as in the right or righteous"; Genesis 44:16: "how shall we be regarded as righteous"; Job 33:32: "I want to regard you as righteous"; Psalm 73:13 [Septuagint 72:13]: "in vain I have regarded my heart as righteous." These contexts are divorced from legal proceedings, although it might be thought there is a juridical flavoring to them. If so, *dikaioō* could be translated "justify" or "vindicate." Nevertheless, the focus is on behavior within the norms of a relationship. When one conforms to these norms, one is considered to be righteous. See also Sirach 1:21; 7:5; 10:29; 13:22; 18:22; 23:11; 26:29; 34:5, in which humans likewise regard other humans as righteous.

(5) Non-juridical contexts, in which *dikaioō* means "to be righteous." The outstanding passage is Genesis 38:26: "she has acted more righteously than I," or simply, "she is more righteous than I" (*dedikaiōtai ê egô*). As Esler explains, this is the expression used by Judah, who is on the verge of burning Tamar to death because she has played the prostitute and borne a child, when he has been shown, himself, to be the father. In this case, *dikaioō* depicts what Tamar has been (it translates the qal of *tsdaq*).

Put precisely, Tamar has acted more in accordance with the prevailing conventions governing social relationships, especially those relating to family honor, than he has. This means that *dikaioō* is an appropriate word to describe acceptable conduct within the honor-shame code operating in this culture.⁴

J. A. Ziesler similarly translates: "she has fulfilled the community obligations better than I have."⁵ Other passages include Jeremiah 3:11: "Israel has shown himself to be more righteous than faithless Judah"; Ezekiel 16:51-52: because of her sins, Jerusalem has made her sisters, Sodom and Samaria, "appear more righteous" than herself.

In sum, it is apparent from this mere sampling that *dikaioō* (like any other word) assumes different shades of meaning according to context. Because of its occurrence in juridical settings (literal or metaphorical), meanings like "justify," "vindicate," "acquit" stand out and provide a forensic framework within which to place Paul's doctrine of justification. Closely aligned with this pronouncement or declaratory character of *dikaioō* is the meaning "regard as righteous." In point of fact, "regard as righteous" and "justify"/"vindicate"/"acquit" are of a piece. Finally, while the sense "be righteous" is attested in the Old Testament, none of the Pauline usages exhibit this usage. Paul's stress is always on the God who justifies.

JUSTIFICATION AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

But even with these data before us, Paul's teaching on justification is more comprehensive than the verb *dikaioō*, because the idea of justification is linked to the concept of the righteousness of God in the Old Testament.⁶ Strictly speaking, there is no independent doctrine of justification that is detachable from righteousness as a generic category.⁷ This means that the semantic range of *dikaioō* is broadened by its relation to the Hebrew/covenantal concept of the "righteousness of God" (*dikaiosunē theou*).

God's righteousness in the Old Testament finds two points of contact with justification in Paul. First of all, there is the forensic/juridical setting of the Mosaic covenantal courtroom. The person who is vindicated and thus acquitted of all charges is declared to be "righteous" (Hebrew *tsddaq* equals Greek *dikaios*) and then treated as such. Yet it is vital to remember that even in these instances in the Septuagint where *dikaioō* is strongly forensic, Ziesler reminds us that it is forensic in the Hebrew sense, i.e., the verb signifies "restoration of the community or covenant relationship, and thus cannot be separated from the ethical altogether. The restoration is not merely to a standing, but to an existence in the relationship." As a result, "righteousness" in this scenario has reference to a vindicated *existence* conferred on a person by a

gracious God. "What this means is that men live together in freedom, possessing their civil rights in a good society. *It is not just a vindicated status, but a vindicated life.*"⁸ Therefore, the one of whom "justification" is predicated is regarded as "righteous," i.e., committed to the covenant and the God of the covenant in a household relationship.⁹ Likewise, Ernst Käsemann writes that in the Old Testament and Judaism generally *dikaiosunē* has in view the relations of community members: "originally signifying trustworthiness in regard to the community, it came to mean *the rehabilitated standing of a member of the community who had been acquitted of an offense against it.*"¹⁰ Reumann concurs that righteousness/justice/justification terminology in the Hebrew scriptures is "action-oriented," not just "status" or "being" language, and "binds together forensic, ethical and other aspects in such a way that some sort of more unified ancient Near Eastern view can readily be presupposed."¹¹ In brief, it is the righteous person who is recognized in his or her true character and thus vindicated against all charges. Just how such a conception of "justification" can square with Paul's declaration that God justifies the "ungodly" (Romans 4:5) will be clarified below.

The other point of contact between righteousness in the Old Testament and Paul is the outlook on Israel's future evidenced in the Prophets and several of the Psalms. The Prophets characteristically contemplate Israel's removal into Babylonian captivity because of her idolatry. Yet one day the nation is to return her land when Yahweh acts in power to deliver her from bondage. At the time of this new exodus, the remnant of the people will enjoy the definitive forgiveness of sins, the restoration of the broken covenant, the glorious new creation, and vindication as those faithful to the Lord. It is Yahweh who vindicates the faithful from the charges of their enemies who assume that he is unable to deliver his people and suppose that their faith in him is in vain. It is he who exonerates them, when in the "eschatological courtroom" he judges their oppressors (Isaiah 10:5-19; Habakkuk 2:2-20) and brings them back to the land from which they will never be uprooted again.¹² It is in this context of promised deliver-

ance that God is said to act righteously on behalf of his own. Especially striking is that in several key passages in Isaiah and in Psalm 98 the terms "righteousness" and "salvation" (or "be justified") are placed in synonymous parallelism.¹³

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow, ever tongue shall swear" (Isaiah 45:22-25).

I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; and for my arm they hope. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended (Isaiah 51:5-6).

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory' and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give (Isaiah 62:1-2).

The Lord has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity (Psalm 98:2-3, 8-9 [Septuagint 97:2-3, 8-9]).

Noteworthy as well are Psalm 35:27-28 (Septuagint 34:27-28); 72:1-4 [Septuagint 71:1-4, 7]; 85:11-13 [Septuagint 84:12-14]; 96:13 [Septuagint 95:13]; Isaiah 9:7 [Septuagint 9:6]; 11:1-2, 5; 45:8, 22-25; 51:5-6; 53:10-11; 61:11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Malachi 4:2 [Septuagint 3:20].

Several comments are in order. For one, "righteousness" and "salvation" are synonymous. The logic behind this is not difficult to discern. Righteousness, by definition, is God's fidelity to his people within the covenant bond. As N. T. Wright expresses it, the phrase "the righteousness of God" (*dikaiousunê theou*) to a reader of the Septuagint would have one obvious meaning: "God's own faithfulness to his promises, to the covenant." It is especially noted in Isaiah 40-55 that God's righteousness is that aspect of his character that compels him to save Israel, despite the nation's perversity and lostness. "God has made promises; Israel can trust those promises. God's righteousness is thus cognate with his trustworthiness on the one hand, and Israel's salvation on the other." He further notes that at the heart of the picture in Isaiah is the figure of the suffering servant through whom God's righteous purpose is finally accomplished.¹⁴

Psalm 98 is likewise explicit that the revelation of God's righteousness to the nations is commensurate with the fact that he has remembered his lovingkindness and faithfulness to the house of Israel. Therefore, he demonstrates his fidelity when he springs into action to deliver Israel from her bondage (note that Psalm 98 is echoed in Romans 1:16-17, which likewise places in parallel "righteousness" and "salvation.>").

Thus, a formal definition of the Greek phrase *dikaiousunê theou* could be stated as, "God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel, as a result of which he saves her from her exile in Babylon."¹⁵

Second, the return of Israel from exile is Israel's justification. Isaiah 45:25 in the Septuagint actually uses the verb *dikaioô*, translated "justified" by the NASB. It is true that the Hebrew of the passage can fairly be rendered "found righteous" (as NIV). Yet the net effect is the same: the people who return from exile are the vindicated ones whose righteousness is now made evident.

Third, the Hebrew of Isaiah 62:1-2 speaks of Israel's ("her") righteousness and salvation. However, the Septuagint has "my," referring to God, instead of "her." This may be accounted for by the textual tradition followed by the Septu-

agent at this point. Be that as it may, on the theological level there is no problem, because the blazing demonstration of Israel's righteousness and salvation is made possible only by the prior revelation of the Lord's righteousness/salvation.

Justification in the apostle's thought is essentially the vindication of the righteous, i.e., the faithful people of God. Believers in Christ, so to speak, have been exonerated in the law court and have been (re)admitted into the privileges, responsibilities, and fellowship of the covenant.

These two interrelated branches of righteousness in the Old Testament, of which Paul was heir, combine to inform us that justification in the apostle's thought is essentially the vindication of the righteous, i.e., the faithful people of God. Believers in Christ, so to speak, have been exonerated in the law court and have been (re)admitted into the privileges, responsibilities, and fellowship of the covenant. The juridical metaphor is extended even further in Isaiah (and Psalm 98). Given the parallel between "righteousness" and "salvation," and given especially the backdrop of the captivity and return from exile, *dikaioō* in Paul means to "vindicate as the people of God." When the Lord caused Israel to return to the land, he vindicated the faithful remnant against the accusations of their enemies that they have rightly been taken into captivity and it is because of them that Yahweh's name has been blasphemed among the nations (Isaiah 52:5; Romans 2:24).

God, of course, is the judge. Israel comes before him to plead her case against the wicked pagans who are oppressing her. She longs for her case to come to court, for God to hear it,

and, in his own righteousness, to deliver her from her enemies. She longs, that is, to be justified, acquitted, vindicated. And because the God who is the judge is also her covenant God, she pleads with him: Be faithful to your covenant! Vindicate me in your righteousness!¹⁶

In Paul, all this is transposed into the "higher key" of what God has done in Christ at the turning of the ages—his own "eschatological courtroom." The actual enemy of believers is not Babylon (or Egypt) but Satan himself. He is the strong man who held them in the bondage of sin (Matthew 12:29; Luke 11:21-22); he is "the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night" (Revelation 12:10; cf. Romans 8:33-34a). It is this cluster of ideas which is embodied by *dikaioō*. If God's righteousness is "his intervention in a saving act on behalf of his people," then the passive voice of the verb means "to be an object of the saving righteousness of God (so as to be well-pleasing to him at the judgment)."¹⁷ When God in Christ intervenes to save his covenant partners, he plants them again in the newly created land, the new heavens and earth, never to be removed. This is "salvation" in the pregnant sense of the term: deliverance from evil and the bestowal of "peace" on a redeemed people. In short, justification in Paul signals deliverance from exile and freedom from bondage (one of the key motifs of Galatians). One of the clearest indications is the relationship of Romans 6:7 and 18. In the former verse, *dikaioō* is literally translated "justified from sin." As such, it forms a parallelism with the verb "liberated from sin" (*eleutheroō*) in 6:18. The parallel is best preserved by rendering 6:7 as "freed from sin." Therefore, when Paul writes of justification, he characteristically has in mind the new exodus on which the latter-day people of God have embarked. Moreover, this saving righteousness is cosmic in its dimensions. At the end of the day, "the righteousness of God" is actively directed at the rescue of the creation.¹⁸

THE FUNCTION OF JUSTIFICATION IN PAUL'S LETTERS

Within the setting of Paul's mission to the nations, justification functions to delineate just who are the latter-day peo-

ple of God. In the eschatological new exodus which has been brought to pass in Christ, *it is Gentiles who are as much the vindicated people as Jews*, and this irrespective of circumcision and the other traditional badges of Jewish self-identity. Therefore, justification is very much a covenantal term, speaking to the issue of the identity of the people of God.¹⁹ It is here that the perspective of Romans 3:21-26 is directly parallel to the outlook of Galatians. According to that passage, in his righteousness (as defined above), God has acted in Christ to remove the sin-barrier that stood between himself and an apostate humanity *in toto* (Romans 1:18-3:20). Jew and Greek alike are now the object of the saving fidelity of the God of Israel. Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), all are now freely justified by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. In short:

He has been true to the covenant, which always aimed to deal with the sin of the world; he has kept his promises; he has dealt with sin on the cross; he has done so impartially, making a way of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike; and he now, as the righteous judge, helps and saves the helpless who cast themselves on his mercy.²⁰

As Wright continues, the covenant with Israel always envisaged a worldwide family. But Israel, clinging to her own special status as the covenant-bearer, has betrayed the purpose for which that covenant was made. "It is as though the postman were to imagine that all the letters in his bag were intended for him."²¹

An important corollary is that the *center of gravity* of Paul's thought on justification is more the corporate body of Christ than the individual believer. As W. D. Davies writes:

That there was such a personal dimension need not be denied, but it existed within and not separated from a communal and, indeed, a cosmic dimension. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith was not solely and not primarily oriented toward the individual but to the interpretation of the people of God. The justi-

fied man was "in Christ," which is a communal concept. And, necessarily because it was eschatological, the doctrine moved towards the salvation of the world, a new creation.²²

Davies further points out that in both Galatians and Romans the discussion of justification by faith is immediately followed by that of the constitution of the people of God.²³ In Galatians 2:16-17 and like passages, *dikaioō* has to do specifically with the vindication/restoration of Jews who have believed in Christ. No longer do they anticipate being vindicated at the last judgment by virtue of their loyalty to the God of Israel and his law; but rather eschatological vindication has taken place at the cross of Christ (Galatians 2:20), and "works of the law" are no longer relevant—this, claims Paul, is a matter of common and well-established knowledge.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE UNGODLY

With all this background in view, we are in a position to address the question posed above: If it is the righteous who are vindicated because of their fidelity, then how can Paul maintain that God justifies the *ungodly*? In answering, it will be useful to interact somewhat further with Wright's analysis of the relationship of righteousness and the pronouncement of justification by God the judge.

According to Wright, in the Jewish law court there are three parties: the judge, the plaintiff and the defendant.²⁴ In such a scenario, for the judge to be "righteous" and to practice "righteousness" is a complex matter having to do with the way he handles the case, i.e., he must render a verdict according to the evidence. However, for the plaintiff and the defendant, Wright says, none of these connotations apply. Although in English the word "righteous" has moral overtones, in the Hebrew courtroom those who stand before the bar are not, before the trial starts, considered morally upright and thus deserve to have the verdict go their way. "No, for the plaintiff or defendant to be 'righteous' in the biblical sense *within the law-court setting* is for them to have that status *as a result of the decision of the court.*"²⁵ Otherwise stated, "right-

eous" for these two persons means "*the status they have when the court finds in their favor. Nothing more, nothing less.*"²⁶

Consequently, maintains Wright, "it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. . . . To imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge's righteousness is simply a mistake. That is not how the language works." He is emphatic that the righteousness of God's people *will not be God's own righteousness* simply because God's own righteousness is his covenant faithfulness which vindicates them and bestows on them the status of "righteous" as the vindicated or acquitted defendant.²⁷ In one stroke, then, Wright dismisses any idea of what Luther called an "alien righteousness."

In response, several matters come to mind. (1) Wright is correct to stress that the context and setting of justification is the Hebrew (not Greco-Roman or modern) courtroom. By definition, this places us within the realm of the covenant, in which the exonerated person is declared righteous by the judge and then allowed to resume his or her position within the community with all its privileges and responsibilities. (2) Nevertheless, a decided weakness in Wright's construction is that the court does not arbitrarily decide that one is righteous; it hears the evidence and on the basis of the evidence pronounces that here is a righteous person. According to Deuteronomy 25:1, it is precisely the righteous who are to be justified and the wicked who are to be condemned. To be sure, the judge is righteous himself when he handles matters correctly; but by the very nature of the case to render an appropriate judgment entails an assessment of all relevant data and on that basis the verdict is pronounced. In brief, one is righteous not primarily because of a judge's pronouncement but because the judge is compelled by the evidence to render a decision in one's favor. The judge's pronouncement seals and confirms the realities established by the evidence.

(3) The major problem with Wright's scenario is the absence of Christ from the equation. In fairness, Wright's focus is more narrowly on the Jewish context of justification,

and certainly Wright is aware of the centrality of Christ in the preaching of Paul; as his book as a whole demonstrates. Nevertheless, his overall treatment of justification is rendered less than adequate because it does not allow for a righteousness that finds its very origin in the believer's union with Christ. It is surely telling that the text in Paul which most clearly states this, 2 Corinthians 5:21, is given a very nontraditional interpretation. According to Wright, what Paul means is that the apostles embody the covenant fidelity of God.²⁸ For various exegetical reasons, this reading fails to carry conviction. But apart from those, Wright has missed the broader biblical-theological picture of the way in which the people of God become righteous. In so doing, he has abstracted the forensic metaphor from the broader picture of what God will do for a renewed Israel. No doubt he is correct that in the courtroom setting righteousness does not flow directly from the judge. However, he has pressed the metaphor too stringently and has not allowed for the all-important presence of Christ within God's courtroom. Indeed, we do not get righteousness directly from the judge, but we do get it from Christ. In his fidelity to his covenant (his righteousness), God the judge provides the means whereby he is able to vindicate/justify/exonerate his own. He writes his law on their hearts, gives them a new heart and raises them from the dead (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36-37). Because of a righteous Branch whom Yahweh will raise up, *the Lord himself is our righteousness* (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; Isaiah 61:10; cf. Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). This is none other than the Servant of God who makes many righteous (Isaiah 53:11 as carried over into Romans 5:12-19).²⁹ In the prophetic perspective generally, it is the righteous remnant that returns from captivity to the land, although they are the very first to confess their sins.³⁰ They are not righteous in themselves but have been made righteous by the Lord who is their righteousness (the very text Wright quotes, Psalm 143:2, indicates that left to themselves they could never be justified; they must be made righteous).

We are now in a position to answer our question, "How can God justify the ungodly while being consistent with the

practice of the Hebrew courtroom to acquit only the righteous?" The answer quite simply is that those who were formerly ungodly in Adam have been made righteous in Christ. Here the perspective of Philippians 3:9 is much to the point. Paul speaks of a "righteousness from God" (*dikaiosunê ek theou*). It is God's own righteousness, defined as "covenant fidelity," that entails *the gift of righteousness* to the apostle. In his own righteousness, God enables us to become what he is—righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). His loyalty to his people consists in his conforming them to himself, so that he and they may live in uninterrupted covenant fellowship. God's righteousness has provided Christ as the propitiation for sins (Romans 3:21-26). In Adam all are guilty, but God has removed their guilt by means of Christ and thus can vindicate them as his faithful people. In these actions are embodied God's covenant faithfulness. Without constructing a full-blown *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), there is a logical process whereby God is able to justify sinners. By the work of the Spirit we are united with Christ and become God's righteousness in him; and on that basis God the judge pronounces us righteous and entitled to the full privileges of covenant membership.³¹ After all is said and done, Luther was right that the righteousness God requires is the righteousness he provides in Christ.³²

APPENDIX: THE TRANSLATION OF DIKAIÔ

Dikaiô is not an easy verb to translate. As is true of any Greek word, there is no one English equivalent to cover every usage.³³ Its overall significance is determined by the cluster of ideas stemming from the Old Testament and Paul's use of it in specific contexts. It is this pregnant meaning of *dikaiô* which some modern scholars have sought to preserve by the term "rightwise" (popularized by Kendrick Grobel's translation of Rudolf Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*).³⁴ In place of "rightwise," Sanders opts for a somewhat unwieldy term of his own devising: "to righteous."³⁵ Others prefer "put in the right" or similar renderings.³⁶ "Justify," because of its time-honored usage, is adequate, provided that the comprehensive

character of *dikaiô* is kept in mind. The believer is "righteous" in that he or she is vindicated, placed in covenant relationship and lives out the righteousness of God. Given that actual Pauline paradigm of justification is to be found in Old Testament covenantal categories, "to be an object of the saving righteousness of God" (Motyer) is to be placed within a renewed covenant relationship and enabled to render to God an obedience commensurate with that relationship. It is just the passive of *dikaiô* in Romans 5:1, 9 which finds its correspondent in Romans 5:9-10, i.e., justification is tantamount to being "saved" and "reconciled."

As noted above, in Romans 6:7, the use of *dikaiô* ("justified from sin") stands in direct parallel to "liberated from sin" (*eleutheroô*) in 6:18. The parallel is preserved by rendering the former as "freed from sin." To this we may add Galatians 2:15-21: those who have been justified in Christ (vv. 16-17) now live in him (vv. 19-20). Justification and life together constitute the "righteousness" which has been procured by the death of Christ (v. 21).³⁷ Moreover, "justified" in 1 Corinthians 6:11 finds its equivalent in "washed" and "sanctified" (cf. Qumran *Manual of Discipline* 11:14), all three pointing to the time when the Corinthians ceased to be what they once were outside of Christ (6:9-10). G. R. Beasley-Murray can say that the "sanctification" by the Spirit and "justification" by the Lord Jesus occurred at the same time—it is a once-for-all consecration Paul has in mind, not a process.³⁸ Both he and Gordon Fee take "you were justified" (*edkaiôthête*) to be a look back to "unrighteous" (*adikoi*) in verses 1 and 9, Paul's description of pagan judges and of some of the Corinthians' rather seamy past.³⁹ Thus, there is more at stake than a changed status: those who had been dead are now alive; they are new creatures in a new creation. In this light, Paul's statement becomes an exhortation for Christians to live as those who are washed, sanctified, and justified.

To make a long story as short as possible, the overall best shorthand translation of *dikaiô* is "vindicate." The verb gives voice to a declaration, but a declaration resultant from an activity (God's saving righteousness). This declaration also

opens the way into the life of the covenant, because the one acquitted in the Hebrew courtroom resumes his responsibilities and privileges within the community. When Israel is vindicated at the time of release from exile the new covenant is established and peace is the result of the nation's renewed righteousness (Isaiah 32:16-17 equivalent to Romans 5:1). These two perspectives combine to inform us that *dikaioō*, in the active voice, is "to righteous," "to rightwise," "to place in the right" or "to save" in the comprehensive sense. In the passive, it is "to be an object of the saving righteousness of God (so as to be well-pleasing to him at the judgment)."⁴⁰ As Martyn puts it, "The subject Paul addresses is that of God's *making right what has gone wrong*."⁴¹ Alistair McGrath points the whole nicely: *dikaioō* "denotes God's powerful, cosmic and universal action in effecting a change in the situation between sinful humanity and God, by which God is able to acquit and vindicate believers, setting them in a right and faithful relation to himself."⁴² So does Scot McKnight: "As a result of God's justifying sinners, we have a new status (no longer held accountable for sinfulness), and, through his act of accepting us, God grants us the Spirit so that we have a transformed character; that is, the person who is justified (*dikaioo*) also inevitably lives a consistent life of righteousness (*dikaiosunē*)."⁴³

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Notes

1. Recent developments are surveyed by Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1-101; Peter T. O'Brien, "Justification in Paul and Some Crucial Issues of the Last Two Decades," *Right With God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (London/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1992), 69-95; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law, and Justification* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 27-53.

2. N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
3. Philip Esler, *Galatians [New Testament Readings]* (London: Routledge, 1998), 163.
4. *Galatians [New Testament Readings]*, 252, n. 12.
5. J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1972), 43.
6. Treatments of justification/righteousness language in the Old Testament and Judaism are provided by Ziesler, *Righteousness*, 52-127; Esler, *Galatians*, 161-64; Karl Kertelge, "Rechtfertigung" bei Paulus: Studien zur Struktur und zum Bedeutungsgehalt des paulinischen Rechtfertigungsbegriffs, second ed. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967), 15-45; Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 8-76; John Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament: "Justification" in the United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, with Responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 12-22; David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 82-120; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit bei Paulus*. 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 102-84. The related issue of purity is canvassed by Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10-51; Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 117-216.
7. Cf. Stephen Motyer, "Righteousness by Faith in the New Testament," *Here We Stand: Justification by Faith Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986), 34. Motyer's entire essay is excellent.
8. *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, 20, 25 (italics mine). Cf. Kertelge, *Rechtfertigung*, 113-20; Richard N. Longenecker, "Galatians," *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 84-85; J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 263-64; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Biblical Basis of Justification by Faith: Comments on the Essay of Professor Reumann," John Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament: "Justification" in the United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, with Responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 198; Reumann, *Righteousness*, 16.
9. Cf. Gottlob Schrenk, "Dikaiois," etc., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 2.185, 189.
10. Ernst Käsemann, "'The Righteousness of God' in Paul," *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 172.
11. *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, 16 (italics mine).
12. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 33-34.

13. See further Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 21-26.
14. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 96.
15. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 96-7.
16. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98-9.
17. "Righteousness by Faith in the New Testament," 48.
18. "'Righteousness of God' in Paul;" "Righteousness by Faith in the New Testament," 55.
19. See William J. Dumbrell, "Justification in Paul: A Covenantal Perspective," *Reformed Theological Review*, 51 (1992), 91-101.
20. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 107.
21. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 108; see also p. 118.
22. W. D. Davies, "Paul: From the Jewish Point of View," *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Volume Three: The Early Roman Period*, edited by William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 715-16.
23. "Paul: From the Jewish Point of View," 716.
24. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 97-99.
25. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98 (italics his). The same line is taken by Esler, "Galatians," 151.
26. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, (italics his).
27. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98-99.
28. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 104-5. Wright defends this interpretation at more length in his essay, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God: 2 Corinthians 5:21," *Pauline Theology. Volume II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, edited by David M. Hay (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 200-08.
29. See Don Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994), chapter 4. Note that Isaiah 53 falls within the setting of the restoration of Israel. See Ronald E. Clements, "Isaiah 53 and the Restoration of Israel," *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, edited by William Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 39-54.
30. See the penitential prayers of Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9, along with the penitential prayer tradition in post-Biblical Judaism. See Rodney Alan Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).
31. On righteousness as privileged identity, see Esler, *Galatians*, 141-77.
32. See further Edmund Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith," *Right With God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (London/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker, 1992), 17-50; Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 255-62.

33. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 13-14, n. 18; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 249-50.
34. Cf. Brendan Byrne, "Living Out the Righteousness of God: The Contribution of Romans 6:1-8:13 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Presuppositions," in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 43 (1981), 572.
35. *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 13-14, n. 18, *passim*.
36. E.g., F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.
37. Cf. Longenecker, "Galatians," 85.
38. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1962), 164-65.
39. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 246, n. 32.
40. "Righteousness by Faith in the New Testament," 48.
41. Martyn, "Galatians," 250.
42. Alister McGrath, "Justification," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 518; see as well McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 355-480; Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 191-92.
43. Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, NIV Application Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 119. See also *Studies in Doctrine*, 355-453; Don Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, chapters 3 and 6; John Armstrong, "The Obedience of Faith," *Trust and Obey: Obedience and the Christian*, edited by Don Kistler (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 79-117; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 334-89; J. M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 236.