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In What Sense is 'Justification' a Declaration?

Mark A Seifrid

The 'new perspective on Paul' may no longer be new, but it is still with us. For some time now E P Sanders' rereading of Paul has sent scholars off in the quest for corporate categories for understanding the apostle, which might replace the traditional understanding of grace. It is fair to say, I think, that the 'corporate interpretation' of Paul is what the 'new perspective' is all about. His message, it is now said, is not about the justification of the individual *in foro Dei*, but about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God, or the end of Israel's exile, or both. According to some recent readings of Paul, 'justification' thereby becomes an analytic judgment on God's part, in which he declares who it is who has been regenerated and given evidence of it in faith.

The response I offer here is an abbreviated form of a more extensive study which shall appear in print shortly.¹ Even this work barely scratches at the surface of a truth to which the entire corpus of Scripture bears witness.

Adolf Schlatter once claimed, with good reason, that the variations in the field of New Testament theology inevitably arise from outside influences, and not from its own work.² An initial observation on the history of interpretation therefore seems appropriate. The recasting of justification in corporate terms is much older than one might gather from recent discussion. Its roots go back at the very least to Albrecht Ritschl, whose understanding of justification anticipates current discussion in various ways.³ In Ritschl's thought, justification appears simply as the means of the establishment of the kingdom of God, the vehicle by which the community of the reconciled is formed. Ritschl further interprets God's righteousness as his consistent action toward this saving end, so that for him 'God's righteousness' represents his

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- 1 See *Christ Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Leicester: Apollos forthcoming)
 - 2 Adolf Schlatter 'The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics' in *The Nature of New Testament Theology* Robert Morgan ed SBT Second Series 25 (Naperville, IL: Alec Allenson 1973) p 123
 - 3 See Rolf Schäfer *Ritschl: Grundlinien eines fast verschollenen dogmatischen Systems* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1968) esp pp 129-42. Perhaps Ritschl's system has not disappeared quite as much as Schäfer once thought.

faithfulness in bringing about the salvation which he has promised. Moreover, in Ritschl's understanding, Christ did not bear the divine punishment for sin in his cross, but there rendered the obedience to God of which humanity otherwise was incapable. He thereby became the 'founder' of the faithful fellowship with God in which we participate. So far as I know, no current reading of Paul corresponds to Ritschl's work in all respects. Indeed, Ritschl himself, borrowing Kantian language, rejected an 'analytic' conception of justification in favour of a 'synthetic' one. But some interpretations of Paul bear an uncanny resemblance to the Ritschlean view, particularly the work of N T Wright and Richard Hays.⁴ In at least some respects the 'new perspective' on Paul is not new at all, but represents a return to the theological concerns of the last century. One might argue, in fact, that despite the great detour of existential interpretation, the mainstream of biblical scholarship never adequately addressed the questions which Ritschl raised. The recrudescence of these older ideas in the 'new perspective' may well reflect unresolved problems which run through the work of Hermann Cremer, Adolf Schlatter, and Ernst Käsemann. Although we cannot explore this matter here, the history of interpretation may prove highly instructive in assessing current trends.

Justification as a Declaratory Event: the Creator's Coming to Justice

At the most basic level, Christ's cross and resurrection constitute a 'declaratory' event in which God the Creator comes to his justice. I shall briefly elaborate this claim in a positive sense shortly. Before I do so, however, it is necessary to set it off against two misconceptions which appear in current literature.

First, in the wake of Sanders' work, a certain 'covenant-romanticism' has captured current study of Paul, in which '*the* covenant with Israel' has become the unexamined basis for resolving all questions about his soteriology. Even if we set aside the important questions as to whether the Sinai covenant can rightly be equated with God's promise to Abraham, and whether the new covenant is really new after all (and not merely the

4 See N T Wright *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Oxford/Grand Rapids: Lion/Eerdmans 1997); Richard B Hays *The Faith of Jesus Christ* SBLDS 56 (Chico, CA: Scholars 1983).

reinstatement of the prior covenant with Israel), this framework reduces God from Creator to covenant-partner. God's righteousness, it is now often claimed, is his 'covenant-faithfulness' toward Israel in which Gentiles are now included. 'Justification' represents nothing more than the saving action which God promised his people, or, alternatively, the declaration that one belongs to the people to whom God has promised salvation.

If one examines biblical usage, however, it becomes quite clear that righteousness-language does not derive from the context of 'covenant', but that of creation.⁵ Although statistics cannot tell the whole story, it is remarkable how infrequently *b^crît* and the *sdq*-root appear in any proximity to one another, especially when one considers that both their fields of meaning extend into social and ethical domains. Conversely, righteousness language appears repeatedly with the *špt*-root, most significantly in expressions such as 'doing justice and righteousness'. Furthermore, one may easily point to examples in which 'righteousness' appears outside a covenantal context. According to the Genesis narrative, God might have found a few righteous ones in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:22-3). In the Book of Ezekiel, God names Job and Noah (along with Daniel) as righteous ones (Ezek 14:14, 20). The running contrast between the righteous and the wicked in the Book of Proverbs has to do with universal wisdom, not merely a covenant with Israel.

'Justification' in particular has to do with 'ruling and judging', in which the right order of creation (including its relation to its Creator) is re-established. In the monarchial period, the task of establishing and maintaining justice belonged especially to Israel's king, who acted as God's viceregent:

Give, O God, your justice judgments to the king
 And your righteousness to the king's son
 He will judge your people with righteousness
 And your oppressed ones with just judgment (Ps 72:1-3)⁶

5 See now Christoph Levin 'Altes Testament und Rechtfertigung' *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 96 (1999) pp 161-76; also Hans Heinrich Schmid *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* BHT 40 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1968); H Schmid 'Rechtfertigung als Schöpfungsgeschehen' in *Rechtfertigung: FS Käsemann* Friedrich, Pöhlmann and Stuhlmacher edd (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1976) pp 403-14.

6 See also eg 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Chron 18:14; 2 Chron 9:8; 1 Kings 10:9; Jer 22:3, 15-17.

The failure of the Davidic dynasty to fulfil this duty brought divine judgment, and with it the Messianic hope. God promises his people a 'new' David who, unlike the previous rulers of Israel, will work 'justice and righteousness'.⁷ Ultimately, it is Yahweh who is king of creation. He shall bring 'justice and righteousness' not only to his people, but to the nations. Psalm 98, the text to which Paul alludes in Romans 1:17 when he speaks of the 'revelation of God's righteousness', bears precisely these ideas:

Sing to Yahweh a new song, for he has worked wonders.
 His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.
 Yahweh has made known his salvation.
 To the eyes of the nations he has revealed his righteousness.
 He has remembered his love and faithfulness to the house of Israel
 All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (Ps 98:1-3)

The psalmist envisions God intervening on behalf of his people against unnamed enemies before the eyes of all the nations. Yet it is not for his people alone that Yahweh has acted. The contention which he has triumphantly concluded involved not merely the 'house of Israel', but the establishment of his own cause: 'His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.' The following lines of the psalm call upon the nations to rejoice as they anticipate the coming of Yahweh. His saving act on behalf of Israel anticipates the righteousness which he shall effect for them. The psalm reverberates with the joy of the whole of creation: the sea, the rivers and the hills celebrate the arrival of their King (Ps 98:4-9). The 'revelation of Yahweh's righteousness' entails his justification as ruler of all the earth, in which he re-establishes justice.

It is this latter theme which appears prominently in the latter part of the Book of Isaiah, where God promises that he shall vindicate himself over against the nations and their idols. In saving his people, he shall make known that he is the Creator, the one, true God:

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 pledged.
 A word has gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return,

⁷ Eg Isa 9:2-7; Jer 33:14-16

that to me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall make its pledge.
(Isa 45:22-3)

With this declaration, the nations and their idols are consigned to defeat (Isa 45:20-1). Yahweh shall bring salvation to the very ends of the earth, even as disaster falls on the idols and those who worship them (Isa 46:1-2; Isa 47:1-15). In biblical thought, 'God's righteousness' ultimately has to do with God's right as Creator which is manifest in both weal and woe, in both salvation and judgment.

Consequently, and secondly, the biblical conception of God's righteousness is not merely salvific, but includes a retributive element. To make this claim is to reject the currently dominant view which had its beginnings with Hermann Cremer, and has run through Gerhard von Rad, Ernst Käsemann and others into the present discussion. To speak of a punitive righteousness is a contradiction in terms, or so it is claimed. One problem with this line of interpretation is that in analysing the biblical usage it has focused upon the feminine noun *sēdaqah* to the exclusion of the adjective *saddiq*. While the former often seems to represent a noun of action, the adjective is almost always applied only to persons. It is therefore understandable that the former usually carries salvific associations (given that the hi'phil form of the verb signifies 'vindication', not punishment). On the other hand, when God is described as *saddiq* in the Hebrew Scriptures, overtones of punitive or retributive justice are always present. Many of these occurrences involve a juridical context in which a guilty party who has suffered retribution confesses that 'Yahweh is righteous', as Pharaoh does after the plague of hail.⁸ This formula appears to be something of a *Gerichtsdoxologie*, like Achan's confession, and may be traced in Jewish literature beyond the first century (Josh 7:19-21).⁹

We may now return to the thesis with which we began. 'Justification' constitutes a declaration for Paul in that the Creator has been vindicated in

⁸ Exod 9:27; Lam 1:18; 2 Chron 12:6; Neh 9:33; Dan 9:7. See also Ps 7:10,12; Ps 11:5-7 (2x); Ps 129:4; Zeph 3:5, where the Lord appears in the role of a judge who executes righteousness. On the confessional form, see further Deut 32:4; Isa 41:26; Jer 12:1; Dan 9:14. Note that God is always given his revealed name, Yahweh, in these contexts.

⁹ See Sipre Deut 307, b 'Abod Zar 18a. See LXX Esth 4:20; Tob 3:2, Bar 2:9 and the apparent reflection of this idiom in the Pss Sol 2:15-21; 3:3-5; 4:8; 8:7-8; 9:2. See also Luke 7:29.

his contention with idolatrous humanity in Christ's cross and resurrection. In the various contexts in which he speaks of 'justification' Paul presupposes the forensic context of the Scripture to which he appeals, in which a contention or lawsuit is viewed as a matter between two parties.¹⁰ We have seen already that the expression 'the revelation of the righteousness of God' in Romans 1:17 recalls God's contention with the nations on behalf of his people, celebrating God's triumph over his foes (Ps 98:3). Indeed, the scriptural references to 'God's righteousness' which serve as the background to Paul's use of the expression generally reflect either God's vindication in a contention, or that of his servants.¹¹

We may also think, for example, of Paul's declaration that Christ has become 'our righteousness' (1 Cor 1:30). To believe in him is to accept the 'word of the cross' by which God destroys all human wisdom, power, and privilege (1 Cor 1:18-25). In the crucified Messiah, God has brought the world to nothing, and has triumphed over all human boasting (1 Cor 1:26-31). Paul employs the theme of God's contention with the world most prominently in Romans, where there is scarcely a chapter which does not echo the thought in some way. We may conveniently point to the conclusion of Romans 8, in which Paul alludes to the Isaianic promise of Yahweh's vindication of his servant. Just as God predestines, calls, justifies and glorifies the servant, so he does all his children (Rom 8:30).¹² The questions which Paul raises in this passage reflect the contention between God and the world into which those who believe have been thrust:

If God is for us, who is against us? ...

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? ...

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom 8:31-5; cf Isa 50:8)

The language of accusation, condemnation, intercession and defence, makes

¹⁰ This is so, we may note, even when a more powerful third party decides the dispute. The Davidic kings, we may remember, were to do justice and righteousness for the oppressed (eg Ps 45:5; Ps 72:4; Jer 22:3). Justice was to be blind with respect to persons, but not with respect to their causes. This conception of the juridical process perdured in Paul's Hellenistic setting, even if jurisprudence was regularized there (eg Matt 5:21-6; Acts 18:12-17). It is therefore not surprising that Paul appeals to the biblical idiom.

¹¹ See Ps 22:32; Ps 40:11; Ps 51:16; Ps 72:1; Isa 51:6-8; Isa 59:16; Dan 9:16-18; Mic 7:9.

¹² Cf eg Isa 41:8-10; Isa 42:1-9; Isa 45:9-17; Isa 54:1-17.

the forensic, declaratory setting of Paul's discourse unmistakable. In the earlier chapters of Romans, Paul has in view the justification of believers before God, but he here speaks of our justification by God before the world, ie the glorification of the sons of God, the resurrection from the dead. This triumph belongs not only to us, but to the God who has loved us in Christ, and who contends for us: it is *for his sake* that believers are put to death all the day and considered as sheep to be slaughtered (Rom 8:36; LXX Ps 44:11).

The same contention between God and the world underlies Paul's initial announcement of the 'righteousness of God' in Romans. That 'righteousness of God' which is revealed specifically in the gospel presupposes a saving *act* of God, as does Psalm 98 to which it alludes. It is more than natural to understand Paul as here referring to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which according to his opening words in the letter is the primary content of the gospel (Rom 1:3). He virtually identifies the 'righteousness of God' with the risen Christ later in the letter (Rom 10:3-4). And he soon indicates that our justification is inseparable from the resurrection of the crucified Jesus (Rom 4:25). In speaking of Christ's resurrection in these biblical terms Paul primarily has its saving significance in view, which we shall consider shortly.

Like its biblical antecedents, however, Paul's reference to God's righteousness also implies the defeat of those who contend against him. That thought, I would suggest, is picked up in Paul's following statement in Romans 1:18: 'for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all impiety and unrighteousness of human beings who suppress the truth in unrighteousness'.

Although we cannot presently examine Paul's argument in Romans 1:18-3:20 in detail, several observations are in order. As is already evident from Paul's introductory statement, the entire section is cast in forensic terms which point to the 'day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God' (Rom 2:5). We may think, for example, of the threefold *ius talionis* of divine judgment upon idolators (Rom 1:24, 26, 28), the divine *dikaioma* which pronounces the sentence of death upon those who practice evil (Rom 1:32), the defenceless conduct of the one who judges another (Rom 2:1), and the judgment which the obedient Gentile shall render upon the disobedient Jew

(Rom 2:27).¹³ As Paul declares in his discussion of Jewish unbelief, God yet shall be justified in his contention with humanity. The present failure of 'some' Jews merely manifests what God has made known already. Every human being shall be made a 'liar', in order that God might be 'true' in his words which pronounce us such (Rom 3:4). That means, of course, that God stands behind our transgression, bringing his word concerning us to pass, just as the psalmist testifies (Rom 3:4; LXX Ps 50:6). According to Paul's charge, all of humanity has been subjected by God to the power of sin: 'there is none righteous, not one' (Rom 3:9-10).¹⁴ Here again in this opening of Romans 3 we find an allusion to the divine contention with the nations described in the Book of Isaiah, where Yahweh's confirmation of his word manifests that he alone is God, and not the idols of the nations.¹⁵ In these contexts, God's 'faithfulness' and 'truth' ultimately has to do with God's being *God*, even in human unbelief and idolatry, (Rom 3:4, 7).¹⁶ The wrath of God revealed from heaven, which has delivered us over to sin, has *God's* righteousness as its goal, namely that God shall be justified in his contention with us (Rom 3:5).¹⁷ As Paul subsequently indicates, the 'righteousness of God' entails the present display of *God's* righteousness, which has been withheld on account of God's forbearance in punishing transgressions (Rom 3:25-6).¹⁸ God's righteousness has been displayed in order that God might 'be just, and the justifier of the one who is of the faith of Jesus' (Rom 3:26). Paul's concluding telic clause here is striking, since it implies that God has *come* to be righteous in Christ's atoning death. We most likely have here a reflection of the formal *Gerichtsdoxologie*. As we have noted, the descriptions of God as 'righteous' in Scripture are always concrete, speaking either of his vindication in a contention or his role as judge. The former background is surely to be preferred here, not only because Paul clearly speaks of an event, but also because the context of the letter already presupposes a contention between God and humanity. In Christ's cross and resurrection, God comes to his right

13 See Rom 1:18, 29, 32; 2:5, 8, 13, 26; 3:4, 5, 8, 10, 19, 20

14 Cf Rom 11:32

15 Isa 43:9-10; also Isa 41:26; Isa 42:3; Isa 44:26; Isa 45:19

16 See eg Isa 43:8-13; Isa 44:6-8, 24-8. Paul describes the rejection of God as the 'suppression of the truth' (Rom 1:18). Idolatry is the rejection of the 'truth of God' (Rom 1:25).

17 Note that Paul here speaks of 'God's righteousness' rather than 'righteousness of God'.

18 Note that Paul uses the pronominal expression 'his righteousness' in Rom 3:25, 26, and speaks of the public display of God's righteousness rather than the more noetic notion of its 'manifestation' (Rom 3:21).

and fallen humanity is condemned.¹⁹ Need we say that both the individual and the communities of Jews and Gentiles in which all individuals stand are included in this judgment?

It is important to indicate that the Sinai covenant plays a distinct and critical role in this matter, even if we cannot pursue the topic further here. In effecting the 'knowledge of sin' and bringing the wrath of God, the Law prepared for the sending of the Son, 'born of a woman, born under the Law, that he might redeem those under the Law' (Gal 4:4-5).²⁰ The Law of God created the context for the death and resurrection of the Son of God, in which God was justified.

Justification as an Extra-Judicial Event: Christ for Us

Of course, when Paul announces the 'revelation of the righteousness of God' in Romans 1:17, he has in view not only our condemnation but also our justification. As in its biblical antecedents, this 'righteousness of God' is a saving righteousness, which gives life to the one who believes. For Paul as well as the other apostolic witnesses, our condemnation and justification are together found in Jesus Christ crucified and risen for us. In other words, there is an extra-judicial aspect to Paul's understanding of justification.²¹ In sending his Son into the world, giving him up on the cross and raising him from the dead *for us*, God has acted in infathomable love, contrary to all calculation or explanation. Although we might dwell on this topic a very long time – indeed all eternity – we cannot do so here. It suffices to point to the themes of 'exchange', 'substitution' and 'inclusion' which appear in the various formulae Paul uses to speak of God's justifying work in Christ. I cite some familiar examples:

Whom God put forward as a mercy-seat through faith in his blood, for the demonstration of his righteousness. (Rom 3:25)

19 As Paul's further discussion in Romans shows, the 'revelation of God's righteousness' addresses humanity both as individuals and as communities of Jews and Gentiles.

20 See, eg, Rom 3:19-20; Rom 4:15; Gal 3:13

21 We may also turn the matter around and say that Paul's Christology bears an indispensable forensic aspect, namely the justifying work of God. Wright *Saint Paul* pp 96-9, completely overlooks the role of Christ in justification.

Who was delivered up for our transgressions, and raised for our justification. (Rom 4:25)

The one who knew not sin, he made to be sin on our behalf, in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him. (2 Cor 5:21)

I have been crucified with Christ. I live, but it is no longer I, rather Christ lives in me. What I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me. (Gal 2:19b-20)

As these passages make clear, Paul joins God's justification to our justification christologically. Sacrificial (and legal) concepts provide the door through which *God* himself enters and acts on our behalf in sending and offering up his Son.²²

We might therefore say that for Paul 'justification' is an elaboration of his Christology and, conversely, Paul's Christology is the basis of his teaching on justification. In other words, if we are to interpret Paul rightly, we must understand justification in terms of Christ's cross and resurrection. The righteousness of God is revealed *in* the gospel (Rom 1:17). We are justified by the redemption which is *in* Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24). He became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God *in him* (2 Cor 5:21). Because the event of Christ's cross and resurrection constitutes the exclusive locus of justification, the justification of God and the justification of the ungodly are inseparable from one another. There is no justification of the ungodly which is not the justification of God in his wrath against the ungodly, and vice versa.

We know, of course, that the justifying event outside of us in Christ has its counterpart within us in faith. Here again we are touching upon a large topic, which we simply cannot explore now. For the purposes of our discussion one matter is of importance. In Paul's understanding, faith is determined by its object, namely, the promise of God to Abraham which has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.²³ That is to say, faith cannot rightly be reduced to a human decision or disposition, but exists as a reflection of God's work in Christ. To 'stand in faith' is to 'stand in the Lord'.²⁴ To be justified by faith is to be justified by Christ's blood.²⁵ To be 'in the faith' is to be indwelt by Christ:

22 In other words, Christ's death transcends the sacrificial system for Paul in that God provides not only the means of atonement but that he himself makes atonement.

23 Gal 3:6-8; Rom 4:20-1

24 1 Thess 3:6-8; 1 Cor 15:1-2; 1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 1:24

25 Rom 5:1, 9

'Test yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Or do you not know concerning yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you – unless you indeed are unapproved?' (2 Cor 13:5). Abraham's faith is no different, in Paul's understanding, since his faith arose solely from the word of promise, which had Christ as its object.²⁶ Faith 'justifies' simply because it reflects the justifying event within the fallen human being. To construe justification as a divine declaration subsequent to regeneration and faith is to embattle Paul's gospel in two ways. The cross and resurrection of Christ, not the individual, is the primary locus of justification. Moreover, in the cross God has justified the ungodly, he has not identified those who are faithful to 'the covenant' (Rom 5:8-9).

The gift of God placed a demand upon Abraham: by means of the promise, God the Creator came to be his God and Creator, since it was out of Abraham's dead body and Sarah's barren womb that the promise came to fulfilment (Rom 4:18-21). In believing the promise Abraham justified God, just as all those who believe in Christ justify God, pronouncing him 'true' and themselves 'liars' (Rom 3:4).²⁷ This, after all, is Paul's main point in Romans 3:21-6: the righteousness of God is given through faith; Christ is an atonement through faith; God not only comes to be right, but justifies the one who believes. The justification of God in Christ becomes ours in faith. From this perspective it is clear that faith, and faith alone counts as obedience.²⁸ Abraham's justification was paradoxically the gift of God to the ungodly and the recompense given to faith (Rom 4:3-8; Rom 4:18-22). Obviously there is much more that one could say on this matter. Here we content ourselves with the observation that faith is the vital link between our present justification and our standing in the final judgment.

Justification as Vindication: Christ's Resurrection and Ours

The forensic setting of Paul's statements on justification differs from what we might expect, in that God there appears not merely as judge, but as party to the dispute. In yet another way Paul's thought varies from our own. The separation of the judiciary and executive branches of government is a

26 Rom 4:13-25; Gal 3:6-18

27 We may recall that Paul pointedly describes Abraham's faith as directed to the one who justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5).

28 Cf Rom 6:17; Rom 10:3; Rom 1:5; Rom 15:18

phenomenon of the modern state, foreign to the biblical setting. In biblical thought a verdict cannot in practice be separated from the vindication which accompanies it. In the Lukan parable of the importunate widow, for example, the woman does not seek a mere pronouncement from the unrighteous judge, but the enactment of the justice which belonged to her by right (Luke 18:1-8). As we have observed, Israel's kings were under obligation to *do* righteousness and justice. For this reason 'righteousness' often appears in the Scriptures as a saving act of God on behalf of the oppressed.²⁹ Paul frequently echoes such imagery when speaking of justification, particularly the language of Isaiah, where the establishment of God's righteousness brings a new creation.³⁰ We have argued already that in speaking of the 'revelation of God's righteousness' in Romans 1:17, Paul has in view the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its saving significance. Although we cannot pursue the matter further here, we would suggest that the connection between 'justification' and the life of the resurrection in the risen Christ is fundamental to Paul's theology.

In making this claim, we are echoing the line of thought that runs from Adolf Schlatter, through Ernst Käsemann, to Peter Stuhlmacher and others in our day. While appreciating their contribution, it is nevertheless necessary to indicate that there is no reason to suppose, as they have, that Paul adopts a sort of 'meta-concept' of righteousness or justification, in which he somehow combines the ideas of gift and power.³¹ It is merely the case that the two ideas of 'ruling and judging' belong together for him. He knows the difference between verdict and vindication, as is clear, for example, in Romans 5:1-11, where he speaks of 'justification' as present peace with God. That is to say, Paul does know of a distinction between 'declaratory' and 'effective' righteousness.³² It is entirely correct and important to stress, as Stuhlmacher does, that God's justifying work in Christ brings with it the entrance of the new creation into the fallen world, in the form of the gift of the Spirit.³³ Indeed, Paul speaks of 'justification by the Spirit'.³⁴ Nevertheless, for him 'justification' is something more than the giving of the Spirit, a giving which

29 Eg Judges 5:11; Isa 46:13; Isa 51:5-8; Ps 22:32; Ps 40:10-11

30 Eg Isa 45:5-8; Isa 48:6-11; Isa 51:1-11

31 See Ernst Käsemann 'The "Righteousness of God" in Paul' in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1969) pp 168-82

32 Peter Stuhlmacher *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments: Grundlegung; Von Jesus zu Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1992) pp 334-5

33 See especially Peter Stuhlmacher 'Erwägungen zum ontologischen Charakter der *kaine ktisis* bei Paulus' *Evangelische Theologie* 27 (1967) pp 1-35

34 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Tim 3:16; cf Rom 1:4

proceeds from the justifying verdict which God has rendered in Christ: 'Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts' (Gal 4:6).³⁵ Furthermore, the Spirit constitutes the anticipatory granting of the whole of salvation, not merely a part of it. It is the gift of the resurrection in its proleptic form: 'Although the body is death on account of sin, the Spirit is life, on account of righteousness' (Rom 8:10).³⁶

For this reason, the presence of Spirit is nothing other than 'Christ' in the believer (Rom 8:10). We therefore cannot rightly speak of justification as a 'process of becoming new'.³⁷ For Paul the work of the Spirit is 'a whole', which is not yet wholly present.³⁸ The same must be said of Romans 6, where Paul speaks of 'righteousness' as a (new) reality which stands outside the believer, and which we are to serve and obey.³⁹ It is not some quality imparted to us. 'Righteousness' like 'sin' signifies a state of affairs which holds sway in the world, a reality which is located in the risen Christ. The 'new obedience' is the resurrection of Christ projected into the present, which cannot be partitioned, imparted or infused. Nor can it become inherent to us, but must be grasped by faith: we must 'reckon' ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God *in Christ Jesus* (Rom 6:11).

Furthermore, Paul can hardly presuppose that the Roman believers were familiar with a conception of God's righteousness as 'gift and power'. If he had done so, he would not have needed to clarify the nature of grace in Romans 6. To anyone who knew of God's righteousness as a 'transforming power' that discussion is unnecessary. Paul sets forth the 'new obedience' in Romans 6 by means of the topic of Christ's cross and resurrection. The same is true of his treatment of the Law in Romans 7 and of life in the Spirit in Romans 8. While his theology of justification reappears in varying forms in these chapters, it is always centered in Christ's incarnation, cross and resurrection. It is *in* the crucified and risen Christ that the righteousness of God has been manifest, not in us. It is not a diffuse power within the world, but has its locus in Christ and the gospel which makes him known. Our

35 Cf Rom 8:16

36 Cf Rom 8:11; Gal 5:5

37 Peter Stuhlmacher *Reconciliation, Law, & Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* trans Everett R Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress 1986) pp 72-3

38 Although Rom 5:19 and Phil 1:11 are debatable in this regard, in my view Paul speaks in both instances of the granting of righteousness as a whole.

39 Rom 6:12, 16, 18, 19, 20

justification in Christ's resurrection demands that we wait for the 'hope of righteousness' (Gal 5:4).⁴⁰ The resurrection which is ours *in spe* shall finally become ours *in re*, and that, too, shall be a declaratory act, in which God shall vindicate himself and his children before the world and angels.

MARK A SEIFRID is Associate Professor of New Testament at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

⁴⁰ For a sample of Luther's thought, see 'The Two Kinds of Righteousness' (*LW* 31:297-306).