The Epistle to the Romans

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Moo, Douglas J. The Epistle to the Romans. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996
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B. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (3:21-4:25)

Romans 1:18-3:20, while important in its own right, is nevertheless preliminary to the main point that Paul wants to establish in this part of his letter: the availability of God’s righteousness to all who respond in faith. This “good news,” announced in 1:17, is now elaborated. The essential points are packed into 3:21-26, a passage that Luther called “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.”1 The remainder of the section develops one major element of this extraordinary dense passage: faith as the only basis for justification. In 3:27-31, Paul highlights the exclusivity of faith (3:28) as he makes a number of points clearly directed to a Jewish viewpoint: faith excludes all boasting (3:27), provides for the inclusion of the Gentiles (3:29-30), and complements rather than nullifies the law (3:31). In chap. 4, each of these points is reiterated with respect to Abraham, as other elements are also drawn into the picture: the place of circumcision, the cruciality of grace, the promise, and the nature of faith. From this emphasis, we can surmise that Paul was well aware of the point at which his gospel was most often (and not only in Galatia) attacked and wanted to demonstrate as clearly as possible that faith was both the necessary and necessarily exclusive response of human beings to God’s work of redemption.

1. Justification and the Righteousness of God (3:21-26)

21But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made manifest, being witnessed to by the law and the prophets, 22the righteousness of God that is through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23for all have sinned and are falling short of the glory of God, 24being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. 25 God set forth Jesus as a propitiatory sacrifice through faith, in his blood, for a demonstration

1. Margin of the Luther Bible, on 3:23ff.
2. Instead of εἰς πάντως, a significant block of MSS and early versions read εἰς πάντα (the second corrector of K, the secondary Alexandrian witness 33, the western uncials D, F, and G, and the majority text). While a few scholars have accepted the longer reading, regarding the omission of εἰς πάντα as due to a scribe’s eye accidentally picking up the second πάντα after he had copied the first (homoioteleuton) (e.g., Morison, Epistle, pp. 224-26; Nygren), the longer reading is suspect as a conflation of the widely supported εἰς πάντως (the papyrus P46, the primary Alexandrian uncials K [original hand], and B, the secondary Alexandrian C, 81, and 1739, and the uncials P and Ψ) and εἰς πάντας (presumed by the Vulgate and two Church Fathers) (cf. Metzger, 508).
3. While NA25 omitted the article before παντώς (following the primary Alexandrian K, the secondary Alexandrian C [original hand] and 1739, the western D [original

of his righteousness because of the passing over of sins committed beforehand so that the forbearance of God, for a demonstration of his righteousness at the present time, in order that he might be just and the justifier of the person who has faith in Jesus.

In a passage that is loaded with key theological terms, the phrase “righteousness of God” ( dikaiosynē theou) stands out. It occurs four times (vv. 21, 22, 25, 26 [“his righteousness” in the last two]), while the related verb “justify” (dikaiōō) is found twice (vv. 24, 26) and the adjective “just” (dikaios) once (v. 26). After a section in which the need for this righteousness has been demonstrated in detail (1:18-3:20), Paul is now prepared to explain how the righteousness of God—his eschatological justifying activity—empowers the gospel to mediate salvation to sinful human beings (cf. 1:16-17). The passage falls into four parts. In the first, Paul reiterates (cf. 1:17) the revelation of God’s righteousness and relates it to the OT (v. 21). The second section focuses on the way in which all human beings, equal in their sin, have equal access also to God’s righteousness through faith (vv. 22-23). The source of God’s righteousness in the gracious provision of Christ as an atoning sacrifice is the theme of the third part of the passage (vv. 24-25a). Finally, Paul shows how the atonement not only provides for the justification of sinners but also demonstrates the “just-ness” of God throughout the process (vv. 25b-26). In making this last point, we are presuming that “righteousness of God,” which refers in vv. 21-22 to the justifying act of God, refers in vv. 25-26 to the “integrity” of God, his always acting in complete accordance with his own character.4 Most contemporary exegetes and theologians reject this interpretation; but we are convinced that this shift in meaning is required by the data of the text, and, indeed, gives to the text its extraordinary power and significance. For, as James Denney says.

There can be no gospel unless there is such a thing as a righteousness of God for the ungodly. But just as little can there be any gospel unless the integrity of God’s character be maintained. The problem of the sinful world, the problem of all religion, the problem of God in dealing with a sinful race, is how to unite these two things. The Christian answer to the problem is given by Paul in the words: “Jesus Christ, whom God set forth a propitiatory (or, in propitiatory power) in his blood.”5

4. The jump from the one to the other is not as great as might at first appear, since always lurking in “righteousness” language is allusion to the character and person of God.
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The occurrence in this passage of some words and concepts that are not typical of Paul's presentation of the gospel suggests to many scholars that Paul is quoting an early Christian tradition. This is possible, but it is more likely that Paul has himself written these verses in dependence on a certain Jewish-Christian interpretation of Jesus' death. This interpretation, which appears also in Heb. 9-10, viewed Jesus' death as the fulfillment of

6. E.g., ἀνεφέλτην ("mercy seat, propitiation"); πέρυς ("passing over"); προτίθημι with the meaning "set forth"; δικαιοσύνη with reference to God's attribute of righteousness; reference to "redemption" as a past event and God's passing over past sins.

7. Additional reasons for this hypothesis are: (1) the awkward transition from vv. 23-24, or, if the fragment is seen to begin in v. 25, the relative pronoun introducing that verse, which can be compared to the introduction to other NT "hymnic" traditions; and (2) the apparently redundant duplication of the ἐνεπείξις ("demonstration") clauses in vv. 25b-26a.

Several competing suggestions as to the extent and origin of the pre-Pauline fragment are extant.

(a) Bultmann thought that everything from δικαιοσύνην ("being justified") in v. 24 through ὥσπερ ("of God") in v. 25a was pre-Pauline, with Paul adding to it the phrases ἐν τῷ θεῷ ("by his grace") in v. 24 and διὰ τῆς πίστεως ("through faith") in v. 25. E. Kaiser has sought to provide stronger evidence for this alternative by a novel interpretation of the way the tradition functions in the context. He suggests that the tradition Paul quotes forth a conception of God's righteousness with which he disagreed and which he corrects by his addition of the phrase πρὸς τὸν ἔνεπείξιν ("for a demonstration") in v. 26 ("Auszelendsis von Römer 3:24-26," in Exegetische Versuche und Beobachtungen / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), pp. 96-100; cf. also J. Reumann, "The Gospel of the Righteousness of God: Pauline Reinterpretation in Rom. 3:21-31," Int 20 [1966], pp. 432-52; R. P. Martin, Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology [Atlanta: John Knox, 1981], pp. 81-89.

(b) The most popular alternative to this view—one that appears to be gaining ascendancy—holds that only vv. 25-26a are pre-Pauline. This tradition, it is suggested, is a Jewish-Christian one that was originally associated with the Eucharist (cf., esp. E. Lohse, Märtyrer und Gottesknecht: Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Verkündigung vom Sühntod Jesu Christi / FRLANT 46; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 149-54; note also P. Stuhlmacher, "Recent Exegesis on Romans 3:24-26," in Reconciliation, Law and Righteousness, pp. 96-98; G. Friedrich, Die Verkündigung des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament [Biblishe Theologische Studien 6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen, 1982], pp. 57-58; Wengst, Christologische Formeln, pp. 87-88; B. F. Meyer, "The Pre-Pauline Formula in Rom. 3:25-26a," NTS 29 [1983], pp. 204-6; von der Minder, Schrift und Tradition, pp. 58-60.

(c) In addition to these fairly popular alternatives, it has been suggested that all of vv. 25-26 is pre-Pauline (D. Zeller, "Stühn und Langmut. Zur Traditionsgeschichte von Röm 3,24-26," TP 43 [1968], 64-75), or even that these verses are a post-Pauline interpolation (C. H. Talbert, "A Non-Pauline Fragment at Romans 3:24-26?" JBL 85 [1966], pp. 287-96; G. Flßer, "Der Ort der Versöhnung nach Paulus," ThZ 22 [1969], 161-83; for a solid argument against this interpolation hypothesis, see Williams, Jesus' Death, pp. 7-10).

8. In response to the arguments in favor of a set tradition here: (1) the presence of some rare words is at least partly due to the fact that Paul does not elsewhere discuss the exact conceptual foundations found here; (2) whether these concepts could or could not have been independently broached by Paul is very difficult to know; (3) abrupt transitions are, if anything, typical of Pauline style; (4) the apparent duplication of clauses in vv. 25b-26 is a problem on any view of the literary origins of the text. For these points and others, see R. Wonneberger, Syntax und Exegese. Eine generative Theorie der griechischen Syntax und ihr Beitrag zur Auslegung des Neuen Testaments, dargestellt an 2. Korinther 5,21 und Römer 3,21-26 (BET 13; Frankfurt: Lang, 1972), pp. 202-77; N. H. Young, "Did St. Paul Compose Romans III 24-26?" Aus B 22 (1974), 23-32; Camiller, L'Evangile de Dieu, pp. 73-79; Hultgren, Paul's Gospel, pp. 60-69; J. Piper, "The Demonstration of the Righteousness of God in Romans 3:25, 26," JSNT 7 (1980), 7-9; D. A. Campbell, The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3:21-26 (JSNTSup 65; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), pp. 45-57; Althaus; Schlier; Cranfield, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 118-19.

9. Gk. vv. 8-8. Hays contests the notion that a major break occurs at v. 21, noting that vv. 21-26 carry on the discussion of covenant faithfulness begun in 3:1-8 ("Psalm 143," p. 115; cf. also Viard). But we are not as convinced as Hays that "covenant faithfulness" is so prominent in either 3:1-8 or 3:21-26, and his view gives insufficient attention to the way 3:21 resumes 1:17.

10. E.g., Meyer.

11. Paul here views the transition from the standpoint of history, with the cross as the point of transition between old era and new. He can also apply this basic salvation-historical concept at the level of the individual, with conversion as the point of transition. See on this particularly Ridderbos, Paul, pp. 44-49, 52, 154, 161-66; Nygren, pp. 144-47, passim; and Luz, 168-69.
As the wrath of God dominated the old era (1:18), so the righteousness of God dominates the new. Righteousness of God means the same here as in Rom 1:17: the justifying activity of God. From God's side, this includes his eschatological intervention to vindicate and deliver his people, in fulfillment of his promises. From the human side, it includes the status of acquittal acquired by the person so declared just. In 1:17, Paul asserts that this righteousness of God is constantly revealed through the preaching of the gospel. Here he simply asserts its presence as a dominating force in God's interaction with humanity.

The relationship of this manifestation of God's righteousness to the OT is indicated in two prepositional phrases that together display the combination of continuity and discontinuity in salvation history that is characteristic of Romans. Apart from the law could go with righteousness of God (cf. KJV, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested), but it makes better sense if taken with the verb is manifested (cf. NAB, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law). Paul's purpose is to announce the way in which God's righteousness has been manifested rather than to contrast two kinds of righteousness.

What does Paul mean by this? In Rom 2:1-3:20 Paul has made clear that the law has failed to rescue Jews from the power of sin because compliance with its demands to the extent necessary to secure justification has not been—and cannot be—forthcoming. Apart from the law might mean, then, apart from doing the law: God's righteousness is now attained without any contribution from the works of the law. While this may, indeed, be part of what Paul intends, it is questionable whether it goes far enough for there is, as Paul will show in chap. 4, nothing really new about this: justification has always been by faith, apart from the law. Furthermore, it is not the manner in which God's righteousness is received that Paul is talking about here, but the manner in which it is manifested—the divine side of this process—by which people are made right with God. This phrase, then, reiterates the salvation-historical shift denoted by but now. In the new era inaugurated by Christ's death God has acted to deliver and vindicate his people apart from the law. It is not primarily the law as something for humans to do, but the law as a system, as a stage in God's unfolding plan, that is in view here. Law (nomos), then, refers to the Mosaic covenant, that temporary administration set up between God and his people to regulate their lives and reveal their sin until the establishment of the promise in Christ. One aspect of this covenant, of course, is those Jewish identity markers, such as circumcision, the Sabbath, and food laws; Paul is certainly affirming, then, that the righteousness of God is now being manifested outside the national and religious parameters set by the law. But Paul's point cannot be confined to this. The reason these identity markers are no longer required is that the covenant of which they were a part has been made obsolete (cf. Heb. 8:7-13). It is this basic shift in salvation history that Paul alludes to here, and much of his discussion of the law in the rest of this letter (cf. 3:27-31; 4:15, 5:13, 20; 6:14; and especially chap. 7) is an attempt to explain this apart from the law, while at the same time justifying his assertion that faith establishes the law (cf. 3:31; 8:4).

But Paul hastens to balance this discontinuity in salvation history with a reminder of its continuity. While God's justifying activity in the new age takes part outside the confines of the Old Covenant, the OT as a whole anticipates and predicts this new work of God: God's righteousness is witnessed to by the law and the prophets.

12. Our reasons for adopting this interpretation are given in the exegesis of 1:17; see also the excursion following 1:17. The alternative explanations of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ are the same here as at 1:17: the status of righteousness given by God (cf. God, the actuality of God's right to his creation as this reveals itself as saving power (Käsemann; cf. Stuhlmacher, Geschichtiger Gottes, p. 91), similar to the previous view, God's saving righteousness, but against the background of Ps. 143 (Hays, Psalm 143, pp. 114-15), God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic promise (Williams, Righteousness of God, p. 276). Ziesler (righteousness, p. 191) is correct to stress both divine action and human participation, but is wrong in thinking that an ethical dimension is present.

13. ἐπωνυματίζων, an imperative present.

14. The verb is παρεμεροτείς, with the perfect tense connoting a stative idea (on this interpretation of the perfect tense, see esp. Porter, Verbal Aspect, pp. 245-70) and the "but now" making clear that Paul is thinking of the present time (= stands manifest).

15. See also NIV and Hodge.

16. So, in effect, most English translations; cf., e.g., Godet.

17. Calvin; Nygren; Murray; Cranfield; Hünter, 127: Gifford: takes νόμος to include any law, Morison (Exposition, p. 209) any divine instruction.
22a. “Righteousness of God,” repeated for clarity because of the distance from its first occurrence, is now considered from the “human” side of the transaction: it is “through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Picking up another key theme from 1:17, Paul highlights faith as the means by which God’s justifying work becomes applicable to individuals. This, at least, is how this phrase has usually been interpreted (and cf. almost all modern English translations). But an alternative interpretation has been gaining favor. On this view, Paul asserts not that God’s righteousness is attained “through faith in Jesus Christ,” but “through the faith of Jesus Christ,” or “through the faithfulness shown by Jesus Christ.” Advocates of this interpretation argue that it is the more likely linguistically and that it makes better sense in the context. For this interpretation avoids the tautology involved in the traditional view, which has Paul asserting the importance of human faith twice: “faith in Jesus Christ,” “for all who believe.” On the other hand, the translation “through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” results in a natural Pauline combination of divine initiative and human response. 25

22. While Paul prefers to use ἐν, with ἐν τῷ to denote the means by which justification takes place (cf. 1:17), ὑπὸ occurs frequently also (Rom. 3:25; 30; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:16; 3:14, 26; Eph. 2:8; 3:12, 17; Phil. 3:9; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 3:7; 2 Tim. 3:15). Similarly, Paul usually denotes the object in which one places one’s faith with ἐν, especially when the verb πίστις is used, but also with the noun πίστις (cf. Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; 2 Tim. 3:15). But Paul most often uses the genitive following πίστις to denote the object of faith (Rom. 3:26; Gal. 2:16 [twice]; 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 3:9).

23. The difference involves the interpretation of the genitive Ἰσραήλ Ἡρῴδε. The traditional interpretation assumes an objective genitive, while the alternative views it as possessive or subjective.

24. They note that in cases where πίστις is followed by the genitive of a noun denoting a person (or persons), the genitive is usually subjective or possessive. For example, πίστις Ἰσραήλ Ἡρῴδε in 4:12 and 16 means “the faith exercised by Abraham”; an objective genitive, “faith in Abraham,” is obviously impossible. This subjective rendering of the genitive when it follows πίστις is, it is argued, typical in Greek, and makes it a priori likely that Ἰσραήλ Ἡρῴδε is also a subjective genitive.


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Despite these arguments, the traditional interpretation of the phrase is preferable. The lingusitic argument in favor of the alternative rendering is by no means compelling. In addition, contextual considerations favor the objective genitive in Rom. 3:22. While the Greek word πίστις can mean “faithfulness” (see 3:3), and Paul can trace our justification to the obedience of Christ (5:19), little in this section of Romans would lead us to expect a mention of Christ’s “active obedience” as basic to our justification. Moreover, πίστις in Paul almost always means “faith” (or very strong contextual features must be present if any other meaning is to be adopted. But these are absent in 3:22. If, on the other hand, πίστις is translated “faith,” it is necessary to introduce some very dubious theology in order to speak meaningfully about “the faith exercised by Jesus Christ.” Finally, and most damaging to the hypothesis in either form, is the consistent use of πίστις throughout 3:21-4:25 to designate the faith exercised by people in God, or Christ, as the sole means of justification. Only very strong reasons would justify giving to πίστις any other meaning in this, the theological summary on which the rest of the section depends. The simple references to “faith” in 3:28 and 3:30 are abbreviations of the “faith in Christ/Jesus” that is enunciated in 3:22 and 26 (cf. v. 25).

But if Paul mentions human faith in this phrase, why then does he add the phrase “for all who believe”? Comparison has been made with the combination “from faith for faith” in 1:17, but this is to appeal from the uncertain...
Paul’s purpose is probably to highlight the universal availability of God’s righteousness. This theme is not only one of the most conspicuous motifs of the epistle, but is explicitly mentioned in vv. 22b-23. God’s righteousness is available only through faith in Christ—but it is available to anyone who has faith in Christ.

22b-23 Paul tells us in vv. 22b-23 why this righteousness is available to all, and why, also, all need this righteousness. “There is no distinction” summarizes a key element of Paul’s presentation in 1:18-3:20, and is likely, therefore, to have special application to Jew and Gentile. In v. 23, Paul elaborates this point. His “no distinction,” as we would expect, has to do with the absence of any basic difference among people with respect to their standing before God. Jews may have the law and circumcision; Americans may lay claim to a great religious heritage; “good” people may point to their works of charity; but all this makes no essential difference to one’s standing before the righteous and holy God. Paul reduces the argument of 1:18-3:20 to its essence in a justified famous statement of the condition of all people outside Christ: “all have sinned and are falling short of the glory of God.” The second verb states the consequences of the first: because all have sinned, all are falling short of the glory of God. “Glory” in the Bible characteristically refers to the magnificent presence of the Lord, and the eternal state was often pictured as a time when God’s people would experience and have a part in that “glory” (e.g., Isa. 35:2; Rom. 8:18; Phil. 3:21; 2 Thess. 2:14). And just as this sharing in God’s “glory” involves conformity to the “image of Christ” (Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 3:21), so the absence of glory involves a declension from the “image of God” in which human beings were first made. “The future glory may be regarded as the restoration of the lost, original glory.” Paul, then, is indicating that all people fail to exhibit that “being-like-God” for which they were created; and the present tense of the verb, in combination with Rom. 8, shows that even Christians “fall short” of that goal until they are transformed in the last day by God.

24 The connection between this verse and the previous verses is not clear. Those who think a pre-Pauline fragment begins here find in the difficult transition evidence for a shift from Paul’s original dictation to the citation of a tradition. But whatever his dependence on tradition, Paul is himself composing the verses, and we need to determine what connection he intends. The participle “being justified” is most naturally taken as a modifier of one or both of the finite verbs in v. 23: “sinned” and/or “falling short.” If so, Paul’s purpose in highlighting the gift character of justification in the participial clause would presumably be to provide evidence for the total religious impotence of humanity. The objection to this interpretation is that it gives to a verse (24) that continues the main theme of the paragraph (justification/righteousness) a relatively subordinate role. Scholars suggest several other ways of relating this participle to its context, but perhaps the best suggestion is Cranfield’s. He argues that “being justified” is dependent on v. 23, to the extent that it has as its subject “all,” but that it also picks up and continues the main theme of the paragraph from vv. 21-22a. With this we would agree, with the caveat that “all” in its connection with “being justified” indicates not universality (“everybody”) but lack of particularity (“anybody”). Paul’s stress on the gift character of justification in v. 24 illuminates the positive side the “lack of distinction” in God’s dealings (vv. 22b-23) even as it continues and explains the theme of “righteousness by faith” from v. 22a.

Paul uses the verb “justify” (δικαιοῦμαι) for the first time in Romans to depict his distinctive understanding of Christian salvation. As Paul uses it in these contexts, the verb “justify” means not “to make righteous” (in an ethical sense) nor simply “to treat as righteous” (though one is really not righteous), but “to declare righteous.” No “legal fiction,” but a legal reality of the utmost significance, “to be justified” means to be acquitted by God from all “charges” that could be brought against a person because of his or her sins.

31. Cf. 10:12, where the same word — διοικητήριον (“distinction”) — occurs.
32. Gk. διοικητήριον. The aorist tense here could refer to the sin of all people “in and with” Adam in the past (cf. 5:12; see Lloyd-Jones; Dunn; Hughes, True Image, p. 130) but is more likely a “summary” aorist, gathering up the sins of people throughout the past into a single “moment” (Porter [Verbal Aspect, p. 222], disdaining the usual past-refering significance of the aorist tense, calls this verb “omnitemporal”).
33. The verb Paul uses here, σφηνεῖος, means, in the passive, “to lack” or, with a following genitive, as here, “come short of [something]” (BAGD); its present tense suggests that Paul thinks all people are regularly falling short of God’s glory.
34. In classical Greek, δῆμως means “opinion,” and a few commentators (e.g., Calvin) suggest that it may have this general meaning here: people have fallen short of the “approbation” of God (cf. John 12:43). But the biblical concept of δῆμως and Paul’s usage point to a different meaning; see the note on 1:23.
36. Cranfield.
37. Gk. δικαιούμενον.
39. E.g., (1) δικαιούμενον (“being justified”) could have the sense of a finite verb, parallel, rather than subordinate, to δοκίμων and δικαιοῦν in v. 23 (cf. NIV: “All ... fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely”; Schlier); (2) the finite verbs of v. 23 could be subordinate to δοκίμων (RSV: “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace”); (3) vv. 22b-23 could be parenthetical, with δοκίμων resuming the discussion of righteousness by faith in vv. 21-22 (S-H; Michel; Murray).
40. See, further, the excursus after 1:17.
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This judicial verdict, for which one had to wait until the last judgment according to Jewish theology, is according to Paul rendered the moment a person believes. The act of justification is therefore properly "eschatological," as the ultimate verdict regarding a person's standing with God is brought back into our present reality.

Characteristic also of Paul's theology is his emphasis on the gift character of this justifying verdict; we are "justified freely by his grace." Grace is one of Paul's most significant theological terms. He uses it typically not to describe a quality of God but the way in which God has acted in Christ: unconstrained by anything beyond his own will. God's justifying verdict is totally unmerited. People have done, and can do, nothing to earn it. This belief is a "theological axiom" for Paul and is the basis for his conviction that justification can never be attained through works, or the law (cf. Rom. 4:3-5, 13-16; 11:6), but only through faith. Once this is recognized, the connection between v. 22a and v. 24 is clarified: that justification is a matter of grace on God's side means that it must be a matter of faith on the human side. But the gracious nature of justification also answers to the dilemma of people who are under the power of sin (v. 23). As Pascal says, "Grace is indeed needed to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts it does not know what a saint or a man is."

41. Gk. δωρέω, the abverbal form of δωρέω, which means "gift" (cf. 2 Cor. 9:15).

42. Those who view this verse as pre-Pauline in origin generally think that εἷς σωθήναι ἐν χάριτί ("by his grace") is Paul's addition to the tradition (e.g., Reumann, "The Gospel of the Righteousness of God," p. 442). But if, as we think, the verse is Paul's own formulation, the repetition should not surprise us, for it occurs elsewhere in Paul (Rom. 5:15, 17; Eph. 3:7).

43. In secular Greek, χαρίς is "what delights," and is used with reference to things that bring joy (χαρῆς), especially gifts (where it occurs often with δωρέω). It can be used of the "favor" of the gods (in which case, however, the word lacks the specifically, Pauline notion of "totally unmerited favor") and occurs frequently in the Hellenistic period to denote instances of a ruler's "favor." In the LXX, χαρίς occurs over 190 times. Of those with a Hebrew equivalent (only about 70), most translate בָּרָת. This word has the special connotation of the "assistance" rendered to a weaker person by a stronger, and approaches more closely thereby the Pauline usage. Note, e.g., the ubiquitous phrase "to find grace at the eyes of..." (Gen. 6:8; Exod. 33:12; Num. 11:15; Deut. 24:1) Still, the emphasis on the inherent quality of the person who finds favor distinguishes it from Paul's conception (cf. H. Constantin, W. Zimmermann, TDNT I, 372-97; H.-H. Escher, MIDNT II, 115-17).

44. Bultmann, 1:288-92; Riddleb. Paul, pp. 173-74. Melanchthon notes, "the word gratia does not signify some quality in us, but rather the will or kindness of God itself toward us.


46. Penéeses, #508.

What gives this paragraph its unparalleled significance is the number of perspectives from which God's justification of sinners is considered. If "freely by his grace" indicates the mode of justification, as entirely free and unmerited, "through the redemption" illuminates the costly means by which this acquitting verdict is rendered possible. "Redemption" means, basically, "liberation through payment of a price." Thus, in the second and first centuries B.C., "redemption" often refers to the "ransoming" of prisoners of war, slaves, and condemned criminals. If "redemption" has this connotation here, then Paul would be presenting Christ's death as a "ransom," a "payment" that takes the place of that penalty for sins "owed" by all people to God. Though widely rejected today, this interpretation of the significance of the word should be retained. While it is not clear whether Paul was thinking specifically...

47. Gk. ἀπολύτρωσις is the compound form of ἀπολύω, the former predominating in the NT probably because of the penchant for compound forms in Hellenistic Greek (F. Bühnel, TDNT IV, 352). Chrysostom, on the other hand, regards ἀπολύω as an intensive form of ἀπολύω, implying the definite nature of Christian redemption so that, as he puts it, "we might never again fall under the same slavery.

48. See the survey in Morris, Apostle Preaching, pp. 22-26.

49. Morison, Exposition, p. 265; Hodge; Godet; S-H; Barrett; Michel; Murray, Riddlebos, Paul, pp. 195-94; Morris, Apostle Preaching, pp. 37-38.

50. Critics of the traditional interpretation marshal several arguments. The one occurrence of ἀπολύτρωσις in the LXX does not clearly refer to a process of "ransoming" (Dan. 4:32 LXX). More important, the verb λατρέω, from which ἀπολύτρωσις is derived, and which occurs 104 times, translates Hebrew words (mainly בַּלְוִד and בּוֹר) that usually mean simply "liberate," "set free," "do good"—no notion of a price paid for that liberation (a ransom) is generally present. The same omission of any "ransoming" connotation is claimed to be true for the other occurrences of ἀπολύτρωσις in Paul (Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14) and the rest of the NT (Luke 21:28; Heb. 9:15; 11:35), as well as for other λατρέω words (λατρεύω: Luke 24:21; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18; λατρεία: Mark 10:45 = Matt. 20:28; λατρεύω: Luke 16:6; 2:38; Heb. 9:12; λατρεύω: Acts 7:35). Accordingly, many argue that the idea of redemption in this verse means simply "act of liberation or emancipation," with no suggestion of the price at which the liberation was secured or the means by which it was effected (cf. esp. O. Procksch/F. Bühnel, TDNT IV, 329-35, 341-56; Hill, Greek Words, pp. 58-80; Black; Schlier).

51. I. Morris has shown that a price is often indicated as the basis for the "release" specified by λατρέω in the LXX, and concludes that, while there was some movement away from an emphasis on price in the use of the word in Jewish Greek, the connotation of a "ransoming" was usually present. Certainly, a "ransom" is always implied with the word in secular Greek contemporary with the NT (Apostolic Preaching, pp. 9-20). The idea of "ransoming" is maintained in Josephus's use of ἀπολύτρωσις (Ant. 12:27) and of ἀπολύω (J.W. 2:273), and in one of Philo's two ways of brokéλωσις (Every Good Man Is Good 113--the word does not clearly refer to a "ransom") in Philo. Stud. 109, nor does the verb in Allegorical Interpretation 3.21. Even in the LXX use of λατρέω, connotations of "cost" are usually present, even if a specific "price" is not clearly indicated (on this distinction, see J. H. Marshall, "The Development of the Concept of Redemption in..."
cally of slave manumissions when he applied the word to Christian salvation, it is likely that Paul views sin as that power from which we need to be liberated (cf. 3:9). If we ask further the question “To whom was the ‘ransom’ paid?” it is not clear that we need to answer it. The usage of the word makes it clear that there need be no specific person who “receives” the “payment.” Certainly we are not to think of Christ’s death as a payment of God made to Satan, a view that became very popular in the first centuries of the Christian church. A more biblical answer, and one that might be implied by v. 25, would be that God, the judge who must render just verdicts, is the recipient of the ransom. If so, an equal emphasis must be placed on the fact that God is also the originator of the liberating process.

As he does in Eph. 1:7 and Col. 1:14, Paul adds that this redemption is “in Christ Jesus.” It is not clear whether Paul means by it that the liberation was accomplished by Christ at the cross or that the liberation occurs “in relation to” Christ, whenever sinners trust Christ. Favoring the latter, however, is the connection of “redemption” with the forgiveness of sins in Eph. 1:7 and Col. 1:14, and 1 Cor. 1:30: “Christ was made . . . our redemption.” While, then, the “price” connoted by the word “redemption” was “paid” at the cross in the blood of Christ, the redeeming work that the payment made possible is, like justification, applied to each person when he or she believes.

Although the Greek word for “whom” connects v. 25 to v. 24, the connection is so loose that v. 25 may be considered as beginning a new sentence. The focus shifts from human reception of God’s justifying work to God’s initiative in providing for it. Specifically, Paul now unfolds the nature and means of “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” showing that this redemption takes place at the will and initiative of God the Father. While the

the New Testament,” in Reconciliation and Hope, p. 153 n. 4). In the NT itself, λόγον almost certainly means “ransom” in Mark 10:45 (= Matt. 20:28; cf. esp. A. Feuillet, “Le legsion sur la rançon,” RSPT 51 [1967], 363-402, and, more recently, P. Stuhlmacher, “Vicarious Giving His Life for Many, Mark 10:45 [Matt. 20:28],” Reconciliation, Law and Righteousness, pp. 16-29; he also defends the authenticity of the saying). The addition of “through his blood” to ἀπολύτρωσιν in Eph. 1:7 spells out the “price” at which the liberation was accomplished. There is a similar emphasis on Christ’s death as a sacrifice in this context (v. 25), and this, coupled with the presence in Paul’s letters of statements such as “we were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; cf. also Gal. 3:13-14), makes it likely that ἀπολύτρωσις includes the notion of Christ’s death as a ransom.


53. See Campbell, Rhetoric, pp. 118-30, who argues that ἀπολύτρωσις denotes freedom from an enslaving power through substitution.

a strong case can be made for taking the word as a reference to the OT “mercy seat,”45 the cover over the ark where Yahweh appeared (Lev. 16:2), and on which sacrificial blood was poured. For this is what the word refers to in one other NT occurrence (Heb. 9:5), as well as in 21 of its 27 LXX occurrences.56 Particularly significant are the several occurrences of the word in the description in Lev. 16 of the “Day of Atonement” ritual. According to this text, the high priest is to enter the “Holy of Holies” once a year and sprinkle on the mercy seat (= LXX hilašterion) the blood of a sacrificial victim, thereby “making atonement.”57 In the OT and Jewish tradition, this “mercy seat” came to be applied generally to the place of atonement.58 By referring to Christ as this “mercy seat,” then, Paul would be inviting us to view Christ as the New Covenant equivalent, or antitype, to this Old Covenant “place of atonement,” and, derivatively, to the ritual of atonement itself. What in the OT was hidden from public view behind the veil has now been “publicly displayed” as the OT ritual is fulfilled and brought to an end in Christ’s “once-for-all” sacrifice. This interpretation, which has an ancient and respectable heritage,59 has been gaining strength in recent years.60 It is

34) rather than as a masculine noun (“propitiator” — cf. the reading propitiatorum in some MSS of the Latin Vulgate, and some Fathers [Cranfield mentions Ambrose, Basilius, Jerome, and Peliagius]) or as an adjective modifying ὅς (S-H; Morison, Exposition, pp. 279-305; Scott, Christianity, p. 68).

62. The English “mercy seat” comes from Tyndale’s translation, which was in turn influenced by Luther’s Germ. “Gnadenstuhl.”


68. The word hilašterion was used for other things than the mercy seat in the OT and is used widely in secular Greek with reference to memorials and sacrifices that are intended to propitiate the gods. Therefore, Deissmann’s insistence that hilašterion does not mean “mercy seat” is correct (“Hilašterion und Hilašterion. Eine lexikalische Studie,” ZNW 4 [1903], 207-8). The word specifies the function of the cover over the ark — in its first occurrence in the LXX, it is used adjectivally (Exod. 25:16) and thereafter always has the sense of the OT when the mercy seat is denoted. The anathematically significant hilašterion of Rom. 3:25 has, then, been cited as evidence against the translation “mercy seat” (e.g., Morris, “Hilašterion,” p. 40). But this argument has little weight since there would be good grammatical reasons for the omission of the article in Rom. 3:25 (e.g., the predicative function of hilašterion [cf. Stuhlmacher, “Recent Exegesis,” p. 99]). Moreover, while hilašterion does not mean “mercy seat,” it is used absolutely in 20 of its LXX occurrences to denote that object. More serious is the logical strain involved in linking Christ with a “place of atonement;” but perhaps the strain is no greater than in thinking of Christ as the temple (John 2:19-21), as the rock that followed in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:4), or as both High Priest and sacrifice at the same time (cf. Hebrews). Moreover, there is evidence that the word, or the mercy seat it designates, becomes a semi-mechanical way of designating the atonement itself. In this case, objections to the interpretation based on the literal function of the mercy seat fall to the ground.

69. Many of the contemporary advocates of this view avoid this difficulty by attributing the imagery to a pre-Pauline confession formulated in Jewish-Christian circles (e.g., Hügel, Paul’s Gospel, pp. 47-72; Stuhlmacher, “Recent Exegesis,” pp. 99-100). But this is a move of questionable validity. Not only is the existence of a tradition uncertain (see the introduction to the section), but it is unlikely that Paul, were he using a tradition, would have quoted words from it that he knew, or suspected, would fail to communicate with his readers.

70. Cf. Stuhlmacher (“Apostle Paul’s View of Righteousness,” p. 83): “The Roman congregation was at home in the Old Testament Scriptures from the synagogue and from Christian worship. They were instilled in the traditions of their faith by Jewish-Christian missionaries.” Thus Paul might well be using cultic imagery from a tradition that the Christians in Rome would have been familiar. Not only, particularly, the striking similarities between Paul’s argument here and the argument of Heb. 9–10. These include verbal parallels — notably hilašterion, used only in Rom. 3:25 and Heb. 3:1–6.}
In fact, we do not find anything that would render the interpretation of *hilaston* against the background of the OT mercy seat improbable. Before drawing conclusions, however, other alternatives must be considered.

While Deissmann has shown that *hilaston* usually means "means of propitiation" in ordinary Greek, 21 C. H. Dodd has argued that the word in the LXX means "means of expiation," and he accordingly opts for this translation in Rom. 3:25. "Propitiation" has reference to the turning away of wrath, and the appeasement of the "wrath of the gods" by various means is a frequent theme in Greek literature. This theme Dodd finds totally absent in the Bible. The verb cognate to *hilaston* in the LXX has as its object sin, not God. The idea conveyed by the word and its cognates is thus, Dodd argues, the "covering," or forgiving, of sins, not the appeasing of God's wrath. 22 Others, while not endorsing all Dodd's conclusions, agree that reference to God's wrath should be eliminated from the word, and translate generally "means of atonement," 23 or "atonement," or "expiatory sacrifice." 24

9:5 in the NT, and ἀφοίητος, found in Rom. 3:24 and Heb. 9:15 (cf. also λάτρευε in 9:12) — but, more importantly, thematic parallels. Hebrews makes much of the inadequacy of the Old Covenant ritual — it "cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper" (9:9), "cannot take away sins" (10:11), and means, in its yearly repetition, a constant, "remembrance of sins" (10:1-4). This inadequacy, according to Hebrews, is not in the "once-for-all" sacrifice of Christ (cf. 9:14; "the blood of Christ"), whose death redeems those who are "saved from the transgressions under the first covenant" (9:15), brings the "forgiveness" of sins, as promised in the new covenant prophecy (10:17-18), so that there is now "at the end of the age" a "setting aside" of sin (9:26). In the same way, according to Paul, God has set forth Christ "as the present" time as a sacrifice that satisfies the demands of God's justice in his "passing over sins in the past." In both passages, then, the focus is on the way God has provided in Christ a sacrificial victim the basis for eternal redemption — a basis that was not provided through the OT cult. Moreover, Hebrews directs attention particularly to the Day of Atonement ritual (cf. 9:6). Not only, then, are we justified in suggesting that the passages move in a similar direction, but there is also further reason for thinking that Lev. 16 may be in the background of the Romans text.

74. Lollie, Mätner und Gotesleicht, pp. 150-52. Further reason for this interpretation is found in the alleged background of Paul's language in the traditions of the deaths of the Maccabean martyrs. Particularly significant is 4 Macc. 17:21-22: "... the martyrs having become, as it were, a ransom [λατρευόν] for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an expiation [τὸ ἱλαστήριον τῶν ἁρμονίων] divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been afflicted." See Lohse, ibid.; cf. also Hill.

But Dodd is almost certainly wrong on this point. The OT frequently connects the "covering," or forgiving, of sins with the removal of God's wrath. 25 It is precisely the basic connotation of "propitiate" that led the translators of the LXX to use the *hilask-* words for the Hebrew words denoting the covering of sins. 26 This is not, however, to deny the connotation "expiation"; the OT cult serves to "wipe away" the guilt of sin at the same time as — and indeed, because — the wrath of God is being stayed. 27 When to the linguistic evidence we add the evidence of the context of Rom. 1-3, where the wrath of God is an overarching theme (1:18; cf. 2:5), the conclusion that *hilastérion* includes reference to the turning away of God's wrath is inescapable.

This propitiation is, of course, altogether different from pagan notions of propitiation. First, as we have seen, the biblical conception of the wrath of God is far removed from the pagan picture of a capricious and often vindictive deity. God's wrath is the inevitable and necessary reaction of absolute holiness to sin. Second, in contrast to the secular religious tradition, it is God himself who initiates the propitiatory offering. "In the heathen

Greek Words, pp. 41-48; Williams, *Jesus* 1:Death, pp. 40-41; J. S. Polack, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (JSOTSup6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), pp. 61-63. W. J. Heard ("Maccabean Martyr Theology" [Ph.D. diss. University of Aberdeen, 1987]) pp. 487-91 thinks the primary background to the Maccabean martyr traditions, but sees these as built, in tum, on texts like Lev. 16 (cf. also Deheebe, *Glaube*, pp. 78-87). However, it is unlikely that Maccabean martyr theology has had any important influence on Paul's use of *hilastérion*; see particularly Stirnheber, "Recent Exegesis," pp. 100-102 (Lohse apparently reads 4 Macc. 17:22 according to the text of A, as σῶς τὸ ἱλαστήριον προκάθορον, his interpretation is not cogent, however, if the text of K, σῶς τὸ δόμα τῶν ἁρμονίων, is read [see Ralphs]). Despite claims to the contrary, these traditions have not exerted any strong influence on the NT, Paul's great indebtedness to the OT makes it more likely that the primary background for a word like *hilastérion*, which is used significantly in the NT, will be found there rather than in post-OT writings.

76. Cf. Williams, *Jesus* 1:Death, pp. 38-40. While there is little agreement about the etymology or meaning of the Hebrew root בּוּ, a good case can be made for finding some allusion to the notion of propitiation when it is used in conjunction with the cult. See the careful survey of usage by P. Garnet, "Atonement Constructions in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls," *EvQ* 46 (1974), 131-63. He concludes that בּו relates particularly to the removal of the guilt, or punishment due sin, and that this inextricably involves a change in God's attitude toward the sinner, and hence propitiation. Janowski (*Sühne als Heilsgeschehen*, pp. 15-102) provides a complete evaluation of the etymological question. The notion of propitiation in *Zärpfen* and its cognates is clearly present in the first-century Jewish author Josephus (cf. War 5:385; *Ant. 6:124, 8:112, 10:59, 16:182; *Ag. Ap. 1:1308(7)).
view expiation renders the gods willing to forgive; in the Biblical view expiation enables God, consistently with his holiness, to do what he was never unwilling to do. In the former view sacrifice changes the sentiment of the gods toward men; in the latter it affects the consistency of his procedure in relation to sin."  

Finally, we must decide whether Paul intends to present this wrath avenging sacrifice of Christ against the background of the typology of the mercy seat. Our main reason for hesitating to find allusion to the mercy seat is the lack of evidence for an early Christian or Jewish Greek tradition in which hilasterion was given the symbolic importance this interpretation suggests. Nevertheless, in this, as in so many other areas, Paul may have been the theological innovator; and the lexical data, combined with the theological appropriateness of the image, make it likely that Paul intends such an allusion. Christ, Paul implies, now has the place that the "mercy seat" had in the Old Covenant; the center and focal point of God's provision of atonement for his people. Since this atonement takes place by means of Christ's death as a sacrifice, and the word hilasterion includes reference to propitiation, translations such as "means of propitiation" and "propitiatory sacrifice" are not inaccurate. But they may be too restrictive. "Mercy seat" would be all right if the broader theological connotations of the phrase were obvious; but, considering the breadth of the concept to which the term refers, the NIV and NRSV "sacrifice of atonement" is as good as we can do.

In a piling up of prepositional phrases that are often seen as indicative of a confessional or hymnic style, Paul now expands on the significance and implications of God's setting forth Christ as the New Covenant "propi­tatory." "Through faith" is not likely to modify "set forth," since faith was not the instrument through which God set forth Christ as hilasterion. Rather, the phrase modifies hilasterion and indicates the means by which individuals appropriate the benefits of the sacrifice. It is harder to know whether "in his blood" indicates the object of "faith" — "faith in his blood" (cf. KJV). modifies the verb "set forth" — "through his blood God has presented him," or modifies hilasterion — "a propitiation in blood" (note the reversal of terms in NASB: "a propitiation in his blood through faith"). But Paul never elsewhere makes Christ's blood an object of faith, so the latter is preferable. "In his blood" singles out Christ's blood as the means by which God's wrath is propitiated. As in several other texts where Christ's blood is the means through which salvation is secured (Rom. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20), the purpose is to designate Christ's death as a sacrifice. The third prepositional phrase in the series indicates the purpose for which God "set forth Christ as a sacrifice of atonement": "for a demonstration of his righteousness because of the passing over of sins committed beforehand in the forbearance of God." Just what Paul means by this phrase is disputed, the pivotal issue being the meaning of "his righteousness." Scholars have proposed many interpretations, but there are two general approaches. The first takes "righteousness" ( dikaiosynē) to designate what we might call an aspect of God's character, whether this be his "justice" (iustitia distributiva), his impartiality and fairness, or his acting in accordance with his own character and for his own glory. The whole clause would then, be interpreted along the lines of the following paraphrase: "in order to demonstrate [or show] that God is just; acting in accordance with his own character, which was necessary because he had passed over sins committed before, in

84. Calvin; Hodge; Monson, Exposition, p. 311.
85. Fitzmyer.
86. So most commentators; see, e.g., Godet; Barrett; Michel.
87. Paul can use εγγυων with the theological implications he had in the Old Testament (Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:15), but it is not his usual construction.
88. The εγγυω is probably instrumental.
90. Gk. εχωδες, used here to introduce a purpose clause.
91. Gk. ενωςει. This is a relatively rare word, not occurring in the LXX and only twice outside this passage in the NT. It is debated whether it means here "proving" (RAGD; Cranfield) or "showing" (cf. particularly W. G. Kummel, "ενωςεις und ενωςη; Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre," ZTK 49 [1952], 161-62), but the emphasis should probably be placed on the latter at light of ἑξαρκεῖον, (Note also that, of Philo's 11 uses of ενωςεις, 10 refer to a public demonstration or indication. Piper ["Romans 3:25, 26," pp. 12-15] argues for the meaning "in light of the v. 26c, but lexical support for this translation is lacking.) On the other hand, this "showing" is probably to be understood as a "demonstration" of something, as in Phil. 1:28 and 2 Cor. 8:24, so the notion of "proof" cannot be entirely eliminated. God's public display of Christ as ἐνωςεις has, at least one of its purposes, the demonstration that he is "righteous."
the time of his forbearance."92 The second interpretation understands "righteousness" here to be God's saving, covenant faithfulness, which requires that the clause as a whole be translated something like "in order to manifest his saving faithfulness through his forgiving of sins committed before, in the time of his forbearance."93 On the first view, this clause makes an important contribution to our understanding of the "internal" mechanism of the atonement, explaining the necessity of Christ's propitiating work in terms of the requirements of God's holy character. God's past restraint in punishing sins with the full measure of punishment they deserved calls into question his fair and impartial "justice," or holiness. creating the need for this justice to be "satisfied," a satisfaction rendered by the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. On the second view, the clause ties God's work in Christ to his fulfilling of his covenant promises. God now fulfills those salvific promises by putting forth Christ as the means by which sins are forgiven. While the second view has been preferred by most contemporary scholars, there are sound reasons for adopting the first. Since the interpretation of "his righteousness" is so dependent on the meaning of other key words in the clause, we will begin with these words and come back to this phrase.

Especially critical is the interpretation of the prepositional phrase "because of the passing over of sins committed beforehand." Those who argue that "his righteousness" refers to God's covenant faithfulness insist that this translation of the phrase is incorrect. It should, they claim, be rendered something like "through [or for the sake of] the forgiveness of sins committed beforehand." The phrase would then express the means (or purpose) by which God has demonstrated his saving faithfulness: by acting to secure forgiveness for the sins committed under the Old Covenant.94 But this rendering has insufficient lexical support. The word we translate "passing over" does not mean "forgiveness," but, when applied to legal charges or sins, "postponement of punishment" ("pretermission") or "neglect" of prosecution.95 Nor is it likely that the preposition dia can here be translated "through."96 The preposition could have virtually a telic meaning ("with a view to"), but this makes little sense with the word "passing over."98 The translation "through [or for the purpose of] forgiveness of sins" must, then, be rejected as requiring strained and unusual meanings for too many words.99 But this further makes it very difficult for "his righteousness" to refer to God's saving faithfulness. For it makes no sense for Paul to say that "passing over" former sins was the reason for God's demonstration of his saving faithfulness.

But what are these "former sins" to which Paul is referring? The phrase at the beginning of v. 26 points toward an answer. "In the forbearance of God" should be connected with "passing over," and in light of Paul's only other use of "forbearance" (Rom. 2:4),100 it will refer to the period of time

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92. This is what might be called the "traditional" view, particularly in Protestant exegesis. Cf. the particularly clear presentation of this view by Denney, Death of Christ, pp. 96-107, and the recent succinct exegetical defense of Piper, 115-30; idem, Romans 3:25, 26, pp. 12-32. (Piper understands God's righteousness a bit differently than in the tradition, but his view certainly fits generally into the traditional Protestant view.)

93. The 1932 article of Kummel, "πάρεξις und διόκοις," pp. 154-67, paved the way for this interpretation. Cf. also Kasemann; Müller, Gerechtigkeit Gottes, pp. 109-11; Schlier; Willeke; Dunn; Reumann, Righteousness, pp. 31-38; Stuhlmacher, "Recent Exegesis," p. 95; Campbell, Rhetoric, pp. 157-75.


95. See esp. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ant. Rom. 7.37 (and the comments of J. M. Creed, "ΠΑΡΕΞΙΣ in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and in St. Paul," JTS 41 [1940], 28-30), and παρεξις in Xenophon, Eq. Mag. 7.10; Josephus, Ant. 15.48; slightly different yet still giving evidence of the meaning "pass over," is Sir. 23:2. See the discussion in 3:21-26 JUSTIFICATION AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

96. An instrumental translation of διά followed by an accusative, while possible in Hellenistic Greek, is so rare that compelling contextual reasons must be present if it is to be adopted. BDAG (222) give only one instance of διά with accusative meaning "through" in the NT, and it is in a compound verb. Cf. H. G. Meechan, "Romans ii.25f.; iv.25 — the meaning of διά c. acc.," ExT 50 (1935-36), 564; Williams, Jesus' Death, pp. 20-23; Piper, Romans 3:25, 26, pp. 29-30.

97. Calvin; Godet; Lietzmann; Willeke; Fitzmyer; Talbert, "Non-Pauline Fragment," 290.

98. E.g., Paul would be unlikely to claim that God has displayed his righteousness "for the purpose of passing over sins." 99. As concludes Taylor, "Great Texts," pp. 299-300.

100. Gk. ἀναφωνή, Williams Jesus' Death, pp. 25-33, on the basis of certain OT and Jewish texts, takes ἀναφωνή as a negative term, denoting God's failure to deal with the sins of Gentiles, allowing them rather to "pile up" and accumulate wrath. But there is insufficient evidence that this specialized aspect of God's "forbearance" is in view here. J. R. Mackay ("Romans iii.26," ExT 32 [1920-21], 329-30) and W. E. Wilson ("Romans iii.25, 26," ExT 37 [1917-18], 472-73) both suggest the translation "delay."
expresses the ultimate purpose of vv. 25b-26a: God let sins go unpunished, in his forbearance, “with a view to” demonstrating his righteousness at the present time. 109 But it is better to take the clause as parallel to “for a demonstration . . .” in v. 25. It resumes the topic of the demonstration of God’s righteousness after the intervening qualifiers and adds the important point that this demonstration has significance not only for the past but also for the present age. 110 A reference back to “but now” at the beginning of the paragraph is obvious, as Paul focuses again on the time after Christ’s coming as the climactic, eschatological age of salvation history.

There are only two ways to make sense of the connection between the final clause of the verse and the preceding context. Either Paul is indicating the ultimate purpose or result 111 of the sentence he began in v. 25 — “God set forth Christ as a propitiation in order that [with the result that] he is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” 112 — or it explains the immediately preceding clause — “for a demonstration of his righteousness at the present time, in order that he might show that he is just and the justifier of the person who has faith in Jesus.” Despite its somewhat weak support in the commentary, this last rendering should be preferred, because it preserves what seems to be a natural connection between “the present time” and “justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.” 113 On this view, the two purpose clauses in vv. 25 and 26 — both beginning “for a demonstration” — are parallel modifiers of “set forth,” the former focusing on how the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ enabled God to maintain his righteous character in postponing punishment of sins in the past, the latter showing how this same sacrifice

109. E.g., S-H.
110. Cf. Hodge; Morison, Exposition, p. 339; Schlier; Cranfield. Cf. the phrase ἐν τῷ θανάτω παρέχοντο ("at the present time"); Paul refers to θανάτῳ καὶ ἀποστασίᾳ also in Rom. 8:18 and 11:5, both with reference to the “present age” as the time of sharing the sufferings of Christ and of Israel’s hardening (cf. also ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ἀποστασίᾳ in 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:12, and 2 Cor. 6:2).
111. This alternative gives the construction of εἰς with the infinitive (ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ) what many would argue is its usual meaning.
112. E.g., Morison, Exposition, p. 315.
113. The rendering is grammatically unobjectionable: it gives to εἰς with the infinitive a meaning the phrase has in almost 25 percent of its Pauline occurrences (see the additional note on 1:24). A few scholars, building on their reading of the gentile ἐπιτύπωσεν Ἰωάννης in v. 22 as objective, think that τὸν ἐν πάσης Ἰσραήλ ἐπιτύπωσεν also denotes the person who rests on the “faithfulness shown by Jesus” (e.g., G. Howard. “Romans 3:21-31 and the Inclusion of the Gentiles,” HT 62 [1970], 229-31) or the person who shares the faith that Jesus had (e.g., Coogan, Theology of the Cross, p. 58). But our reasons for rejecting the subjective genitive in v. 22 are equally decisive against this reading. Paul only rarely uses ἐπιτύπωσεν absolutely (see also Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:10-11; Gal. 6:17; Eph. 4:21, Phil. 2:10; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:14), and his reason for doing so here is not clear.

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preserved God’s righteous character as he justifies those who, in this age of salvation, place their faith in Jesus. This being so, it is likely that “the justifier”114 is not coordinate with “just”115 — “just and justifying,” nor instrumental to it — “just by means of justifying,”116 but concessive — “just even in justifying.”117 Paul’s point is that God can maintain his righteous character (“his righteousness” in vv. 25 and 26) even while he acts to justify sinful people (“God’s righteousness” in vv. 21 and 22) because Christ, in his propitiatory sacrifice, provides full satisfaction of the demands of God’s impartial, invariable justice.118 To be sure, this way of viewing the atonement is out of fashion these days, frequently being dismissed as involving ideas completely foreign to the biblical teaching about God’s sovereignty and love. But whatever the mistakes of Anselm of Canterbury, whose famous treatise Cur Deus Homo (“Why God Became Man”) is widely regarded as the fountainhead of this approach, his emphasis on the divine character as incapable of dismissing sin lightly is a vital component in the biblical doctrine of God. Those who ignore or minimize the problem inherent in a holy God accepting sinners may well heed Anselm’s own warning: “You have not yet considered the weight of sin.”119

Luther called this paragraph “the chief point ... of the whole Bible” (see the introduction to his paragraph) because it focuses on what Luther thought was the heart of the Bible: justification by faith. Luther believed that this “article” was vital: “if that article stands, the church stands; if it falls, the church falls.”120 Later Lutherans coined the slogan “the article by which the church stands or falls” to highlight the central role that they accorded this doctrine. In Luther’s day, of course, “justification by faith” was a polemical thrust against a Roman Catholic teaching that insisted on the place of human cooperation in the grace of justification. Hence to the sola fide of the Reformers was added sola gratia — “by grace alone.” With these phrases, the Reformers expressed their conviction that justification is, from first to last, a matter of God’s own doing, to which human beings must respond but to which they can add nothing.


In 3:27–4:25, Paul expounds the great theological thesis of 3:21–26. Or, to be more accurate, he expounds one key element in that thesis. For we hear no more in 3:27–4:25 about the atonement, or the demonstration of God’s righteousness, or the provision for sins under the Old Covenant. Rather, Paul concentrates on the vital theme stated in v. 22: “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Faith is the topic in every paragraph of this section of the letter, as Paul uses a series of antitheses to draw out the nature and implications of faith as the sole means of justification. Faith is contrasted with “works of the law” (3:28), “works” (4:1–8), circumcision (4:9–12), the law (4:13–16), and “sight” (4:17–22). With these contrasts Paul enunciates what has become a hallmark of the Reformation teaching: sola fide — that “faith alone” is the means by which a person can be brought into relationship with the God of the Bible. Sola fide, Paul argues in this

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114. Gk. δικαιοσύνη.
115. Gk. δικαιοσύνη.
117. Morison, Exposition, p. 343; Cranfield.
118. See again, especially, Denney, Death of Christ, pp. 97–98; also Ridderbos, Paul, pp. 193–96; Morris, Apostolic Preaching, p. 257.
119. “Nondum considerasti quam ponderis peccatum sit.” On Anselm, see the comments of Weber, Dogmatics, 2.207–14 (a bit too negative?); McGrath, Justitia Dei, 1.55–60.
120. Luther’s Exposition of Ps. 130:4.
section, is necessary in order to maintain sola gratia: "by grace alone." But it is also necessary in order to ensure that Gentiles have equal access with Jews to the one God. The inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God has been God’s plan all along, as his dealings with Abraham demonstrate. The revelation of God’s righteousness “apart from the law” (v. 21) has now opened up this possibility in a way that was not the case before. This concern with the inclusion of the Gentiles is thus also an important theme in this section; but, contrary to many contemporary scholars, who are reacting to what they perceive to be an excessive concern with the individual and his or her relationship to God in traditional theology, it is not the main theme. The inclusion of the Gentiles within the people of God continues to crop up — 3:29-30; 4:9-12, 16-17 — but only as one motif within the larger argument.

The antitheses in this section reveal its polemical thrust. Paul is once again “arguing” with a Jewish or Jewish-Christian viewpoint, contesting the importance of the law (3:27-28; 4:13-15), works (4:2-8), and circumcision (4:9-12). Indicative of this thrust is the return to the “dialogical” style of 2:1-5, 17-19; 3:1-8. On the other hand, in the balance that so characterizes Paul’s presentation of his gospel in Romans, he is at pains to maintain continuity with the OT and with Judaism. Justification by faith is nothing more than what the OT itself teaches (chap. 4, passim); faith “establishes” the law (3:31); and even circumcision, while no longer the necessary sign of those who belong to God, is upheld as valid for Jews (4:11-12). These positive remarks about OT and Jewish institutions stand in marked contrast to the somewhat parallel passage in Galatians (chap. 3), where Paul’s polemical forces him to take a more one-sided slant. In Romans, however, Paul is intent on showing how his gospel breaks the boundaries of the Old Covenant while at the same time standing in continuity with it; continuity within discontinuity is his theme. Such balance was necessary if the Romans were to understand and appreciate Paul’s gospel as a message that meets the needs of all people.

While the preoccupation with Abraham in chap. 4 sets apart that chapter from the last paragraph of chap. 3, the two sections are closely related. In fact, an impressive degree of parallelism between the two is evident:

1. The parallel between chap. 4 and 3:27-31 extends to key words:

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Boasting is excluded (3:27a)</td>
<td>Abraham has no right to boast (4:1-2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>... because one is justified by faith, not works of the law (3:27b-28)</td>
<td>... because Abraham was justified by faith, not works (4:3-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumcised and uncircumcised are united under the one God through faith (3:29-30)</td>
<td>Circumcised and uncircumcised are united as children of Abraham through faith (4:9-17)</td>
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Naturally, the much longer chap. 4 introduces a number of points not found in 3:27-31, but the similarity in general theme and development is striking. We may, then, view 3:27-31 as the initial statement of the theme, with chap. 4 as its elucidation and elaboration.


1. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. Through what law? Of works? No, but through the law of faith. 28 For we reckon that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not also the God of Gentiles? Yes, he is God also of the Gentiles, 30 since there is one God, who will justify the circumcision on the basis of faith and the uncircumcision through that faith.

31 Do we then nullify the law through faith? By no means! Rather, we establish the law.

2. Moses (Theology in Conflict, pp. 226-29) finds a further parallel, holding that 3:31 and 4:13-22 are similar: the law is “established” (3:31) when it is viewed as promise (4:13-22). But, as I argue in my exegesis, the meaning Moses attributes to 3:31 is unlikely.

3. See esp. R. A. Harrisville III, The Figure of Abraham in the Epistles of St. Paul: In the Footsteps of Abraham (San Francisco: Mellen, 1992), pp. 21-22. Stowers is more exact, classifying 3:27-4:2a as a dialogue between Paul and a Jewish “student,” with 4:2b-25 as the “exemplum” (example from the life of a famous person) that validates the points of the dialogue (Diatribe, pp. 164-73).

4. Much of the Alexandrian text (R. A. 81), the heart of the western text (original hand of D, F, G), and the uncial Ps read ýóπ, the basis for our translation “for.” But some important MSS (the Alexandrian B, C, 33, and the second corrector of D; cf. also the majority text) read ἐκατόν in its place. And this alternative is adopted by a number of scholars, who argue that it is more difficult, ýóπ making for a more natural transition between vv. 27 and 28 (e.g., Morris, Exposition, pp. 369-78). But this is not clear; ἐκατόν is used often by Paul, and particularly in verses such as this, that a scribe could easily have substituted it for ýóπ (cf. Altford, Bengal; Metzger, 509).
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Paul moves quickly through several implications of and arguments for justification by faith. He begins by showing how justification by faith excludes any possibility of boasting on the part of Jews (vv. 27b-28). The next two verses provide further reason for accepting the principle that justification must be by faith with no admixture of "works of the law"; only so can God truly be the God of Gentiles as well as Jews. Finally, in v. 31, Paul responds briefly to a Jewish objection to his stress on faith; no, he argues, faith does not nullify but "establishes" the law — enables it to be truly fulfilled. The style, as in 2:1-5, 17-29 and 3:1-8, reflects the diatribe method of argumentation, with its question-and-answer format. As in the earlier sections, it is difficult to say — and perhaps not all that important — whether we have here a "real" dialogue between Paul and a Jewish interlocutor, or whether Paul himself is responsible for posing questions to himself as a means of making his points. 6

27. The question "Where then is boasting?" with its answer "It is excluded" draws an inference from vv. 21-26. "Boasting," of course, is a sin common to all people — it reflects the pride that is at the root of so much human sinfulness. But Paul is probably thinking here particularly of Jews and their boasting. This is suggested by his elaboration in terms of the "law" in vv. 27b-28, by his dialogical style — the "Jew" has been his dialogue partner earlier (cf. 2:17), and by the focus on Jew and Gentile in vv. 29-30. What is the nature of this boasting? and why is it wrong? One interpretation holds that Paul is thinking of the pride of the Jews in their special covenant relationship to God (cf. 2:17). Such pride, Paul would then be arguing, has now been ruled out by the revelation of God's righteousness apart from that covenant and its law. There is considerable truth in this view, as is clear from the Jewish emphasis throughout these chapters and from Paul's stress that God has now revealed his righteousness "apart from the law" (3:27). But this "salvation-historical" explanation does not, in itself, go far enough. Paul's reason for excluding boasting has to do with a contrast between faith and works (vv. 27b-28) — two kinds of human response to God (reasons for not limiting "works of the law" to Jewish covenant privileges will be given below). And this is confirmed by the parallel teaching about Abraham in chap. 4. The hypothetical basis for Abraham's boasting is not simply covenant "identity markers" but "works" in a general sense. Moreover, Paul's use of Abraham as a key example shows also that it is not just with the coming of Christ that boasting becomes wrong; Abraham, many centuries before Christ, had no cause to boast either.

The root issue here, then, is not salvation-historical, but anthropological. It is not the Jew's pride in a covenant relationship with God, but the pride in accomplishments, the tendency for the Jew to think that his obedience to the law constituted some kind of claim on God, that Paul rejects. 11 This does not mean, however, that the very doing of the law was wrong because it involved sinful, boastful presumption. 12 There is nothing at all wrong with doing the law, according to Paul. The problem, rather, is when doing the law is regarded as an achievement on the basis of which a relationship with God could be established or maintained. This is wrong because justification can come only by faith: not only now that Christ has been revealed (vv. 21-24) — although this makes it even clearer — but in the past also (chap. 4). This is not to say, either, that all Jews were prone to such a "legalistic" attitude. Certainly, the centrality of the law in the Jewish religion rendered Jews very susceptible to such a tendency; but all people, being fallen, exhibit the same tendency: Greeks, boasting in their wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:19-31); Americans, boasting in their "American way of life"; and all too many Christians, boasting in their "good deeds" instead of in the grace of God.

Paul's explanation for the exclusion of boasting, as we have seen, rests on a contrast between "works" and "faith" (v. 27b). What is striking about this contrast is that Paul formulates it with the help of the word "law" (nomos): "Through what nomos [is boasting excluded]? [Through the nomos] of works? No, but through the nomos of faith." What is his purpose in using this word here? Paul's normal usage of nomos would suggest that he uses the word throughout the verse with reference to the law of Moses, the torah. Paul would then be contrasting two different ways of understanding, or using, the law of Moses: understood simply in terms of "works," it could lead to boasting; but

6. E.g., Wilckens, 1:244.
7. The verb is the aorist εἴθηθεν. Some scholars have suggested that the aorist connotes a "decisive," once-for-all, rejection (e.g., Räisänen, 170); but this reflects the all-too-typical overloading of the meaning of the aorist tense in Greek.
8. Paul here uses the Greek word καυχάσμα, which he uses ten times in his letters (cf. also Rom. 15:17; 1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 1:12; 7:14, 16; 8:24; 11:10, 17; 1 Thess. 2:19); he also uses the related word καυχάσματα ten times (Rom. 4:2; 1 Cor. 5:6; 9:15, 16; 2 Cor. 1:14; 5:12; 9:3; Gal. 6:4; Phil. 1:26; 2:16). Based on their formation, we would expect the former to connote the act of boasting and the latter the cause of boasting. While this distinction is not always observed in Paul, καυχάσμα here certainly refers to the boasting itself. (On the meaning of "boasting" in Paul, see the comments on 2:17.)
11. E.g., Rydberg, Paul, pp. 140-41; Westerholm, 170.
13. The Greek here is simply τὸν ἐγγύον (see our translation above); but the words δῆμος τούτου from the previous question are to be supplied.
understood in terms of "faith," it excludes all such boasting. Advocates of this view sometimes point to the word we have translated "what?" as important support for their view. For the "lital’ meaning of this word is "what kind of?" and this qualitative connotation supports the idea that Paul is asking here about contrasting qualities of the same law. But the "lital’ translation is, in fact, not clearly dominant in the NT, where the translation "what?" receives strong support. On either translation, it is straining the wording to think that Paul is referring to two perspectives on the same law rather than to two different laws.

But an even more serious objection to this interpretation is the close relationship between the law of Moses and faith that it assumes. For such a positive relationship between these two contradicts both the movement of this passage and Paul’s larger teaching about the law. In both 3:21-26 and 3:28, the faith that gains a standing with God is explicitly distanced from the Mosaic law ("apart from the law’; "apart from works of the law"). It is just this distance that gives rise to the question in v. 31: "Do we then nullify the law through faith?" This question does not make sense unless Paul has, in this context, fully separated "faith" from the law of Moses. And this same careful distinction between believing and "doing" (the law, works of the law) is maintained throughout Romans (cf. 2:25-29; 3:20; 4:2-8; 9:31–10:8) and the Pauline writings (cf. esp. Gal. 3:12). An allusion to a connection — however it is viewed — between faith and the Mosaic law in v. 27 would run quite counter to this clear principal distinction. It is our faith, "apart from works of the law" (v. 28), that rules out of court any possibility of boasting — not a new way of looking at the law (cf. also the plain antitheses in 4:2-6 and 13-15).

A second interpretation is, then, to be preferred: that Paul is contrasting two different "laws.” On this view, the word nomos, in both its actual occurrences in the verse, has a metaphorical sense: "principle," or "rule.” Some scholars think, then, that there is no direct allusion to the law of Moses at all here; Paul simply contrasts the "principles" of works and faith. But Paul connects the Mosaic law and "works" too often in Romans (cf. 2:16-17; 25:27-3:20) to make it possible to eliminate reference to the torah. We take it, then, that nomos in Paul’s question, while meant to have a general reference — "what ‘rule’ or ‘system of demands’ excludes boasting?" — would naturally bring to mind the law, the torah. Paul then adds the contrasting modifiers to make clear his point: no, it is not through the torah, that law which demands works, through which boasting is excluded: it is through the "rule" of faith, the "ordinance" or "demand" of God for faith as the basis for justification (v. 28). Rather than being entirely metaphorical, then, Paul’s use of nomos


16. The Greek word is nοτός. While this word has a basic "qualitative" meaning — "what kind of?" — it frequently loses all qualitative force, being used as equivalent to τι (cf. BDP 208[s]). In fact, the majority of the 33 NT occurrences of nοτός seem to have lost any qualitative meaning.

17. A broader meaning of νόμος, in the sense of a "principle," or "order," or "rule," is well established in pre-Christian Greek. From the etymological meaning of νόμος, "that which is allotted, that which is proper," comes the meaning "any kind of existing or accepted norm, order, custom, usage or tradition" (cf. H. Kleuker’s, 1 TDT IV, 2023-24). While this broad meaning became largely submerged under the more dominant legal usage in later times — a process accelerated in "Jewish Greek" by the use of νόμος to translate תורayah — the broader meaning of νόμος did not disappear. For instance, Josephus can speak of the "νόμος of war," e.g., the "[unwritten] rules, or customs of warfare" (J.W. 5:123) or of the "law" of historical writing (J.W. 5:20). Similarly, Philo refers to the νόμος, or "norms" of music (On the Creation 54, 70). These references, and others from roughly the same period, show that this "general" use of νόμος was very much a "live" meaning in first-century Greek — and especially among Greek-speaking Jews. See also especially the thorough survey of H. Räisänen, ‘Sprachliches zum Spiel des Paulus mit NOMOS,” in The Torah and Christ (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 45; Helsinki: Kirjapaino Raamatutalo, 1986), pp. 119-47. Paul probably uses the word with this meaning also in 7:21, 23-25, 8:2. And Winger (By What Law? 92) notes that a generic modifier is one possible pointer to this metaphorical sense of νόμος.

18. Cambien, L’Evangile de Dieu, pp. 148-52; Alford; Godet; Hodges; S-H; Denney; Murray; Barrett; Kuss; Morris.

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embodying a “play on words,” in which the characteristic demand of the Mosaic covenant — works — is contrasted with the basic demand of the New Covenant (and of the OT, broadly understood; cf. chap. 4) — faith.

Paul’s point is that the narrow focus of most of his fellow Jews on the Mosaic law as the system within which their relationship to God was established gives rise to an implicit “boast” in human achievement; what a person does in obedience to the law becomes, in some sense and to varying degrees, critical to one’s “righteousness.” Once it is seen, however, that God’s righteousness comes to people “apart from the law,” there can be no more cause for any pride in human achievement.

28 In this verse Paul explains21 “the nomos of faith.” It is a “rule” or “principle” pertaining to faith that “a person22 is justified by faith23 apart from works of the law.” Paul here promulgates no new rule; the first person plural “we reckon” probably indicates that he assumes that his readers would join him in this assessment.24 Paul’s concern to meet Jewish views is evident in his addition “apart from works of the law.” As in 3:20, what is meant is not certain kinds of works, or works viewed in a certain light, but anything a person does in obedience to the law and, by extrapolation, anything a person does. This being the case, Luther’s famous addition of sola (‘alone’) to fide (‘faith’) — in which he was preceded by others, including Thomas Aquinas25 — brings out the true sense intended by Paul. A serious erosion of the full significance of Paul’s gospel occurs if we soften this antithesis; no works, whatever their nature or their motivation, can play any part in making a sinner right with God.

29-30 “Or”26 introduces the alternative to the principle set forth in v. 28: if justification is by works of the law, then only those “in the law” can be justified, and God becomes the God of Jews only. Paul rejects this alternative with the question, “Is he not also the God27 of Gentiles?” To this question Paul gives the answer already implied by the form of the question:28 “Yes, he is God also of the Gentiles.” In v. 30, Paul both explains why29 God must be God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews and draws an implication from that truth. The explanation comes in the main clause: “there is one God.”30 Paul takes one of the most basic of Jewish beliefs, monotheism, and turns it against Judaism. The “oneness” of God was confessed by the pious Jew every day: “the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). Yet if this is so, then God must be God of the Gentiles; else they would be left with no god. To be sure, Jews also believed that God was God of the whole world. But the limitations they placed upon this concept illustrate the rationality of Paul’s argument. For, in Judaism, God was the God of Gentiles only by virtue of his creative work, while only the Jews enjoy any meaningful relationship with God; this is expressed in later Jewish text: “I am God over all that came into the world, but I have joined my name only with you [Israel]; I am not called the God of the idolaters, but the God of Israel.”31 Only by accepting the torah could Gentiles hope to become related to God in the same way as Jews. In this paragraph, and in many other places in Romans, Paul makes clear that the torah no longer functions as the “dividing wall” between those who are outside and those who are inside the sphere of God’s people.32

20. Dunn argues that the contrast in this verse is between a view of the law in terms of “works,” with prominence thereby given to Jewish “identity markers,” and looking at it in terms of faith, which opens it up to the Gentiles. But this underlines the fact that the law as a whole — not just certain “identity markers” — is particularly Jewish in its focus (see, e.g., S. Westerholm, Review of The Obedience of Faith: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context, by D. S. Garlington, JBL 112 [1993], 356). This was a viewpoint that Paul shared (cf., e.g., 2:12; 3:19) with the OT itself; cf. Ps. 147:19-20: “He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them.” If the barrier between Jew and Gentile is to be removed, it is not a new perspective about the law that must come, but the law itself, as a system, that must go. See also Laato, Paulus und das Judentum, pp. 229-40; Schreiner, “Works of the Law,” pp. 234-38.

21. Assuming that the conjunction to be read here is yap, with an explanatory function.

22. Gk. ἀνθρωπος, which universalizes the statement (cf. also Gal. 2:16).

23. Gk. πιστις. This is the only place in which Paul uses πιστις in the active with ἄναπαθος (“justify”), but it is more than a stylistic variant of the more typical ἐπί πιστις. The Greek is ἐπί πιστις. Paul uses this word with various nuances, but it here refers to the “conviction” about God’s way of justifying that Paul has been setting forth (cf. RSV: “we hold”). The plural form of the verb may be editorial, or it may include both Paul and other Christian teachers, but it probably embraces both Paul and his readers.

25. Others who added the “alone” here are, according to Fitzmyer, Origen, Theodoret, Hilary, Basil, Ambrosiaster, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Bernard, and Theophylact.


27. The Greek is simply σωξι καὶ ἔφωνοι; in the other two clauses in this verse, the word θεὸς (“God”) must be supplied from the context — e.g., ἰ [θεὸς] Ἰουδασίων ὁ θεὸς ἔφωνοι; σωξι [θεὸς] καὶ ἔφωνοι; να [θεὸς] ἔφωνοι.

28. The σωξι implies that the question has a positive answer.

29. The καθαρός introducing the verse has a slightly causal meaning: “since,” “seeing that” (BAGD; Cranfield).

30. R. W. Thompson, however, thinks that Paul bases his argument not simply on the oneness of God, but on the “God who justifies the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision by faith” (“The Inclusion of the Gentiles in Rom 3:27-30,” Bib 69 [1988], 545-46).

31. Exod. Rab. 29 [1884].

OT, while the law was not the means of salvation, it did function to “mark out” the people of God; and in Judaism, it became an impenetrable barrier. But for Paul monotheism, as he has come to see it in Christ, means that there can be no such barrier; all must have equal access to God, and this can be guaranteed only if faith, not works in obedience to the Jewish law, is made the “entrance requirement.”

Paul states this radical implication of monotheism in a relative clause: “who will justify the circumcision on the basis of faith and the uncircumcision through that faith.” The variation in prepositions in Paul’s description of the faith of the circumcised (“ek faith”) and that of the uncircumcised (“dia faith”) has stimulated the ingenuity of commentators for years. But none of the suggested distinctions makes very good sense; the change in prepositions is probably simply a stylistic variation.

31 The function of this verse in the context can be determined only after the meaning of Paul’s assertion that “faith establishes the law” has been decided. This assertion comes in response to the question, raised by Paul himself (“we”), but undoubtedly reflecting an objection he had heard frequently as he preached to Jews: “Do we then nullify the law through faith?” How would faith nullify the law? Through Paul’s emphasis on faith “alone,” to the exclusion of “works of the law,” in justification. The polemical situation forced Paul to harp on the inadequacy of works and the limited, and passing, importance of the Mosaic law; and this gave to his preaching an “anti-law” flavor. But, as on other occasions when Paul faces such an objection (cf. Rom. 7:7), he responds with a forthright denial: “By no means!” He then follows this up with a counterassertion: “Rather, we establish the law.” That Paul affirms here a continuing role for the law, despite its playing no part in justification, is clear. But what role Paul may intend for the law is disputed.

The main possibilities are three, according to whether Paul views the law as testifying, convicting, or commanding.

1) The first is the most popular. Its advocates point to 3:19 and 3:21 for evidence that Paul in this context uses “law” broadly as a reference to Scripture. And, in both 3:21 and chap. 4 (Gen. 15:6), Paul affirms just this “testifying” role of the law in relationship to his teaching of justification by faith. While, then, it is faith, not the law, that justifies, this stress on faith “establishes” the law by setting forth that to which the law bears witness. While a “testifying” role of the OT is plainly asserted in this context, this interpretation suffers from two major problems. First, the connection between v. 31b and chap. 4, on which so much rests, is questionable. Had this been the function of v. 31b, we would have expected chap. 4 to begin with “for” rather than with “therefore.” A second objection is more serious. That Paul sees in the OT a witness to his teaching about its contrast with the verb ἐστὶν (“establish”). For this contrasting pair of verbs is said to reflect the use of the Hebrew verbs ḥēb and ἔποιη in rabbinic exegetical discussions (Michel; Käsemann; Cranfield; Dunn). But the evidence for the exegetical application of the Hebrew words is weak, and so is the evidence for their equivalence with the Greek words used here (see esp. Hüner, 140-41; Rhyne, Faith Establishes the Law, p. 73; Frommer). Probably then, we need to interpret both words apart from this background, in which case ἐστὶν will mean something like “make of no account,” “render purposeless.”

35. Gk. ἐστὶν. The most detailed defense is that by Rhyne, Faith Establishes the Law, Ch. also, inter alia, Hüner, 137-44; E. Loew, “Wir wissen das Gesetz auf! Glaube und Thora im Römerbrief,” in Treue zu Thora. Beiträge zur Mitte des christlich-jüdischen Gesprächs (ed. P. von der Osten-Sacken; Berlin: Institute Kirel und Judentum, 1977), p. 65; O. Hofius, “Das Gesetz des Mose und das Gesetz Christi,” ZTK 80 (1983), 279-80; Carelli, L’Evangile, pp. 164-68; Räisänen, 67-70 (as one meaning); Godet; Alford; Meyer; Lietzmann; Käsemann; Wicke. Moores (Theology on Conflict, p. 229) holds a variation of this view, according to which Paul upholds the law as promise.

36. Gk. ἔσται. The lack of a υἱός here distinguishes this context from the typical Pauline sequence in which an objection in the form of a question is met with a curt negative—usually μὴ ἐστιν—a counterassertion, and extended explanation (contra Rhyne, Faith Establishes the Law, pp. 34-61, who argues that 3:3ff, fit this pattern).
justification by faith is clear. But when denoting that function of the OT, he uses "the law and the prophets" (v. 21) or the "Scripture" (Gal. 3:8).

Nowhere does he use "law" by itself to indicate this witnessing role of the OT. Even in Rom. 4, "law" is used in a negative sense and is not linked with the "witness" of Gen. 15:6. Perhaps most significant is 4:3, which introduces the quotation of this verse by asking, not "What does the law say?" but "What does the Scripture say?" These points do not make it impossible that Paul refers here to the testifying role of the law — but they make it unlikely. 41

(2) According to a second interpretation, the law is established in its role of condemning sinners and preparing the way for Christ. 42 This function of the law is also mentioned in the context (3:19) and receives extensive treatment in Gal. 3:15-4:7. While this view deserves more consideration than it has been given, it has against it the fact that "law" is not used with this reference in the immediately preceding verses: Yet it is these verses, 27-30, that spark the objection in v. 31:

(3) When the meaning of "law" in the immediate paragraph is considered, it is clear that it is the commanding aspect of the law that is prominent: "law of works" (v. 27); "works of the law" (v. 28). In fact, as we have noted, Paul normally uses "law" to denote the body of commands given by God through Moses. 43 And in other contexts where the continuing validity of the law is discussed, this is also the significance of "law" (cf. 7:7-12; 8:2-4; 13:8-10). This makes it likely that Paul argues here for the establishment of the Mosaic law in its commanding aspect. But in what sense is the law as demand established? (a) Does Paul mean that Christians are obliged to continue to obey the ("moral") demands of the law? 44 (b) Or does he anticipate 13:8-10, where the command to love is set forth as the "fulfillment" of the law? 45 (c) Or is he thinking of the way in which our faith in Christ provides for the full satisfaction of the demands of the law?

1. Many scholars label Rom. 4 a "midrash." As in a midrash, Paul not only concentrates on the exposition of a verse from Scripture (Gen. 15:6), but he also adds a secondary text from outside the Pentateuch (Ps. 32:1-2; cf. v. 7-8), which is linked to the primary text through a wordplay (to'yil;oµm). Indeed, some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that Paul is building the chapter on a preexisting midrash (cf. esp. von der Miade, Schrift und Tradition, pp. 68-85; also Michel; P. Borgen, Bread from Heaven (NovTSup 10, Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 69). However, while Paul makes extensive use of traditional themes, there is no evidence to justify the supposition of a traditional piece behind Rom. 4 (cf. Moine, Theologie in Conflict, pp. 204-5). Whether we call the chapter a midrash or not will depend on the definition we give to that exceedingly slippery term. Certainly the chapter contains features reminiscent of Jewish midrashic techniques. But we would perhaps be wise to refrain from labeling the chapter a midrash until a firmer definition of the term is forthcoming.

sion and uncircumcision dominates vv. 9-12. Here Paul shows that the "reckoning" of Abraham's faith for righteousness took place before he was circumcised, thereby enabling him to become the "father" of both Jewish and Gentile believers. This same concern with the inclusive importance of Abraham is stressed in vv. 13-22, where Paul focuses on the promise that Abraham would be the father of "many nations," or "all the seed." The ruling contrast — though not so clearly sustained as in the previous two paragraphs — is between "faith" and "law," with a minor contrast perhaps suggested in vv. 18-21 between faith and "righteousness." The quotation of Gen. 15:6 at the end of v. 22 brings Paul's exposition back to where it began in v. 3; the final three verses of the chapter apply the lessons Paul has drawn from his text to his Christian readers.2

As we noted in the introduction to 3:27-4:25, the parallels between them show that Paul in chap. 4 expands on the themes he introduced in 3:27-31. But why has Paul singled out Abraham as the reference point for this expansion? One reason is undoubtedly polemical. Abraham was revered by the Jews as their "father" 3 and his life and character were held up as models of God's ways with his people and of true piety. "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life" (Jub. 23:10); Abraham "did not sin against thee" (Pr. Man. 8); "no one has been found like him in glory" (Sir. 44:19).4 In keeping with the nomistic focus of first-century Judaism, Abraham was held up particularly as a model of obedience to God. His righteousness and mediation of the promise were linked to this obedience; it even being argued that he had obeyed the law perfectly before it had been given.5 Paul would naturally want to show his Roman readers that this understanding of Abraham, which his Jewish and Jewish-Christian opponents undoubtedly cited against his teaching (cf. Gal. 3-4), was not in accord with the OT. Through Paul's interpretation of Gen. 15:6, Abraham is wrested from the Jews as an exemplar of torah-obedience and made into an exemplar of faith. As a result, Abraham ceases to be for Paul the father of Jews exclusively but the father of all who believe. Käsemann's judgment is therefore justified: "The polemic which runs through the whole chapter shows that we are dealing here not with an extension or modification of the Jewish view, but with its contrast." 6

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2. Moxnes, Theology in Conflict, p. 41, has a similar outline.
3. Cf. Isa. 51:1-2; m. Qidd. 4:14. 4. See also 1 Macc. 2:52; m. 'Aba 5:3; Philo, On Abraham 52-54, passim; Josephus, Ant. 1.256; etc.

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But Paul is drawn to Abraham for more than polemical considerations. That Paul cites Abraham as an example for believers is clear. But Abraham is much more than an example. After all, the Jews focused as much as they did on Abraham because of the decisive role the OT gives to him in the formation of the people of Israel and in the transmission of the promise. Both Paul's insistence that justification is by faith alone and his concern for the full inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God make it necessary for him to integrate Abraham theologically into his scheme.7 At least, it was necessary if Paul's teaching was to have any claim to continuity with the OT. It is also evident that Paul considered this continuity to be essential—not just for polemical reasons, but for the sake of the gospel itself, which is the gospel of God (1:1) — "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." 8

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1. Faith and Works (4:1-8)

1. "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?" 2. For if Abraham was justified by works, he has

7. Paul's interpretation of Abraham's significance in this chapter is fair to the teaching of Gen. 12-25 and shows little dependence on Jewish traditions (see Harrisville, Abraham).
9. The middle part of v. 1 is found in four forms in the textual tradition:

1. εὐφρατεύεται Ἀβραὰμ τὸν προφέτατα ἡμᾶς — "has found Abraham our fore-
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reason to boast, but not before God. So for what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed in God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 4Now for the one who works, the wages are not reckoned according to grace, but according to obligation. 5But to the one who does not work but believes on the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness. 6Just as also David pronounces a blessing on the person to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

7Blessed are those whose lawless acts are forgiven and whose sins are covered; 8blessed is the person whose sin the Lord does not reckon. 9a. Gen. 15:6 10b. Ps. 32:1-2

The argument of the paragraph unfolds in four stages. In vv. 1-2 Paul denies that Abraham is any exception to the principle laid down in 3:27-28; all boasting is excluded because justification is by faith. Verse 3 cites the scriptural evidence for Abraham’s justification by faith. This reckoning of Abraham’s faith for righteousness is shown in vv. 4-5 to be a gracious act of the “God who justifies the ungodly,” thereby eliminating any place for “works” in the process. Finally, vv. 6-8 confirm the sovereign character of God’s “reckoning,” here defined in terms of forgiveness, with appeal to

father” (the Alexandrian MSS Ξ [original hand], A, C [original hand], and 81; the Byzantine second corrector of Κ); 2. ἐπέρασεν Ἀβραὰμ τὸν κόσμον ἡμῶν — “he found Abraham our father” (the Alexandrian MS C [third corrector], the western MSS D, F, G, the uncial Ψ, the Byzantine first corrector of Κ); 3. Ἀβραὰμ τὸν κόσμον ἡμῶν ἐπέρασεν — “Abraham our father has found” (the Alexandrian minuscule 33 and the majority text); 4. Ἀβραὰμ τὸν προγόνον ἡμῶν — “Abraham our forefather” (the Alexandrian MS B; 1739 has πάτερος).

The presence of κόσμος in some MSS is a clear case of a more common word being substituted for a less common one; προγόνος is almost certainly original. More significant is the possibility that ἐπέρασεν is not original (cf. option 4). It is omitted in the very important B; and the different placement of the word (cf. options 1, 2, and 3) may suggest that it was added to the text (Lightfoot, S-H). With this omission, we would translate v. 1 as in REB, “What, then, are we to say about Abraham, our ancestor by natural descent?” But it is more likely that ἐπέρασεν has been omitted from the original text, either accidentally, because of its similarity to the preceding ἐφόσον (Mezger, 599), or deliberately because of the awkwardness of the syntax. Godet argues for reading 3 because he thinks προγόνον should be attached to the verb, but this connection is unlikely, and reading 1, with its stronger external support, should be adopted.

11. While ὅπως frequently has inferential force (“therefore”), it marks a simple transition here (“then”).
12. προέρχομαι, used only once in the LXX and only here in the NT, is a variant of the usual formula “Abraham our father.”
13. This translation assumes that the infinitive ἐπέρασεν introduces a noun clause that specifies the content of the verb ἐφόσον (“we say”). This is more likely than the suggestion of Hays, who takes τί ὅπως ἐφόσον as a separate question and “Abraham” as the object of ἐπέρασεν: “What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham (to be) our forefather according to the flesh?” (“Have we found?”, pp. 76-98; cf., contra Hays, Harrisville, Abraham, p. 22). The somewhat awkward use of ἐπέρασεν (”to find”) in the question may be due to the LXX expression ἐφέρασεν Ἑλεός Ἰάσων (Isa. 57:17) (“to find mercy [grace]”) — used with respect to Abraham in Gen. 18:3 (e.g., Cranfield; Dunn). But it is probably a case simply of ἐφέρασεν meaning “find to be the case,” “discover by experience” (cf. 7:10, 21). Paul asks his readers to contemplate with him what Abraham has found to be the case with respect to the matters he is discussing.
14. Cf., e.g., Rhyne, Faith Establishes the Law, pp. 75-76.
15. E.g., Murray; Cranfield; Dunn.
16. See the introduction to 3:27-4:25 for the parallels.
17. Jewett, Anthropological Terms, pp. 425-26; Hodge; Godet; Meyer; Stuttmarck.
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16:18) suggests rather that this phrase limits “our forefather.” This limitation may involve physical as opposed to spiritual generation — “our [the Jews’] forefather ‘according to natural physical generation.’” But something of the usual pejorative sense of the phrase “according to the flesh” is probably to be found here as well: Abraham’s “paternity” in relationship to Paul and other Jewish Christians (“we”) is limited not just by physical descent but also by a narrow, “old era” perspective. For from a “new era” perspective, Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jewish and Gentile (cf. 4:11-12).

2 In this verse, Paul explains why he has asked about Abraham’s experience in v. 1. The flow of thought may be paraphrased: “What shall we say about Abraham? For if we say he was justified by works, he has reason to boast, and my claim in 3:27-28 that all boasting is excluded is called into question.” The question about Abraham’s being justified by works is no idle one. As we have seen, the Jewish interpretation of Abraham stressed his works as the essence of his piety and the basis for his extraordinary, exemplary relationship to God. Paul’s conditional sentence assumes the reality of this situation for the sake of argument — “if Abraham was justified by works” — and draws out the consequence: he “has reason to boast.”

Paul contests the conclusion in a brief rejoinder: “but not before God.” But does this rejoinder limit Abraham’s boasting or reject it altogether? If the former, Paul would be implying that Abraham’s boasting was limited to the sphere of his fellow human beings: before people Abraham has some reason for pride; but “before God” he has no reason to boast. If Paul were speaking simply about Abraham’s works, this would be a possible interpretation. But Paul is speaking of Abraham’s works in relation to his justification.

18. E.g., Cranfield.

19. The ἐγώ does not require that Paul be addressing Jewish Christians at this point (as Minear, 52-53, thinks); he may be speaking from the perspective of himself and other Jews or Jewish Christians, without including his readers.


21. Note the γάρ, “for.”

22. Cf. Godet; Cranfield.

23. Paul uses ἢ with the indicative in a so-called “first-class” condition. Since Paul clearly rejects the possibility stated in this condition, Schmithals thinks that Paul here abandons the usual meaning of the conditional clause. But the “first-class” condition does not require that the condition be a real one — only that it be viewed as such for the sake of argument. On the nature of this conditional sentence, cf. further Lambrecht, “Why Is Boasting Excluded?” pp. 366-67.


25. Gk. ἢλιθινον ὑπὸ πρὸς θεὸν. The preposition πρὸς here means “as far as — is concerned to” (BAGD); its meaning here is probably influenced by the Hebrew יִתְנָא.

26. E.g., Godet; S-H; Wilckens.

And since Paul rejects any possibility of justification by works (cf. vv. 3-5), it is more likely that Paul rejects Abraham’s claim altogether: all boasting in this context, whether before God or people, must be ruled out. “But not before God,” then, rejects the logic stated in the conditional sentence: when God’s viewpoint is considered, Abraham has no right to boast at all. The abrupt “but not before God” states in preliminary fashion the conclusion of Paul’s argument, in which the protasis of the sentence (“‘if Abraham was justified by works’”) is disproved.

3 Paul now explains this “but not before God” by citing the scriptural teaching about Abraham’s justification. The text that he cites, and which becomes the reference point for the rest of the chapter, is Gen. 15:6. While Jewish authors had already seized on Gen. 15:6 as a particularly important text, Paul has more than a polemical purpose in citing the verse. Not only is this the first time the word “belief” occurs in Scripture, but it is connected with the attaining of righteousness — one of the very few times in the OT that this connection is made. And the verse, of course, describes Abraham — the “father” of Israel and recipient of God’s promise. Paul therefore has very good reasons from within the OT itself to make this a banner verse for his gospel, as he does both here and in Gal. 3.

In Gen. 15:6, Abraham’s “faith” is his complete trust in God with reference to God’s promise that he would have a natural descendant (vv. 4-5). But since this promise is a renewal of the one that God made to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3, the promise with reference to which Abraham believes in Yahweh...
includes the worldwide blessing promised in the earlier text. Of considerable importance for Paul’s use of the text is the meaning of God’s “reckoning” Abraham’s faith “for” righteousness. The language could suggest that his faith is considered as the “equivalent” of righteousness— that God sees Abraham’s faith as itself a “righteous” act, well pleasing to him. But if we compare other verses in which the same grammatical construction as is used in Gen. 15:6 occurs, we arrive at a different conclusion. These parallels suggest that the “reckoning” of Abraham’s faith as righteousness means “to account to him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him.” Abraham’s response to God’s promise leads God to “reckon” to him a “status” of righteousness. If this interpretation of Gen. 15:6 is correct, then Paul’s application of the verse is both fair and appropriate. To be sure, the new connotations given the terms “faith” and “righteousness” as a result of Paul’s christological focus cannot be ignored. But the essential point, that Abraham’s relationship with God is established as an act of God’s grace in response to Abraham’s faith, is the same in both Genesis and Romans. Here Paul distances himself emphatically from the typical interpretation. For Jewish interpreters often viewed Gen. 15:6 through the lens of Gen. 22, so that Abraham’s “faith” became his obedience to God and was regarded as a “work” for which God owed Abraham a reward. Paul’s interpretation stands squarely against this tradition and is also a more faithful interpretation of the original.

In vv. 4-5, Paul draws two theological consequences from what is said about Abraham’s justification in Gen. 15:6: (1) works have no part in justification; and (2) this is so because God’s justifying verdict is not earned, but given freely. To be sure, Paul does not state things in just this way. His argument is more involved and even somewhat unclear. This is because he disrupts what would seem to be an intended parallelism between vv. 4 and 5 by shifting from the contrast between grace and obligation in v. 4 to a conclusion about justification in v. 5. Nevertheless, the two points isolated above emerge clearly enough.

The theological application of Gen. 15:6 that Paul makes in vv. 4-5 reveals his true interest in Abraham’s justification and illustrates the hermeneutical principle he states in vv. 23-24: “the words ‘it was reckoned to him’ were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also.” And it is particularly the nature of the “reckoning” that Paul is interested in. Verse 4 picks up this key word from the quotation in v. 3, as Paul lays down a general principle about the “reckoning” or “accounting” of “wages” to a worker. If a person “works,” says Paul, the pay he or she receives in return is a matter of obligation, or fair compensation; the employer “owes” the worker a certain wage and is not giving it “freely,” or “without compulsion.” This contrast, which is found in secular commercial language as well as in the religious discussions of Judaism, is never given its theological application in this context. But the implicit “theologic” of Paul is clear: since work means the reward is given by obligation, the reward of righteousness must not be dependent on work—for God is never obliged by his creatures; justification is a gift, freely bestowed, not a wage, justly earned. That God acts toward his creatures graciously—without compulsion or necessity—is one of Paul’s nonnegotiable theological axioms. He uses it here to show that the faith that gained righteousness for Abraham was a faith that excluded works. For many of us, accustomed by four centuries of Protestant theology to the Pauline “faith vs. works” contrast, this point might appear mundane. But it flew in the face of the dominant Jewish theology of the day, which joined faith and works closely together, resulting in a kind of synergism with respect to salvation. Against this, Paul argues that the “reckoning” of faith


34. Cf., e.g., Zieseler, Righteousness, pp. 181-85.

35. C. P. Roberton, “Genesis 15:6: New Covenant Exposition of an Old Covenant Text,” WITJ 12 (1980), 265-66; cf. also H. C. Leuchter, “Gerechtigkeit und Glaube. Genesis 15, 1-6 und sein biblisch-theologischer Kontext,” EvT 40 (1980), 408; Calvin, Genesis, p. 405; Leupold, Genesis, p. 477; W. Brueggemann, Genesis (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), pp. 144-46. The relevant construction is the use of the verb ἰσοποιέω following by the preposition ἐπί. It describes the offering of sacrifices, which are “reckoned” to a person’s benefit (cf. Lev. 7:18; Num. 18:27, 30—this background is stressed by G. von Rad, “Die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit,” TLZ 76 (1951), cols. 129-32; K. Seybold, on the other hand, stresses a commercial background [TDOT V, 243]). Others refer to a status, or legal standing, which someone “reckons” to someone else. In 2 Sam. 19:20, e.g., Shimei, who confesses his sin, nevertheless asks David not to “credit his guilt against him” (עושה נני לי בְּעַצְמְךָ). What Shimei is asking is that David “reckon” or “regard” him in a way that overlooks, or does not correspond to, the facts of the case. In Ps. 106:31, similarly, God’s “reckoning” Phinehas as righteous (see Num. 25) is a declarative act, not an equivalent compensation or reward for merit (cf. also Gen. 31:15; Ps. 33:22).


for righteousness — in Abraham’s life, or in anyone else’s — is a reckoning that is wholly of grace and must be, then, based on faith. Viewed in this light, Paul’s point does not rest on an alleged Hebrew concept of reckoning: he is arguing that grace is the necessary consequence of reckoning, or of faith. Grace is not the end point but the beginning of his logic; from the fact of grace comes the conclusion that the faith that justifies must be a faith that is “apart from” all works (cf. 3:28).

5 The transition from general principle to theological principle explains the contrast between “the one who works” in v. 4 and “the one who does not work” at the beginning of this verse. With this last clause Paul is not “canonizing laziness” (Morriss); nor does he mean that a Christian need never produce “good works.” As Calvin rightly emphasizes, Paul is the last theologian who would countenance a complacent Christian, unconcerned with the active putting into practice of one’s faith. Rather, what Paul has in mind, in light of the contrast with “[the one who] believes on the one who justifies the ungodly,” is the person who does not depend on her works for her standing before God. The one who justifies the ungodly” is justly famous as a succinct and bold statement of Paul’s conviction that our standing with God is wholly of God’s free grace. To appreciate the boldness of this characterization, we must set it beside OT condemnations of human judges who “justify” the guilty (Isa. 5:23; Prov. 17:15), and especially with God’s declaration in Exod. 23:7 that “I will not justify the wicked.” What is involved, of course, is a new application of the word “justify.” The OT texts refer to the declaration or recognition of an existing situation. But Paul has in mind a creative act, whereby the believer is freely given a new “status.” What is highlighted by the phrase is the nature of God — loving, freely giving, and incapable of being put under obligation to any human being. It is the person who believes in this God, and who thereby in his belief renounces any claim on God that his good works might exert, whose “faith is reckoned for righteousness.” Likewise, it becomes clear again that faith for Paul is something qualitatively distinct from any human-originated endeavor. We believe, but we can take no credit for it. As Jonathan Edwards puts it, the point of the verse is,

45. As, e.g., H. W. Heidland (TDNT IV, 290) thinks.
44. As, e.g., Barrett and Moxnes (Theology in Conflict, p. 110) conclude.
47. As Cranfield suggests.
48. See Hodge; Cranfield.
49. “Ungodly” translates the Greek word ἄσεστος, which denotes one who “refuses to worship” (cf. my comments on the cognate ἄσεσθαι in 1:18). The term is therefore a strong one, as its other NT occurrences attest: cf. Rom. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 4:18; 2 Pet. 2:5, 6; 3:7; Jude 4, 15.

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50. “Justification by Faith Alone,” Works 1.622. Dunn implies that such conclusions represent an overinterpretation of the text as a result of reading it through Lutheran spectacles. But it needs to be said, first, that the spectacles are not peculiar to Lutheranism; the same pair are worn by virtually all the heirs of the Reformation — from strict Reformed to Methodist. But, second, and most important, we are convinced that Dunn’s own dismissal of these implications is the result of an overly narrow interpretation of Paul’s interaction with his Jewish contemporaries (see, further, the excursus after 3:20).
51. “David” appears in the title of Ps. 32; in addition, it was becoming customary to associate him with the Psalter as a whole.
52. Gk. λέγει, which here means “speak about,” “attribute,” “pronounce.”
53. Gk. μετάγινε. Paul is the only NT author to use this word (cf. also v. 9; Gal. 4:15); he uses it here as the substantive corresponding to μετάγειν and μεταγίνεται in the quotation in vv. 7-8.
54. Gk. τοῦ ἄσεστον. The genitive indicates the person “with reference to” whom or “over whom the blessing is pronounced.
55. Paul’s use of the middle form λογίζεσθαι in an active sense with God as its subject (in contrast to the passive λογίζομαι with faith as its subject as in v. 3) because he is again underlining the language of the quotation that follows. Nevertheless, as Murray notes, the variation in Paul’s language shows that he regards as materially equivalent the expressions “it was reckoned to him for righteousness,” “God reckoned righteousness to him,” and “God justified him.”
56. See the introduction to these verses, χαῖρετο δὲ ἐν, “just as also.”
7-8 The words of David are taken from Ps. 32:1-2a. One of the reasons why Paul quotes these verses is the presence in them of the key word “reckon.” The practice of associating verses from the OT on the basis of verbal parallels was a common Jewish exegetical technique. But unlike the extremely artificial connections between verses often established through this method by Jewish exegetes, Paul’s association of Ps. 32:1-2 with Gen. 15:6 and his exposition of it is very much to the point. For the Psalm verses closely associate the forgiveness of sins (v. 1) with the Lord’s “not reckoning” a person’s sins against her (v. 2). In other words, it is not the “reckoning” of people’s good works but God’s act in not reckoning their sins against them that constitutes forgiveness. This perfectly accords with Paul’s concern to portray justification as a free act of God that has no basis in a person’s works. Two other implications flow from the association of these Psalm verses with Paul’s exposition. First, it is clear that the forgiveness of sins is a basic component of justification. Second, Paul reveals again his strongly forensic understanding of justification. For he uses this quotation to compare justification to the non-accrediting or not “imputing” of sins to a person. This is an act that has nothing to do with moral transformation, but “changes” people only in the sense that their relationship to God is changed — they are “acquitted” rather than condemned.

ii. Faith and Circumcision (4:9-12)

Therefore, was this blessing given to the circumcised, or to the uncircumcised also? For we are saying, “Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.” How, then, was it reckoned? When he was circumcised or when he was yet uncircumcised? It was not when he was circumcised but when he was uncircumcised. And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness of faith that was his when he was uncircumcised, in order that he might be the father of all those who believe while not circumcised — so that righteousness might also be reckoned to them — and the father of the circumcised.

57. LXX 31:1-2a. Paul reproduces the LXX exactly, the LXX translation differing from the MT only on minor stylistic points.


1. Many early and important witnesses (the primary Alexandrian uncials 70, [original hand] and B, the secondary Alexandrian minuscules 81 and 1739, and the uncial W) omit the adverbial word “also” in this clause. UBS 4 encloses the word in brackets, indicating that the decision is a difficult one but that the editors incline slightly to its inclusion (following the Alexandrian C, the western D, F, and G, and the majority text). The decision has minimal impact on the meaning of the verse.

4:9-12 Faith and Circumcision

—those who are not only circumcised but also walk in the steps of our father Abraham, who believed while still uncircumcised.

Quickly returning to his key text, Paul notes another significant aspect of the reckoning of Abraham’s faith for righteousness — it took place before he was circumcised. This circumstance allows Paul to claim Abraham as the father of all believers, both circumcised and uncircumcised. Paul thereby makes clear that it is not necessary to be Jewish to become a member of the people of God. Faith alone — apart from works (4:3-8), apart from circumcision (4:9-12) — is sufficient to gain entrance into Abraham’s spiritual “family.” It becomes evident here that Abraham is much more than an “example” of faith. As the recipient and mediator of the promise, his experience becomes paradigmatic for his spiritual progeny.

9 Having used Ps. 32:1-2 to confirm and interpret Gen. 15:6, Paul now turns back to Gen. 15:6 to add a further dimension to his application of Ps. 32:1-2. The question that is raised is whether “the blessing” of forgiveness of sins, accomplished through the Lord’s gracious “non-reckoning” of them against a person (cf. vv. 7-8), is applicable only to the circumcised, or to the uncircumcised also. The second sentence of the verse, in which Paul cites Gen. 15:6 again, does not explain the opening question, nor does it gives its answer. Rather, Paul here sets the stage for his answer by reminding his readers of the OT text that speaks authoritatively about these matters.

10 As in vv. 3-5, Paul focuses on the meaning and circumstances of the “reckoning” of Abraham’s faith: “How, then, was it reckoned? When he...
was circumcised or when he was yet uncircumcised?" Paul's answer is clear and direct: "It was not when he was circumcised but when he was uncircumcised." Paul does not justify this answer, but the course of the argument in v. 11 makes clear that Paul has in mind the chronological progression of the Genesis narrative about Abraham. Abraham's faith "is reckoned for righteousness" when God promised him a son (Gen. 15); but it is not until much later — twenty-nine years, according to the rabbis — that he is circumcised (Gen. 17).

11. In the first part of this verse, Paul amplifies his answer at the end of v. 10 by showing the relationship between Abraham's justification by faith and his later circumcision. What was the significance of Abraham's circumcision? It was, Paul claims, a "sign." Paul tells us what this "sign" was in an appositive addition: "a seal of the righteousness of faith that was his when he was uncircumcised." Genesis 17:11 calls circumcision a "sign of the covenant." In light of the tendency among Paul's Jewish contemporaries to identify this covenant as the Mosaic covenant, Paul's decision to connect the signatory value of circumcision with "the righteousness of faith" (Gen. 15:6) is emphatic. Everything in Abraham's experience with the Lord, Paul suggests, has its source in his justification by faith. While there are Jewish texts that characterize circumcision as a "seal," their late date makes it uncertain whether the description was a reference to the covenant is implied (ibid.).

12. Paul now claims Abraham and the inheritance that is dependent on Abraham, this means that there is a strong connection between Abraham and the Gentiles. Paul believes that Abraham's faith was his by virtue of his circumcision, which was a sign of the covenant. Circumcision, therefore, has no independent value. It cannot effect one's entrance into the people of God; nor does it even "mark" a person as belonging to God's people apart from a prior justifying act. Abraham was declared righteous while still uncircumcised. His later circumcision added nothing materially to that transaction; it simply signified and confirmed it.

In verses 11b-12 we have one long purpose clause, with a result clause ("so that righteousness might also be reckoned to them") stuck inside it. In the major purpose clause, Paul depicts Abraham as the spiritual father of all believers, both Gentiles and Jews. It is dependent on v. 11a, although the two parts of the clause relate to different elements in 11a: (because Abraham believed while uncircumcised, he is the father of all Gentile believers; because he believed and was also circumcised, he is qualified to be the father of all Jewish believers). As we have seen, Abraham is specially revered as the "father" of the Jewish nation (cf. 4:1); and with salvation practically confined to Israel, this meant that one could become Abraham's spiritual descendant only through incorporation into Israel — through birth, or, occasionally, through conversion. Paul now claims Abraham and the inheritance that is dependent on Abraham, this means that there is a strong connection between Abraham and the Gentiles. Paul believes that Abraham's faith was his by virtue of his circumcision, which was a sign of the covenant. Circumcision, therefore, has no independent value. It cannot effect one's entrance into the people of God; nor does it even "mark" a person as belonging to God's people apart from a prior justifying act. Abraham was declared righteous while still uncircumcised. His later circumcision added nothing materially to that transaction; it simply signified and confirmed it.

16. The texts are b. Shabb. 137b; Exod. Rab. 19 (R1c); Tg. Ket. Cant. 3:8. Also significant is the allusion in Barn. 9.6. Michel, D. Flusser, and S. Safra ("Who Sanctified the Beloved in the Womb," Immanuel 11 [1980], 46-55) think the usage pre-dates the NT; G. Fitzmyer believes it is later (TDNT VII, 949).

17. The genitive τῆς εὐλογίας indicates source: "righteousness that has its source in faith,"

18. From the middle of the second century, the word "seal" was used with reference to Christian baptism (cf. Herm.: I Clem.). Many scholars also think that the word has baptismal connotations in Eph. 1:13 and 4:30. This factor, coupled with the relationship drawn between circumcision and baptism elsewhere in the NT (cf. Col. 2:11-15), has led many expositors to suggest that Rom. 4:11 has at least indirect reference to Christian baptism (e.g., Wilckens; Küesemann [cautiously]). The evidence for this claim is, however, inconclusive. The Ephesians texts fall far short of a clear allusion to baptism, and reading back the imagery of later Christian writings into the connections established in texts like Col. 2:11-15 are between spiritual circumcision and baptism. We consider an allusion to baptism in this verse, then, as unproven and improbable (cf., e.g., Dunn).

19. Although proselytes were forbidden from calling Abraham "our father" (cf. Barrett, From First Adam to Last, p. 31).
his (cf. vv. 16-17), for anyone who believes. It is through faith, and not through incorporation into the nation of Israel, that one becomes Abraham’s spiritual “child.” Indeed, Abraham’s Gentile “children” are mentioned first in the compound purpose clause. Paul at this point inserts a parenthetical remark in which he notes a consequence of the belief of the Gentiles; they, like Abraham, have their faith reckoned to them for righteousness.

12 After the brief interruption at the end of v. 11, Paul now resumes his main purpose clause. Paul indicates that Abraham’s receiving of circumcision had the purpose of qualifying him to be the “father of the circumcised — those who are not only circumcised but also walk in the steps of our father Abraham, who believed while still uncircumcised.” But who comprises this category of “the circumcision”? A few expositors think the word might have a spiritual sense here, designating the Christian community as a whole (cf. Phil. 3:3). But the context of Rom. 4 focuses too much on the distinction between Jews and Gentiles to make that likely. Others think that the long explanatory clause Paul adds to the word “circumcision” makes it clear that he has two groups in mind: both Jewish believers, “children” of Abraham as participants in the righteousness of faith, and Jews generally, who continue to be the beneficiaries of at least some of the promises God made to Abraham (see Rom. 9:5 and 11:28). Advocates of this view argue that the wording of the qualifying clause could point to a translation in which two separate groups are denoted: “not only to those who are ‘of the circumcision’ but also to those who follow in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had when uncircumcised.” But there are other elements of the wording that point to one group; and the context strongly suggests that Paul is referring to Jewish Christians: those of the circumcision “who are not only circumcised but also walk in the steps of our father Abraham,” who believed while still uncircumcised.”

20. The infinitive εἰς τὸ λόγον τῆς ζωῆς probably indicates result rather than purpose (Käsemann; Cranfield; Wilcken; contra Godet; Michel; Barrett; Dunn; Turner, 143).


22. The grammatical point that could favor this rendering is the presence of the article (τὸς) before σωτηρίαν (“those who walk”). See, e.g., Käsemann; Fitzmyer. In a variation of this view, some think that the two groups are Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians (cf. J. Swetnam, “The Curious Crux at Romans 4:12,” Bib 61 [1980], 110-15).

23. Gk. τοῖς; the article is plural (it refers to the singular noun περιτομής) because Paul is thinking of the sense in which he uses the latter word.

24. This translation is necessarily interpretative. Paul actually makes “faith” (σωτηρίας) the object of “walk in the footsteps,” thus revealing both the metaphorical nature of the phrase and the emphasis Paul wants to put on faith.

25. As Cranfield points out, the placement of the first τοῖς is strange if Paul had intended to enumerate two separate groups. Had this been his intention, we would have expected the order ὧν τοῖς ἐκ περιτομῆς γόνον (“not to those of the circumcision only”); cf. the order of words in v. 16b. Scholars who think that Paul is referring to only one group explain the second article as a careless “slip of the pen” on the part of Paul or Tertius, his scribe (S-H; Kuss; Cranfield; Wilcken, or as the mistake of an early scribe, who wrote τοῖς where Paul had ὧν τοῖς (“to them”) (Michel). It may be better, however, simply to acknowledge an unusual word order (cf. Moule, Didom Book, p. 110 (“an intrusive article”; Godet; Lightfoot).

1. The translation “and” reflects the reading ἀν, supported strongly by the Alexandrian family (the original hand of Κ, Β, C, and 81). The alternative reading is γάρ (“for”), which must support the western family (D, F, G), one MS of the Alexandrian family (1759), and the majority text. There would have been good reason for γάρ to have replaced ἀν since γάρ has been used three times in vv. 13-15a and v. 15b is naturally construed as an explanation of v. 15a.

2. Many witnesses (the western family [D, F, G], the majority text, the Alexandrian minuscule 33, and the uncial 09) include the negative particle οὐ in front of the verb λέγειν ("observe"). At first sight, this reading would seem to yield a significant
Many expositors divide this passage into two paragraphs, putting a break after v. 16 or v. 17. But while Paul’s focus does shift at this point from a polemical contrast between law and faith to a more positive portrayal of Abraham’s faith, the theme of the promise runs throughout vv. 13-22, binding them together in an overall unity. The noun “promise,” which occurs for the first time here in the letter, is used four times in these verses, the verb “to promise” once. In each case, the reference is to the promise given to Abraham, with Paul emphasizing particularly how it was faith that secured what God had promised. There is evidence that Paul has built his exposition on the foundation of a traditional Jewish and Jewish-Christian interpretation of Abraham’s faith. This interpretation, whose general outline can be discerned in Philo, Acts 7, Heb, difference in meaning. Yet this is not the case. If the particle is included, Paul would be emphasizing that Abraham did not weaken in faith because he did not “consider,” in the sense of “let himself be influenced by,” the physical circumstances. If it is omitted, on the other hand, Paul would be saying that Abraham did not weaken in faith, even though he “considered,” in the sense of “took into account but dismissed,” the physical evidence. Since the omission of the word has slightly stronger external support (strong support from the Alexandrian family [K, A, B, C, 81, and 1739]) and the addition of the particle is the sort of “correction” that a scribe would naturally be tempted to make, όδο should not be read.

3. The external support is almost evenly balanced on the question of whether to read Ἰήμη before εὐεραφείζεων (“dead”). The bulk of the Alexandrian family (K, A, C, 33, 81), the western D, the uncial, and the majority text include it; while two Alexandrian witnesses (B and 1739) and two western uncial (F and G) omit it. NA22 and UBS4 include the word in brackets. The UBS committee decided that external evidence favored inclusion, while internal evidence went the other way, it being easier to understand how the word would have been added than subtracted (Metzger, 510-11). A decision is difficult, but we are inclined to accept it since it makes good sense with the perfect participle.

4. The external evidence favors including the ξαί after δό — the majority of witnesses include it (most of the Alexandrian family [K, A, C, 33, 81, and 1739], the western D [first corrector], Ψ, and the majority text), and the combination of B, the Greek text of D, and G, which omit it, is not a strong one. This makes a difficult decision, but the tendency may well have been to omit an original ξαί as redundant.


11, and 1 Clem. 10, focuses particularly on the miracle-working power of God and the way Abraham (and Sarah) experienced this power by ignoring the “facts” of the situation and trusting rather in the promise of God. However, while this theme is evident in vv. 17-21, the first part of Paul’s exposition departs from the traditional interpretation with its polemical contrast between the law and faith and, to a lesser extent, with its inclusion of the Gentiles in the “seed” of Abraham. Paul’s concern to claim Abraham as the spiritual ancestor of Christians is evident here again. Surfacing again also is his concern with grace and universalism, which Paul believes can be upheld only if faith rather than the law is the instrument by which what had been promised to Abraham is attained. Verses 13-22 continue, then, Paul’s exposition of faith by way of contrasts: to “faith apart from works” (vv. 3-8) and “faith apart from circumcision” (vv. 9-12), we can add “faith apart from the law” (vv. 13-16) and “faith apart from sight” (vv. 17-21).

13. As the “for” suggests, the paragraph beginning in v. 13 has an explanatory function — it explains why Paul made no mention of the law in tracing the spiritual descendants of Abraham (vv. 11-12). This omission, in light of the standard Jewish view that it was Abraham’s fidelity to the law that secured God’s blessing (see the introduction to 4:1-25) and that one could be Abraham’s child only by taking on oneself “the yoke of the torah,” requires explanation and defense. Paul makes his position clear in v. 13: it was not “through law”9 but “through the righteousness of faith” “that the promise was to Abraham or to his seed, that they should be the heirs of the world.” “Law” refers, as the Jewish polemical context makes clear, to the Mosaic law.11 In Gal. 3, Paul makes his case for the exclusion of the law from God’s dealings with Abraham on the basis of simple chronology — the law, given four hundred and thirty years after the promise, cannot annul or substantially alter this previous agreement between God and Abraham (vv. 15-17). Some think that his argument is presumed here in Romans also.12 But this is not
clear. Probably Paul has not used the chronological argument because he wants to apply his reasoning to Abraham’s descendants as well as to Abraham. And, since most of Abraham’s putative descendants lived after the giving of the Mosaic law, the chronological argument would obviously have no point.

“Not through the law” denies, then, that what had been promised to Abraham was attained by him or by his descendants through the law, for example, by their doing of the law. 13 Rom. 4 does not focus on the chronological implications of “seed” that Paul brings out in Gal. 3. 14 The word here is purely collective, the reference being to all who are numbered among the “descendants” of Abraham (cf. also vv. 16, 18, 9:7-8). The clause “that they should be the heirs of the world” explains what the promise is. 15 This language does not exactly match any promise to Abraham found in the OT but succinctly summarizes the three key provisions of the promise as it unfolds in Genesis: that Abraham would have an immense number of descendants, embracing “many nations” (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4-6, 16:20; 22:17), that he would possess “the land” (Gen. 13:15-17; 15:12-21; 17:8), and that he would be the medium of blessing to “all the peoples of the earth” (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Particularly noteworthy is the promise in Gen. 22:17b that Abraham’s seed would “possess” the gate of their enemies.” Later in the OT, there are indications that the promise of the land had come to embrace the entire world (cf, Isa. 55:3-5), 17 and many Jewish texts speak of Israel’s inheritance in similar terms. 18 Against this background—to which we can add Jesus’ beatitude, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth”—Paul probably refers generally to all that God promised his people. 19

14 Paul now explains (“for” 22) why the promise cannot be attained “through the law”: “if22 those who are of the law were heirs, 23 faith would be emptied 24 and the promise would be nullified.” 25 “Those who are out of the law” is a literal and rather awkward translation of a phrase that appears to mean something like “those who are basing their hope for the inheritance on the law,” 26 The phrase does not, then, refer to Jews per se, 27 but to those who have nothing more than their status as Jews as a basis for inheriting the blessings promised to Abraham. For there are Jews who, living “in the sphere of the law,” 28 add to their Jewishness faith in Christ; and the righteousness before God they gain by that faith makes them, like Abraham, heirs of the promise. As “only” is appropriately added to “faith” in 3:28 to bring out the meaning, so also here we might paraphrase “if those who have only the law are heirs…” 29

Why, if Jews as such were heirs, would faith and the promise be jeopardized? Paul might mean that the granting of the inheritance to Jews on the basis of their relationship to the law would empty the terms “faith” and “promise” of their essential theological meaning. One can hardly apply the word “promise” to something that a person has a “right” to; nor is faith, in the Pauline sense of absolute trust in God, an appropriate word to use for what is one’s “birthright” or “wage.” 29 However true this may be (cf. 4:4-5), the verbs Paul uses do not naturally suggest this interpretation. 30 In light of these verses, Paul probably means that the exercise of faith has failed to attain its end. Why are faith and the promise rendered futile if Jews apart from faith are the heirs? The reason that is suggested by the logic of Rom: 1–3 and by the explanation in v. 15 is the inherent impossibility of any person adhering to the law to the extent necessary to gain the inheritance. In other words, Paul is arguing: “If it is the case that the inheritance is to be based on adherence to the law, then there will be no heirs, because no fallen human being can adequately adhere to the law—and that means that faith is exercised in vain and the promise will never be fulfilled.” 31

24. Gk. ἐκκλήσεως, a perfect passive form of ἐκκλήσω. 25. Gk. ἔκπληκτος, a perfect passive form of ἐκπλήκτω. Paul probably uses the perfect tense of both verbs in this apodosis to emphasize the state of affairs that would result from the condition being fulfilled.

26. The Greek is of ὑπόθεσιν. 27. Contra, e.g., Klein, “Römer 4,” p. 158. 28. See the phrase ἐν τῷ νόμῳ (“in the law”) in 2:12; 3:19.

29. See Barrett; Nygren.

30. In Paul, who is the only NT author to use the word, ἐκκλήσω (“empty”) means “deprive of power” (1 Cor. 1:17), “render vain or futile” (1 Cor. 9:15; 2 Cor. 9:3), or “make of no effect” (Phil. 2:7—cf. M. Silva, Philippians [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], p. 119). Perhaps most important, however, is Paul’s use of ἐκκλήσω in 1 Cor. 15:14, where he tells the Corinthians that their faith is “in vain” if Christ has not been raised. ἐκπλήκτω, while having a fairly broad range of meaning in Paul (see on 3:3), probably has a similar meaning here: the promise fails to take effect, is rendered null and void. 31 Calvin; cf. also Godet; Cranfield.
15. The first clause of this verse substantiates the conclusion drawn in v. 14 by showing what the law does — “produces wrath” — as opposed to what it cannot do — secure the inheritance. Paul is countering the very positive, and sometimes even salvific, function given the law in Jewish theology. The second clause in the verse is a parenthetical explanation of the reason why the law produces wrath: “And where there is no law, neither is there transgression.” It is difficult to decide whether the clause is a statement about the Mosaic law specifically or a kind of “gnomic” statement about the nature and function of law, as “law.” 34 In either case, the application is to the Mosaic law, which is clearly referred to in the first part of the verse. But what is the point of this statement? Murray thinks that Paul is justifying the universal infliction of God’s wrath. According to him, Paul’s logic goes like this:

God justly inflicts wrath for transgressions.
Wherever there is “law,” there is “transgression.”
“Law” is universal (Paul here assuming what he argued in Rom. 2:12-16).
Therefore: God’s infliction of wrath on all people is just.

Another way of reading the clause, however, is to attribute it to the more limited purpose of explaining why the Mosaic law works wrath. Paul’s logic would then be:

Violation of law turns “sin” into the more serious offense of “transgression,” meriting God’s wrath.
God gave the law to the Jews.
The Jews have transgressed the law (cf. 2:1-29; 3:9-19).
The law brought wrath to the Jews. 35

This second interpretation is the more likely. A statement about the negative results of the Mosaic law fits well in the context, since vv. 13-16 are dominated by the “not through the law” of v. 13a. An explanation of the causes of God’s wrath does not fit nearly as well and appears to be a needless repetition of the argument of Rom. 1:18-3:20. Moreover, Paul’s use of the word “transgression” rather than “sin” suggests that he is not thinking of the general condition of sin that justifies the infliction of God’s wrath, but the more specific situation that obtains wherever people are confronted with clearly defined, verbally transmitted laws and commands. For Paul does not use “transgression” as a synonym for “sin.” “Transgression” denotes a specific kind of sin, the “passing beyond” the limits set by a definite, positive law or command. 36 While every “transgression” is also a “sin,” not every “sin” is a “transgression.” Paul, then, is not claiming that there is no “sin” where there is no law, but, in almost a “truism,” that there is no deliberate disobedience of positive commands where there is no positive command to disobey. As Calvin puts it: “He who is not instructed by the written law, when he sins, is not guilty of so great a transgression as he is who knowingly breaks and transgresses the law of God.” Paul’s real point emerges in the application of this principle to the Mosaic law as an explanation of how it is that “the law works wrath.” Before and outside the Mosaic law wrath certainly exists, for all people, being sinners, stand under God’s sentence of condemnation (1:18). But the Mosaic law “produces” even more wrath; rather than rescuing people from the sentence of condemnation, it confirms their condemnation. For by stating clearly, and in great detail, exactly what God requires of people, the law renders people even more accountable to God than they were without the law. 37

16. In vv. 14-15 Paul has elaborated the negative point in v. 13: the inheritance comes “not through the law.” Now Paul turns to its positive antithesis: the inheritance is given “through the righteousness of faith.” “Because of this” 38 may, then, refer back to the negative argument of vv. 14-15: “because of this” incapacity of the law to secure the promise, it must be by faith that it is attained. 39 However, the phrase “because of this” often looks ahead to a following clause in the NT, 40 and this makes good sense here. The antecedent of “this” will then be the purpose clause “in order that it might be according to grace.” It is for that reason, that grace might be preserved, that “it is of faith.” 41 But what is this “it,” the implied subject of the verse? Probably, in light of v. 13, “the promised inheritance.” 42 The intimate relation

32. Gk. ἀνάγκη. This compound verb often emphasizes the results of an action: “produce.” This meaning is appropriate here. Rather than referring to the current infliction of God’s wrath (Dunn), the present tense is probably gnomic, asserting what the law “generally,” by its nature, does.
33. As we have noted, the original reading here is probably ἔ&. But this does not imperil the explanatory function of the clause, since ἔ& often introduces an explanation — cf., Rom. 1:13.
34. For the latter view, see, e.g., Winger, By What Law? p. 83.
35. See esp. Calvin; Godet; Denney; Nygren; Luz, 187-88.
36. The Greek word is παράδειγμα, which he uses elsewhere in 2:23; 5:14; Gal. 3:19; and 1 Tim. 2:14. See, on this issue, the survey by J. Schneider, TDNT V, 739.
37. A similar logic underlies 5:13-14 and 7:7-12.
38. Gk. ἐν τοῦτο.
39. Most commentators hold this view.
40. See the note on 5:12.
41. See esp. Cranfield and Schlier. Others refer ἐν τοῦτο back to v. 13 (Godet) or v. 14 (Barrett).
42. E.g., Käsemann.
in Paul’s thought between faith and grace emerges again here. As Paul has shown in vv. 4–5, grace is the necessary corollary to faith, as “obligation” is to works. Thus, “God’s plan was made to rest upon faith on man’s side in order that on God’s side it might be a matter of grace.” But there was, according to Paul, a still further purpose in God’s provision of the inheritance through faith: “that the promise might be confirmed to all the seed.” The benefit denoted by this clause is, as Chrysostom notes, twofold: that the promise might be “firm” — that it might come to fruition — and that the promise might be confirmed to every descendant of Abraham. Neither blessing would have come to pass if it had depended on human “works” or obedience to the law; but because faith grasps the absolutely sure promise of God, a promise that he has determined freely to give, the inheritance God has promised can become a reality, and a reality for anyone who believes.

Paul puts a particular spin on “all the seed” in two contrasting phrases: “not to those who are of the law only, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham.” As is the case throughout Romans, and certainly in chap. 4, Paul’s “universalism” is a “qualified” universalism that gives the Gentiles the same opportunity as Jews to respond to the gospel and to become part of the people whom God is calling out of the world in the last days. While Paul does not express himself extremely clearly, this inclusion of both Jew and Gentile in the “seed” of Abraham is what is in view in this last part of v. 16. “Those who are of the law only” could, especially in light of the contrast with “those who are of the faith of Abraham,” refer to unbelieving Jews. In this case, Paul would be asserting that Jews continue to be part of the “seed of Abraham,” in a different way, however, from that in which Christians are the seed of Abraham. Such a point would not, if properly nuanced, be incompatible with Paul’s thought (see Rom. 11:11–30). But it is perhaps unlikely that this is what he intends here. Paul has forcefully stated that the true descendants of Abraham are those who believe (vv. 11–12); and when he uses the word “seed” here, it must be with this spiritual meaning that he has given the word. Moreover, the phrase “out of faith” rules the entire verse and must be carried over to this latter part of it. The meaning, then, is that the promise is for the Jew who is part of the seed through faith. “Out of the law” must mean something a bit different from what it does in v. 11, and designate Jews as such, “those who had the advantage of being under the Mosaic economy.” In light of the contrast indicated by “not only . . . but also,” “those out of the faith of Abraham” are Gentile believers. It is in this sense that Abraham is the “father of us all” — the spiritual forefather of all of “us” who are believers.

17 This verse is composed of two main clauses:

Even as it is written, “I have appointed you as the father of many nations” before the God in whom he believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls those things that are not as though they were.

They can be related to one another and to the larger context in several ways. (1) The two clauses could follow one another in a straightforward, consecutive sequence, with the quotation from Gen. 17:5 confirming “who is the father of us all” at the end of v. 16, and the second clause being dependent on the first clause. (2) The first clause could confirm “to all the seed” in the middle of v. 16, with the second clause again dependent on the first. (3) According to most commentators, v. 17a depends on v. 16b, as in the first reading, but is somewhat parenthetical, with 17b taken with “father of us all” in v. 16b. (4) Again, as in v. 1, the first clause may be attached to v. 16b, with the second

48. So most commentators, ancient and modern.
49. Murray.
50. Godet; Kuss; contra, e.g., Küsemann, who thinks the reference is to believers generally.
51. The beginning of this second clause is elliptical, οὐκ ἔχασεν ημῶν ἔκπαθεν ἀπὸ της φύσεως that is, as Chrysostom notes, twofold: that the spiritual forefather of all of “us” who are believers.
52. Note the rendering of TEV: “as the Scripture says, ‘I have made you father of many nations.’ So the promise is good in the sight of God, in whom Abraham believed — the God who brings the dead to life and whose command brings into being what did not exist.” See also REB; Küsemann. In a variation of this reading, Godet considers v. 16b to be a resumption of the main line of discussion from v. 12b, vv. 13-16a being an aside to deal with a Jewish objection.
53. Wiekens.
54. Note the NASB rendering: “(as it is written, ‘A father of many nations have I made you’) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.” See also KJV; and, e.g., Calvin; Michel; Murray; Cranfield.

4:13-22 Faith, Promise, and the Law

43. Barrett.
44. Gk. εκ το ζωντ.
45. Gk. ἁπαξλείτου.
46. In agreement with the word σπέρματα, the Greek here, and in the next clause, is singular: το. But, recognizing the collective force of σπέρματα, a translation “according to the sense,” in which the individuals who comprise the “seed” are denoted, is appropriate. So most modern English Bibles, which also usually translate σπέρματα “descendants.”
Abraham's faith that follows confirms this, as v. 19 notes the "deadness" of Abraham's body and the barrenness of Sarah as the visible evidence that Abraham's faith had to transcend. However, this characterization of God receives a further application in the context, vv. 24-25 defining as the object of Christian belief "the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." Finally, it is possible, though perhaps unlikely, that Paul is also thinking of the application of these words to the rescue of Isaac from his near death (cf. Heb. 11:19).

It is more difficult to know what Paul intends by describing God as the one "who calls those things that are not as though they were." Our conclusion will depend on the meaning we give to "call." If it means, prosaically, "name" or "address," then Paul would be further alluding to the certainty of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham: although "the many nations" do not yet exist, God can address them as if they did.61 Somewhat similar is the interpretation that takes "call" to mean "summon": God summons, calls up before Abraham's view, these nations that "are not" as if they were.62 While each of these explanations fits the syntax and the context well, some interpreters discern a further reference. In the OT, the verb "call" refers to God's creative work (cf. Isa. 41:4; 48:13), and later Jewish authors perpetuate this usage, sometimes adding the idea that this creative "calling" involves a bringing into being things that were not.63 It may be, then, this tradition of a creation ex nihilo to which Paul alludes, with the purpose of reminding his readers of God's creative power generally.64 Moreover, several texts apply this language to spiritual conversion, and sometimes, as here, with reference to God's giving life to the dead.65 These parallels make it possible that Paul's description of God as "the one who calls into being things that are not" is a reminder that God "justifies the

58. Paul quotes the LXX exactly.
60. See, e.g., Fitzmyer.
61. Denney.
62. Godet; S-H; Murray's view is similar.
63. Cf., e.g., Philo, On the Special Laws 4.187: τὰ γὰρ μὴ δόντα έξέδοθησαν εἰς τὸ εἶλθεν; "for he called things that were not into being." There are many occurrences of substantially similar expressions in Philo; cf. also 2 Macc. 7:28; 2 Apoc. Bar. 21:4; 48:8.
64. Burrett; Bruce: Cranfield. O. Hofius finds in Paul and in the Jewish tradition (especially 2 Macc. 7:28) a connection between creation ex nihilo and the eschatological resurrection of the dead ("Eine althäusische Parallelde zu Röm. IV.17b," NTS 18 [1971-72], 93-94).
65. See esp. Jos. and As. 8:9; "Lord, God of my father Israel, highest and most powerful God, who gives life to all and things and calls from darkness into light, and from error into truth, and from death into life." (σὺς δὲ τὸν ζωοτόταν ζωοτάτον, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευτάτος, τὰ πάντα καὶ ἀπαντάντα ἐκ τοῦ σκότους ἐκ τοῦ φωτός, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πάντως εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωήν). Cf. also 2 Clem. 1:8.
ungodly" (v. 5): he creates out of the nothingness of people's empty, sinful lives a new, vibrant, spiritual life.66

There can be no doubt that Paul's language is quite close to this Jewish creatio ex nihilo tradition and that an allusion to either God's general creative power or his spiritual creative power would not be out of place in the context. However, if this were Paul's purpose, it is surprising that he speaks of God's calling things "as though" they existed; we would have expected him to say "calls things into being."67 This leads us to conclude, somewhat hesitantly and reluctantly, that the clause cannot refer to God's creative power as such, whether general or spiritual. It is, then, the nature of God as "speaking of" or "summoning" that which does not yet exist as if it does that Paul must mean. And this interpretation fits the immediate context better than a reference to God's creative power, for it explains the assurance with which God can speak of the "many nations" that will be descended from Abraham.

18 As we have seen, a number of commentators hold that a new paragraph begins here.68 However, while it is true that Paul shifts his focus a bit, spotlighting the positive characteristics of Abraham's faith in vv. 18-21, his attention is still on the promise: how Abraham responded to the promise — in faith — and how it was that faith which secured righteousness and what had been promised. The emphasis in v. 18 falls on the paradoxical description of Abraham's faith as "against hope, on the basis of hope."69 No better explanation of the phrase can be found than Chrysostom's: "It was against man's hope, in hope which is of God." As Paul will explain in v. 19, Abraham had every reason, from a human point of view, to give up the attempt to produce a child through Sarah. His faith flew in the face of that hope which is founded on the evidence of reason and common sense — "hope" as we often use the word ("I hope to win the lottery"). Yet his faith was firmly based on the hope that springs from the promise of God. We note here that Abraham's faith is not described as a "leap into the dark," a completely baseless, almost irrational "decision" — as Christian faith is pictured by some

66. Küsemann; Wickens; Schlier; Dunn. The most detailed defense of this view is given by Moxnes, who argues also that Paul applies this language to the Jews, to show that they are in the same position as Gentiles, requiring a conversion to become part of God's people (Theology in Conflict, pp. 241-50).
67. That is, in place of Paul's οὐκ, we would have expected an εἰκόνα οὐκ εἶχεν or simply εἰκόν. To be sure, οὐκ can indicate result or purpose, but only rarely. In constructions different from Paul's (LSI and BAGD both list the consecutive and final uses of οὐκ but note that they usually are found with the infinitive or subjunctive; none of the occurrences is close to the syntactical structure of Rom. 4:17b).
68. See the introduction to this section; note, e.g., Kuss.
69. Gk. οὐκ ἔχειν ἑξῆς ἐνίκησεν ἐξ ἔκρηξιν. In contrast, the most literal meaning of the Hebrew term שָׁבַע, "to call" or "summon" is used by Paul when he speaks of God's promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:16; Rom. 4:2).
70. This clause is introduced with an infinitival construction, εἰκόν: γενέσις. This construction could signify (1) the content of Abraham's faith — "he believed that he would become the father of many nations" (Zahn; Michel); (2) the consequence of Abraham's faith — "he believed and as a result became the father of many nations" (NIV; NCV; JB; Kisseman; Cranfield); and (3) the purpose of his faith (with reference also, perhaps, to the purpose of God) — "he believed with the purpose that he might become the father of many nations" (NASB; Turner; 143; most earlier commentators and Murray; Dunn). The second of these interpretations is justified syntactically (see the additional note on 1:20) and is the most natural way to complete the verb.
71. Paul again quotes the LXX exactly (which is faithful to the MT).
72. Gk. τῇ αἰτίᾳ. The dative is probably dative of respect: "did not weaken with respect to his faith."
Since Gen. 17:1 claims that Abraham was ninety-nine years old when the promise of offspring was renewed, Paul’s is an acceptable approximation. But standing in the way of the fulfillment of the promise was not only Abraham’s advanced age but the “deadness,” the “barrenness,” of Sarah, the woman predicted to be the mother of the child through whom Abraham’s “seed” would come. Since the word “deadness” is not the normal word for a woman’s barrenness, Paul has deliberately chosen his language to make clear that Abraham’s faith with respect to this promise was specifically faith in the “God who gives life to the dead” (v. 17b). In another way, also, our faith is to be like Abraham’s, as Calvin eloquently notes:

Let us also remember, that the condition of us all is the same with that of Abraham. All things around as are in opposition to the promises of God: He promises immortality; we are surrounded with mortality and corruption: he declares that he counts us just; we are covered with sins: He testifies that he is propitious and kind to us; outward judgments threaten his wrath. What then is to be done? We must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all things connected with us, that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.

This verse resumes and expands on what we have identified as the main point of v. 19: “Abraham did not weaken when he considered . . . .” The Greek phrase equivalent to “the promise of God” comes first in the sentence for emphasis. When Paul says that Abraham did not “doubt . . . because of unbelief,” he means that not Abraham never had a genuine passive deponent form (the Greek of the NT period is prone to use aorist passives for deponent verbs; cf. BDF 78) of the verb ἄξιοπροέρχομαι, which in the deponent means “to be divided” or “to waver” (used as the opposite of faith also in 14:23; Matt. 21:21; Mark 11:23; Jas. 1:6). However, the suggestion that ἄξιοπροέρχομαι here must mean “decide that a thing is impossible” (F. C. Synge, “Not Doubt But Discriminate,” ExpTim 89 [1977-78], 203-5) goes too far in this direction.

Paul’s insistence that Abraham “did not waver because of unbelief” in the face of God’s promise that he would beget offspring seems to be unjustified in light of Gen. 17:17, which says that Abraham, when told that Sarah would bear him a son, fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” The apparent conflict can be resolved in three main ways: (1) The reaction of Abraham in Gen. 17:17 may be understood as an “expression of wonder” at the promise rather than a reaction of disbelief (Calvin; and Philo suggests something like this [Questions and Answers on Genesis 5:55]). But Abraham’s request immediately afterward that God might work through Ishmael, as well as the parallel with respect to Sarah in Gen. 18:12-15, makes this suggestion unlikely. (2) We might confine Paul’s comment to the situation as described in Gen. 15 (Geddes; Meyer). For it is a promise from Gen. 15:5 that is quoted in v. 18, where this immediate discussion begins. This is a more likely possibility and may well be right. But (3) we might stress the meaning of the word ἄξιοπροέρχομαι as we have brought it out above and suggest that Paul is not denying the presence of some degree of doubt in Abraham’s faith (for, after all, he was a sinful human) but is focusing on the heart attitude of Abraham toward God’s promise.

80. ἄξιοπροέρχομαι is the aorist passive deponent form (the Greek of the NT period is prone to use aorist passives for deponent verbs; cf. BDF 78) of the verb ἄξιοπροέρχομαι, which in the deponent means “to be divided” or “to waver” (used as the opposite of faith also in 14:23; Matt. 21:21; Mark 11:23; Jas. 1:6). However, the suggestion that ἄξιοπροέρχομαι here must mean “decide that a thing is impossible” (F. C. Synge, “Not Doubt But Discriminate,” ExpTim 89 [1977-78], 203-5) goes too far in this direction.

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82. Gk. ἀλλά.

83. Gk. ἀκούσας. The translation “grew strong” is preferable to treating it as a genuine passive: “he was strengthened [by God]” (Cranch; Wilkens) or as equivalent to a middle with reflexive force “he strengthened himself” (suggested, though not adopted, by Geddes).

84. Especially if ἐκστάσεις is a causal or instrumental dative (BDF 196f[1]; Turner, 242; Käsemann) — “he grew strong because of or through faith”; cf. S-H.

85. The dative, then, is probably a dative of reference (Barrett; Murray; Cranchfield).
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Its victory over the hindrance created by the conflict between God’s promise and the physical evidence. And in this strengthening of his faith, Abraham gave “glory” to God. In his faithful response to God’s word, Abraham therefore accomplished what the idolaters of 1:21 failed to do.

21 The sentence begun in v. 20 is continued. As “giving glory to God” denotes the result of Abraham’s growing strong in faith, “being fully convinced” that he was able also to do what had been promised” repeats and further describes what this “growing strong” means. It is Abraham’s conviction that God is fully able to do whatever he promised that enabled his faith to overcome the obstacle of the tangible and visible “facts.”

22 “Wherefore” indicates that this verse draws a consequence or conclusion from the preceding verses. Paul certainly sees this as the conclusion of the immediately preceding verses, in which he has described Abraham’s faith (vv. 18-21). And since these verses include aspects of the promise that are brought out in Gen. 17 and later, it would seem that Paul agrees to this extent with the Jewish tradition, that the faith Abraham exercised in Gen. 15:6 is explained and exemplified in the later career of the patriarch. But the verse may serve to conclude more than the immediate section. With a last reference to Gen. 15:6, Paul rounds off the discussion of that verse which has been the constant touchstone since v. 3. Now, in a sense, Paul’s “historical” exposition is ended, and he can turn in application to his Christian readers.


23 And it was not written for him only, that “it was reckoned to him,”
24 but also for us, to whom it was going to be reckoned, to those who believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over because of our trespasses and raised for our justification.

While these three verses are related to vv. 18-22, they can be considered a separate paragraph because they draw conclusions from the entire exposition of vv. 3-22. Paul has, of course, applied his far-ranging exposition of Gen. 15:6 to Christians throughout the chapter, in both explicit and implicit ways.

86. Gk. δόγμα. The participle, though sorist, describes action coincidental with the verb it modifies. This happens far more often than some grammars suggest.
87. Gk. παροικοφρονεύειν, a participle that is coordinate with δόγμα at the end of v. 20. παροικοφρονεύειν is a synonym of παροικίας ("fill, fulfill"); cf. Luke 1:1; 2 Tim. 4:5, 17), but in the papyri it can denote the "completion" of business transactions (MM). From these meanings, it takes on the nuance of "fill with certainty." "be fully persuaded." This is its meaning here, in Rom. 14:5, and (perhaps) in Col. 4:12.
88. Gk. δόγμα.
same nature as Abraham’s; it ultimately has as its object the same God, “who
gives life to the dead” (cf. v. 17b). And the connection is even closer. For
Abraham’s faith in God had to do not just with the miraculous creation of life
where there was “deadness,” but with the fulfillment of God’s promise to
bless the world through him. It is the God of the promise, the promise given
to Abraham but ultimately fulfilled in Christ and Christians, in whom both
Abraham and we believe. While, therefore, the locus of faith has shifted as
the course of salvation history has filled out and made ever more clear the
specific content of the promise, the ultimate object of faith has always been
the same.

25 The last words of v. 24 have a rather solemn tone, and this is
continued in v. 25. The two clauses of the verse exhibit a clear parallelism:

who was handed over because of our trespasses
and was raised because of our justification

Most commentators think that this parallelism betrays the presence of a pre-
Pauline tradition. This may well be the case, although it must be insisted that,
if so, Paul has fully integrated the elements of the tradition into his
exposition. But, whether traditional or not, the wording resembles that of the
LXX of Isa. 53, particularly v. 12: “because of their sins he was handed
over.” As is probably the case in Isaiah, and certainly in Paul (cf. 8:32), the
passive “was handed over” is a “divine passive,” God being the implied
agent of the action. God the Father has himself taken the initiative in giving
up his Son to and for sinful people (cf. 3:25: “God set forth Christ as a
propitiation”).

The second line of the formula—“who was raised because of our
justification”—may allude to Isa. 53 as well, for the LXX of v. 11 (which
differs widely from the MT) speaks of the servant as “justifying the-

4. Gk. παρεπέμψας. Paul uses παρεπέμψας as an equivalent to ἀμαρτέω (“sin”)
6. See, e.g., Wengst, Christologische Formeln, pp. 101-3, for a discussion;
Stuhlmacher, “Jesus’ Resurrection and the View of Righteousness in the Pre-Pauline Mission
Congregations,” in Reconciliation, Law and Righteousness, pp. 55-56.
7. The Greek of Isaiah here is διὰ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν σου παρεπέμψη. Jeremia
suggests that there may be influence from the Aramaic targum of Isa. 53:5b—רַפָּא
8. The Greek word for “justification” here is δικαιοσύνη instead of Paul’s usual
δικαιοσύνη. By form, δικαιοσύνη would suggest more of an emphasis on the process
as opposed to the results of the action (BAGD). But any such distinctions here are precarious,
since Paul might be quoting tradition.

Pauliniennes dans la première partie de l’Epître aux Romains (1—8),” in Mélanges bibliques
en hommage au R. P. Bédé Rigaux (ed. A. Descamps and A. de Halleux; Gembloux:
Duculot, 1970), pp. 322-33; Cranfield.
10. Gifford; Hodge; Murray: For this prospective use of διὰ, see Matt. 24:22; Mark
2:27; John 11:42; 12:30; J. C. F. McCormick, “Jesus’ Resurrection and the View of
Righteousness in the Pre-Pauline Mission Congregations,” in Reconciliation, Law
and Righteousness, pp. 55-56; Moule, Idiom Book, p. 55: “while the commonest
sense of διὰ with acc. is because of (consecutive), some steps are traceable towards
the final or prospective sense, for the sake of or with a view to.” (Modern Greek για
is customarily used to state purpose.)
(AnaBib 13; Rome: Pontificial Biblical Institute, 1961), p. 172; and most commentators.
Nygren; Fitzmyer.

the fact that Paul would obviously not want to separate Christ’s death (the first line) from our justification (the second line). But when due allowance is made for rhetoric, we must still insist that Paul is affirming here a theological connection between Jesus’ resurrection and our justification (cf. 5:10). As Jesus’ death provides the necessary grounds on which God’s justifying action can proceed, so his resurrection, by vindicating Christ and freeing him forever from the influence of sin (cf. 6:10), provides for the ongoing power over sins experienced by the believer in union with Christ.


In this letter to the Romans, Paul explains and defends his gospel to a Christian community he has neither founded nor visited but which he hopes to enlist as supporters of an evangelistic campaign in the western Mediterranean. To accomplish this purpose, Paul writes a “tractate”-style letter with a careful and logical structure. After introducing himself as one “set aside for the gospel” and announcing his plans to bring that “good news” to Rome (1:1–15), Paul justifies his commitment to the gospel because it transmits “God’s power that brings salvation” (1:16). And why does the gospel have such power? Because, Paul explains, it reveals God’s justifying activity — and all who respond to that activity in faith become “just” before God (1:17). This teaching of “justification by faith,” so basic to Paul’s gospel, is the theme of the first major section of the letter (1:18–4:25). To explain why God has manifested this new justifying activity, and why it can be experienced only by faith, Paul shows that all people have rebelled against God and are helpless under the power of sin, unable of themselves to do anything to escape God’s impartial judgment (1:18–3:20). But, expanding on 1:17, Paul shows how God’s sacrifice of his Son has enabled him both to rescue people from this dilemma and to do it without violating his own holy justice (3:21–26). Again, though, Paul stresses that this new relationship with God is available only for those who believe — it cannot be attained by works, or by circumcision, or by the law (3:27–4:25). But, as these last negations reveal, Paul’s exposition of the gospel has constant reference to Jewish viewpoints. In both major sections of 1:18–4:25, Paul shows how the revelation of God’s righteousness erases distinctions between Jews and Gentiles: the Jew, like the Gentile, is under the power of sin (3:9); the Jew, like the Gentile, can be justified only by faith (3:28–30).

How does chap. 5 carry on Paul’s argument? Since Paul continues to stress justification (5:1, 9, 16–19, 21) and only at 6:1 breaks the course of the argument with a rhetorical question about the Christian life, chap. 5 could be closely connected to 1:18–4:25, with chaps. 6–8 forming the second major section of the letter.1 This has been a very popular way of outlining the letter, with 1:18–5:21 and 6–8 often being viewed as describing, respectively, “justification” and “sanctification.”2 Another way of looking at the matter is to place a major transition at the middle of the chapter, with 1:18–5:11 being dominated by the antithesis between sin and justification and 5:12–8:39 by the antithesis between life and death.3 Each section would then go over similar ground, with an introductory section on sin (1:18–3:20; 5:12–21) and a concluding section on hope (5:11–8:39).4 Still others insist that the chapter is transitional and refrain from attaching it more to what precedes or to what follows.5 But, as the heading to the section indicates, I think it better to place the transitional point between chaps. 4 and 5. To be sure, this whole question requires caution, lest we impose on the letter a rigidly logical, dogmatically oriented outline that Paul may never have intended. After all, he is writing a letter, not a systematic theology.6 Nevertheless, while mindful of the danger of oversystematizing and of erecting barriers between sections so that the continuity of Paul’s argument is lost,7 Paul is arguing, and arguing theologically; therefore, it is quite appropriate to look for transitions in that argument. While we must not draw too heavy a line between chaps. 4 and 5, the progress of Paul’s argument reveals a transition in topic at this point.8

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1. The best recent defense of this structure is to be found in Winkens (1:286–87) and Dunn (1.242–44); although he also speaks of chap. 5 as a “bridge” chapter, cf. also his “Paul’s Epistle,” pp. 2856–57. Cf. also Godet, 59, 231; Murray, 1:211–12; Rüdtes, 104–5, 124; Kist, 1:199; Morris, 217; Hoppe, Idee der Heilsgeschichte, pp. 78–79; M. Welter, Rechtfertigung und zukünftiges Heil: Untersuchungen zu Rom 5,11 (BZNW 43; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), pp. 214–16.

2. E.g., Godet, Lagrange.


5. Black, 81; Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, pp. 486–87; B. N. Kaye, The Thought Structure of Romans with Special Reference to Chapter 6 (Austin, TX: Scholta, 1979), pp. 1–13; P. M. McDonald (“Romans 5:1–11 as a Rhetorical Bridge,” JSNT 40 [1990], 82–96) sees 5:1–11 as a bridge paragraph, in which Paul argues from an identity with his readers.

6. See especially the warnings of Beker, 66–69.

7. We are thinking particularly of A. Schweitzer’s strict division of the argument of Rom. 1–8 into two “craters,” one focusing on justification (1–5) and the other, the “main” crater, on “mysticism” (Mysticism, pp. 225–26, passim).

8. This division was advocated by Bengel, 61, and finds a large number of contemporary advocates. See esp. Nygren, 187–89; Cranfield, 1, 1252–54; Beker, 83–86;