

**THE UNITY OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION
BY FAITH AS IT IS PROGRESSIVELY REVEALED IN
HOLY SCRIPTURE**

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ABSTRACT

Our Old Testament studies in the doctrine of justification lead to the conclusion that believers were justified under the Law, not by obedience to the Law, but by fleeing from the threats of the Law to the refuge of faith in the Promise given to Abraham. This is how they became children of Abraham and heirs with him of the same Promise.

The Old Testament offerings pointed to the expiation of sins through the shedding of blood and to the appeasing of God's wrath indicated by the symbolism of the smoke ascending thus indicating a pleasing sacrifice to God. In the Prophets, the Servant (Isaiah 53) is described as the Righteous One who justifies many. The righteousness that Abraham received through faith in the promise, Isaiah now indicates that this same righteousness is provided by the Servant of the Lord. This shows the progressive nature of the revelation regarding justification. In Jeremiah 23, we see the transfer of righteousness. The Messiah is described as being righteous or establishing righteousness and he becomes "our righteousness." This is expressed in older Protestant theology by the phrase "the imputation of Christ's righteousness". We conclude that believers are counted righteous before God because he permits them to share Christ's status of acceptance before him.

In the Psalms we find emphasis on substitution and atonement, and the revelations of a suffering messiah who would bear the sins of the people. The revelation received warranted confidence that God was a forgiving God and that, atonement having been made, forgiveness was not only possible, but sure and certain to all in covenant with Yahweh, showing the unity of the doctrine in both testaments.

From our studies in Matthew we conclude that Jesus had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, rather, he came to fulfil them. The Law and the Prophets pointed to him, but the Law and the Prophets demanded righteousness. Until now the Law had only been broken, never kept, but this man never breaks it; he keeps it perfectly; he is the Righteous One.

Considering the forgiveness of sins, in both Luke and Acts we come to the conclusion that it is the same forensic reality; that in both books it is conditioned on repentance and faith. However, in Acts it is clearly and demonstrably based on Christ's death and resurrection, and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

We conclude from the writings of Paul, that justification is basic to Paul's doctrine of salvation, and, theologically, Paul's writings contain the most highly developed expression of this truth in the New Testament. Paul gives first place in Romans to the 'good news' that God graciously justifies sinners through faith alone in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law. Romans 1:16-17 contains Paul's thesis in the book of Romans: that the power of God is revealed through the gospel for all who have faith. In the remainder of the letter he argues the case for this thesis and defends it against objections. He begins in 1:18-3:20 by arguing that God is righteous and makes no difference between Jew and Gentile in the matters of sin, judgement and salvation. Both are justified in the same way, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and apart from works of the law.

OPSOMMING

Ons Ou Testamentiese studies in die leerstuk van regverdiging het tot die gevolgtrekking gelei dat gelowiges geregtig is onder die wet, nie deur gehoorsaamheid aan die wet nie maar deur weg te vlug van die bedreiging van die wet na die toevlugsoord van geloof in die Belofte wat aan Abraham gegee is. Dit is hoe hulle kinders van Abraham geword het en erfgename saam met hom van dieselfde Belofte.

Die Ou Testamentiese beloftes wys heen na die versoening van sondes deur die storting van bloed en na die genoegdoening van God se toorn, aangedui deur die simboliek van die opstygende rook, wat 'n aangename offer voor God teweeggebring het. . . In die Profete word die Kneg (Jes 53) beskrywe as die Regverdige Een deur Wie baie geregtig is. Die geregtigheid wat Abraham ontvang het deur die geloof in die belofte, word nou deur Jesaja aangedui as dieselfde geregtigheid wat voorsien word deur die Kneg van die Here. Dit wys op die progressiewe aard van die openbaring aangaande regverdiging. In Jer 23 sien ons die oordrag van geregtigheid. Die Messias word beskrywe as regverdig of iemand wat geregtigheid vestig en Hy word 'ons geregtigheid'. Dit word beskrywe in die ouer Protestantse teologie as 'Christus se toegerekende geregtigheid'. Ons kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat gelowiges as regverdig voor God gereken word omdat hy hulle vergun om Christus se status van aanvaarding voor God te deel.

In die Psalms vind ons die klem op plaasvervanging en versoening, en die openbaring van 'n lydende Messias wat die sondes van die mense sou dra. Die openbaring wat ontvang is het die vertrouwe versterk dat God 'n vergewende God was en dat, nadat versoening bewerkstellig is, vergifnis nie alleen moontlik was nie, maar ook vas en seker vir almal wat in 'n verbond met Yahweh was. Dit dui op die eenheid van die leerstuk in beide testamente.

Deur ons studies in Matteus kom ons tot die gevolgtrekking dat Jesus nie gekom het om die Wet en die Profete te ontbind nie maar om dit te vervul. Die Wet en die Profete wys heen na Hom, maar die Wet en die Profete eis geregtigheid. Tot hiertoe is die Wet altyd net verbreek, nooit onderhou nie. Hierdie man breek dit egter nooit, maar onderhou dit volmaak. Hy is die Regverdige Een.

As daar gekyk word na vergifnis van sondes, kom ons in beide Lukas en Handelingte tot die gevolgtrekking dat ons hier met dieselfde forensiese realiteit te doen het nl dat dit in beide boeke bepaal word deur bekering en geloof. In Handelingte is dit egter duidelik aantoonbaar gebaseer op die dood en opstanding van Christus, asook die belofte van die Heilige Gees.

Uit die geskrifte van Paulus kom ons tot die gevolgtrekking dat regverdiging fundamenteel is vir Paulus se leerstuk van verlossing, en dat, teologies gesproke, Paulus se geskrifte die mees gevorderde uitdrukking van hierdie waarheid in die Nuwe Testament bevat. Paulus gee eers aandag in Romeine aan die 'goeie nuus' dat God genadiglik sondaars regverdig deur geloof alleen in Jesus Christus, afgesien van die werke van die wet. Romeine 1:16, 17 bevat Paulus se stelling: dat die krag van God geopenbaar is deur die evangelie vir elkeen wat glo. In die res van hierdie brief

beredeneer hy die argumente ten gunste van hierdie stelling en verdedig dit teen besware. Hy begin in 1:18 – 3:20 uiteensit dat God regverdig is en geen onderskeid maak tussen Jood en nie-Jood ten opsigte van sonde, oordeel en redding nie. Beide word op dieselfde wyse geregverdig nl deur die genade van God deur geloof in Jesus Christus en sonder die werke van die wet.

Die leer van regverdiging in die besonder was so duidelik omskrywe in die apostoliese geskrifte dat diegene wat op die apostels gevolg het geen rede gehad het om dit as 'n onbesliste vraagstuk te beskou nie. Inderdaad is die afwesigheid van hierdie onderwerp in die eerste en tweede eeu se debatte 'n stille getuie van die aanvaarding daarvan in hierdie periode van die kerk.

Dit was die gevolgtrekking van die Hervormers dat die aard van regverdigende geregtigheid nie te vinde was in enige inherente persoonlike regverdigheid wat in die sondaar ingestort is nie, maar in die toegerekende geregtigheid van Christus. Hulle het op skriftuurlike gronde geredeneer dat ons geregverdig is deur die geloof alleen, doodeenvoudig omdat geloof ontvang word en gebaseer is alleenlik op Christus vir ons saligheid, terwyl daar op sy geregtigheid vertrou word as die grond van ons aanvaarding. Hulle het erken dat daar so iets bestaan as historiese geloof, maar hulle het geredeneer dat, onderskeie daarvan, daar 'n geloof in die Skrif is wat onmiddellik die kwytskelding van die sondaar verseker en sy aanvaarding voor God. Dit is 'n geloof wat die instemming van verstand, hart en wil behels, wat Christus en al sy weldade ontvang en wat alleen op sy geregtigheid as pleitgrond let. Dit verenig die sondaar met Christus en maak hom vir eens en vir altyd 'n deelnemer aan sy geregtigheid.

Volgens diegene wat 'n gewysigde standpunt daarop nahou is 'die geregtigheid van Christus' nie 'n Pauliniese uitdrukking nie. Die apostel Paulus verwys egter wel na Christus as 'ons geregtigheid' in 1 Kor 1: 30, terwyl regverdiging beskrywe word in Rom 4: 1- 13 en 5: 17 – 19 as beide die nie-toerekening van sonde en die toerekening van geregtigheid. As hierdie waarheid ontken word laat dit die deur oop vir moralistiese self-regverdiging.

Ons is nie oortuig deur argumente wat die betekenis van regverdiging wyer maak deur wedergeboorte en heiliging in te sluit nie. Dit lei terug tot die verwarring wat Augustinus se definisie bewerkstellig het en is eintlik gevaarlik vir die evangeliese waarheid. Ons het geen reg om ons eie betekenis te heg aan die uitdrukking net om dit relevant te maak nie. Bybelse terme kan nie vergelyk word met stukke plastiek wat willekeurig gebuig word net om 'n bepaalde behoefte te bevredig nie. Die redenering dat 'n begrip soos regverdiging toegelaat moet word om te ontwikkel tot die begrip 'versoening' is nie haalbaar nie. 'Regverdiging', anders as die woord 'versoening', het alreeds 'n lang geskiedenis gehad van vurige debat in die kerk om sy presiese betekenis te bepaal. Daar bestaan 'n Bybelse 'dogma' van regverdiging eerder as net 'n Bybelse 'begrip'.

Ons finale gevolgtrekking is dat die leer van regverdiging dwarsdeur die Skrif 'n eenheid vorm.. Dit is desnieteenstaande progressief geopenbaar in die Bybelse geskiedenis. Dieselfde basiese elemente word gevind in al die dele van die Skrif. Hierdie een leerstuk is gereflekteer in die leer van die kerk deur die eeue heen.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

1.1.1 The General Problem

Throughout the history of the church there has been much confusion on the question “How can I be right with God?” It has been widely believed that the doctrine of justification by faith originated with the Apostle Paul and that theologians who favoured Paul then superimposed this doctrine on the rest of Scripture. Those who hold this view are quick to allege that Paul and James are at variance on this doctrine.

The problem however, is not confined to the alleged views of James and Paul. Here are some general questions that are often in the minds of church members that reveal areas of confusion on this subject.

These questions are popularly expressed in the following form:

- On what basis were people in Old Testament times accepted as righteous with God?
- Was the basis different then, compared to people in the New Testament times and today?
- Were Old Testament people justified by their works, while New Testament people were justified by their faith?
- What part did the sacrifices play in the OT scene?
- Were people accepted because they made sacrifices?
- What is meant by the term: “The righteousness of God?”
- How do we get this righteousness? Do we achieve it or do we receive it?
- What is the righteousness of Christ and what does it have to do with our justification?
- What is the basis of justification? Is it faith, or Christ’s righteousness?

In order to grasp the doctrine of justification it is necessary to understand that this is what the Bible is all about: God pursuing sinful people in order to bring them into a right relationship with Himself. God does this for two reasons, that people may reach their full potential, and that he may be glorified. However, it is necessary to see the presence and development of this doctrine from Genesis through to Revelation on a broad canvas. Otherwise there is the danger of getting lost in discussions about minute details and coming to the false conclusion that this doctrine only occurs in Romans and Galatians, or that it was invented by the apostle Paul.

1.1.2 The Specific Problem

This consideration of the general problem reveals the need for a clear understanding of the unity of the doctrine of justification. This can only be established by a study of the Biblical data as it is progressively revealed throughout the history of Scripture.

All doctrine is progressively revealed throughout Scripture. In the book of Genesis we are introduced to most, if not all, of the great doctrines of our Christian faith. But no doctrine is fully revealed in Genesis, not even the doctrine of Creation. This is also the case with justification. It is present in Genesis, but not in the later fullness we see in Romans and Galatians.

We cannot however come to the conclusion that no one who lived in the Genesis period was justified. It is clear that the elements of the doctrine were revealed to and understood by Abraham and that he received acceptance with God and the same benefits as New Testament believers. Yet the full revelation of the doctrine clearly comes in the New Testament. This is part of the difficulty that we hope to address in this study.

In conclusion, the consideration of the *general* problem leads to the identification of *specific questions* that are set out below.

- Is it possible to establish that there is only one doctrine of justification by faith taught in Scripture?
- What are the basic elements of this doctrine and is it possible to find these basic elements in all parts of Scripture?
- Can it be established that there is progressive development of the doctrine throughout Scripture, and can this be shown in the basic elements?
- Can it be established that the Biblical unity of the doctrine continued in church history?

1.1.3 General Introduction to the Doctrine of Justification by Faith

At the beginning of this study it is necessary to highlight the importance of the doctrine of justification by faith. The following quotations from two prominent twentieth century church leaders will be sufficient.

“The confession of divine justification touches man’s life at its heart, at the point of its relationship to God. It defines the preaching of the Church, the existence and progress of the life of faith, the root of human security and man’s perspective for the future.”

(Berkouwer 1954:17)

“The doctrine of justification by faith is like Atlas. It bears the whole world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of God the Saviour. The doctrines of

election, of effectual calling, regeneration, and repentance, of adoption, of prayer, of the Church, the ministry, and the sacraments are all to be interpreted and understood in the light of justification by faith."

(Packer 1999:221)

The importance of the doctrine of Justification has been evident throughout church history. Luther described it as "articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae" - the doctrine of a standing or falling church, meaning that when this doctrine is understood, believed and proclaimed the result is a living church. Conversely, when this doctrine is neglected or buried beneath what the church in any given age deems relevant the result is a dead and lifeless shell over which we may write "Ichabod" - the glory has departed.

Church History also bears witness to the fact that this doctrine was pivotal in every period of revival and reform. To take but one example - the neglect of the proclamation of the doctrine in the Middle Ages led to an impoverished church which became so corrupt that it brought Christianity to the very depths of disrepute and ridicule. The rediscovery of the doctrine by Martin Luther led to such a change in the history of the Church that the difference could only be described as "life from the dead." To Luther this doctrine was no theological speculation but a spiritual reality obtained through prayer by revelation from God through the Bible. It was a gift given as part of God's total work of love in saving us, thus bringing us to the true knowledge of God and of ourselves.

It has been thought that since the doctrine of justification was settled at the time of the Reformation, there is really nothing more to be said about it. There is also the saying that "what is new in theology is not true and what is true is not new". Over against these views it may be said that, as in all things there is room for further investigation, so in theology. Was it not through the further investigations of Luther that the Biblical doctrine was rediscovered?

It is true that doctrine has been once for all revealed in Holy Scripture, that it cannot be changed, added to, or taken away from. However, since the Word is the living Word and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Life and human understanding is finite and fallen, may we not seek fresh insights into this age-old truth of Justification? It is especially in the area of the interdependency and correlation of this doctrine that there is surely more light to be sought. The development of the doctrine in Scripture and the unity of the doctrine in Scripture are areas that deserve further study, and these are the main areas to be covered in this study.

Though the doctrine of justification was established at the time of the Reformation, yet to every succeeding generation it is still new, as fresh and as inspiring as the day when Abraham "believed the LORD and He counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15v6) For in every generation when a sinner relies on Christ alone for salvation he experiences a free pardon for all sin, and acceptance with God as

righteous in His sight. Indeed this doctrine becomes for him, as for Luther, “the very gate of heaven to his soul.” Justification by faith can never become old and obsolete, for it is “the everlasting Gospel,” relevant in all ages.

1.1.4 General Definitions

Justification by Faith has been adequately defined as follows:

Justification is an act of God's free grace in which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.

Westminster Shorter Catechism. (1994:Q33)

Justification by faith must always be understood in terms of man's acceptance with God, of his being regarded as righteous in the eyes of God, regarded as the object of His pleasure not of His displeasure.

In our present fallen state pardon for sin is a very precious part of our justification, yet it is not necessarily basic to the elementary idea of justification. The angels who did not sin were in some sense justified since they were the objects of God's favour and acceptable to Him. The same may be said of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Therefore it is necessary in the first place to consider the Justification of those who never committed sin and yet were accepted in God's sight.

1. 2. Aim and objectives

The *aim* of this study is:

- To establish that there is only one doctrine of justification taught in the Holy Scripture, that is, the doctrine commonly known as the doctrine of justification by faith.
- To identify the basic elements of this doctrine and show that these are taught throughout Scripture from beginning to end.
- To show that the revelation was progressive, and that the basic elements were present from the very beginning of Scripture history.
- To briefly survey the dogma historical perspectives in the history of the church.

1.2.2 Objectives

In order to achieve this aim, the following *objectives* are set up.

1.2.2.1 Biblical Data

- To identify all the main parts of Scripture relating to the doctrine of justification.
- To examine the background and context of each Scripture portion.
- To identify the basic elements of the doctrine of justification
- To study how each Scripture portion relates to the basic elements.
- To summarise the teaching of the parts of Scripture examined.
- To examine the progressive nature of the revelation and the unity of the parts with regard to the doctrine of justification by Faith.

1.2.2.2. Dogma-historical perspectives

- To briefly examine the doctrine of justification in the early church.
- To briefly examine the doctrine of justification according to Augustine.
- To briefly examine the doctrine of justification according to Calvin.
- To briefly examine modern trends in the doctrine of justification.
- To reach a conclusion on the unity of the doctrine in history.

1.3 Central Theological Argument

The hypothesis of this study is that the doctrine of justification by faith is one in Scripture, unchanging throughout. It is, nevertheless, progressively revealed from beginning to end of Scripture history. Yet the same basic elements are to be found in all parts of Scripture. This unified doctrine is reflected in the teaching of the Christian church throughout her history.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Presupposition

This study is done within the Reformed tradition that is based on the authority of Scripture. The methodological starting point of this study takes account of the fact that Scripture is the revelation of God written in human language. This presupposition also assumes that the study will be carried out using Reformed methods of Biblical exegesis in order to determine the meaning of Scripture in any given instance.

1.4.2 Correlation between the biblical and historical parts of this study

This study will be approximately two thirds Biblical and one third historical and will be confined within the limits of what is needed for an M-degree.

1.4.3 Method re: Biblical Data.

The Method to be employed in this Study of relevant passages of Scripture will be as follows. The following Scripture passages will be surveyed and examined as to their usefulness for this study. When this is ascertained, each scripture will be studied in

the following way:

- As to the basic meaning.
- As to the context.
- As to the basic elements of the doctrine found therein. These will be discussed.
- As to its relation to other passages of Scripture.
- As to its relation to the unity of the doctrine.

1.4.4 Biblical Data.

Scripture References related to the experience of the following Biblical characters or to their writings.

Adam:	Gen. 3:15,24
Abel:	Gen. 4:4-7. (Heb. 11:4.)
Enoch:	Gen. 5:24 (Heb. 11:5-6)
Noah:	Gen. 6:8-9 (2 Peter 2:5 Heb. 11:7)
Abraham:	Gen. 15:6 (John 8:56; Rom. 4; Gal 3:24)
Melchizedek:	Gen. 14:18-20; Ps 110 (Heb. 7.)
Job:	Job 1:1-5
Moses:	Ex: 20:1-21
David	Ps. 2:12; 14:17; 25:8-11; 51:1; 84:9; 89:1,2,15,16. 130; 143:2.
Isaiah:	Is. 53.
Jeremiah:	Jer. 23:6
Daniel	Dan. 9:24
Matthew	Matt. 5-7; 19:1-7; 26:29.
Luke	Luke 10:28; 15:11-31; 18:10-14; Acts 10:43; 13:38,39.
John	John 3:1-18; 8:39-46.
Paul	Rom. 1-8; 10; 1 Cor.1:30 -31; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 2:1-10. Phil. 3:7-10; Titus 3:4-7
Peter	1 Peter 2:6
James	Jas. 2:14-25

1.4.5 Method Re: Dogma-historical Perspectives.

A brief examination of the historical works will be undertaken in order to establish the doctrine of justification as taught in the selected periods of church history. The nature of the doctrine in each period will be identified and assessed and compared with what is found in each other period. This will be done by studying the works of selected Early Church Fathers; of Augustine, Calvin and others.

1.5. Tentative Chapter Division.

1. Introduction. (Contents of research proposal)

2. Biblical Data

1. The doctrine of justification in relation to the Protevangelium and Sacrifice.
2. The doctrine of justification in relation to the Patriarchs.
3. The doctrine of justification in relation to Moses.
4. The doctrine of justification in relation to the Prophets and Psalms
5. Matthew and righteousness.
6. Justification in Luke and Acts.
7. Justification in Paul's Writings.
8. Justification in James's Writings.

3. Dogma-historical perspectives.

- 1 The doctrine of justification in the Early Church and in the Middle Ages.
2. The doctrine of justification at the time of the Reformation.
3. Modern trends in the doctrine of justification.

4. Evaluation

5. Conclusion

1.6 Schematic Representation of the Correlation between points 3,4, and 6.

PROBLEMS	AIM & OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY
How is it possible to establish that there is only one doctrine of justification by faith taught in Scripture?	To establish that there is only one doctrine of justification by faith taught in Scripture	To survey the relevant Scripture passages in order to find their basic meaning and relevance to this study
What are the basic elements of the doctrine of justification by faith? Can these elements be found throughout Scripture?	To identify the basic elements of the doctrine of justification by faith and to show that these are taught throughout Scripture	To study the relevant Scripture passages in order to identify and discuss the basic elements of the doctrine of justification by faith found in these passages.
How can it be established that there is progressive development in the doctrine? Can this progressive development be shown in the basic elements?	To study the progressive development of the doctrine. To study the relationship between the progressive development and the basic elements.	To survey and discuss the progression of the revelation as it relates to the basic elements.
How can it be established that the Biblical unity of this doctrine continued in church history?	To briefly survey the continuance and/or development of the doctrine in church history	To discuss and evaluate the continuance and/or development of the doctrine in church history

2. BIBLICAL DATA

Chapter 2:1

The Doctrine of Justification in Relation to the Protevangelium and Sacrifice

It is here that we begin detailed examination of the Biblical data relating to the doctrine of Justification by Faith, according to the prescribed method.

2.1.1 The Doctrine of Justification in relation to Our First Parents.

2.1.1.1 The Justification of the Righteous.

The doctrine of justification is a revealed doctrine. It does not belong to those truths that are self evident to all human beings from the natural observation of God's works of creation and providence, such as God's eternity, power, glory and sovereignty. It was necessary for God to reveal directly by a special act of revelation the basis on which his favour could be enjoyed. From natural revelation it may be possible to deduce that sin deserves punishment but it is not evident that obedience deserves reward.

God revealed himself as the Creator of the world and established the Creation Ordinances of the Sabbath, Work and Marriage in relation to the human race. He then made known to our first parents the terms on which they might continue to enjoy the state of perfect righteousness in which they first existed, and not only continue to enjoy it but secure it for all future generations.

He had already given them the Moral Law written in their hearts. This meant that as human beings they were unquestionably bound to Him as their Creator and Sovereign. Even though this was the case, God willed to test their commitment to him and so He set before them one single command. This command involved a threat and an implied promise:

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:16,17.

By his reaction to his command Man would reveal the state of his heart. He would reveal his attitude to God's authority, especially to God's Word. He would also reveal the feelings of his heart whether they be love or hate; his reaction would reveal whether he

desired to stay in the relationship of rightness with God which he had experienced up to that point.

The threat associated with disobedience was death. This involved not simply the severing of body and soul, but his separation from his Creator which meant that he would be immediately deprived of God's favour and endure the imposition of His anger and curse eventually resulting in final and irrevocable separation from Him for all eternity.

The very existence of the tree of life implies the promise of life. The death, which is threatened upon disobedience, has its counterpart in the life which is implied in the words:

"You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Gen. 2:17)

Therefore God was pleased to enter into covenant relationship with Adam as the federal head of the human race. Grace was involved in this covenant. Adam could not earn or deserve eternal life since he already owed obedience to God as his creator and sovereign. In theology this covenant has normally been called the covenant of works. There have been objections to this designation. But it cannot be denied that there is in it a correlation between obedience and reward. "This do and you shall live".

So we see that the first covenant provided for the justification of the righteous and the righteous alone. It was made for man in his sinlessness.

2.1.1.2. The Justification of Sinners

We come now to deal with the doctrine of justification as we ourselves experience it, that is, the doctrine of justification as it relates to sinners. This doctrine, as it relates to sinners came into being immediately after the Fall.

The sin of Adam consisted of two parts; unbelief and disobedience. He believed the word of Satan over against the Word of God and he chose to rebel against his Creator. The behaviour of our first parents immediately after the fall indicated that they were conscience stricken and felt convicted and condemned. They had now exchanged the approval of God for His disapproval and His favour for His wrath. They were ashamed and afraid and now hid themselves from His presence. It appeared that nothing now awaited them but the sentence of condemnation. Yet it was at that very point that the grace and mercy of God appeared.

We now turn to the first promise of the Gospel: **Genesis 3:15 (The Protevangelium)**

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

2.1.2.Context and Basic Meaning of Genesis 3:15.

Atkinson (1990:97) comments on this verse as follows:

“The serpent is cursed by God and there is a promise that though the woman will die, her seed will live to bruise the serpent’s head. The picture is that through a man the serpent who has been instrumental in the downfall of a man will itself be crushed. No doubt the author could not look on the day of which the New Testament speaks, nor of the ‘Proper Man’ (Luther) in whom a new humanity is born. But we can now stand within Genesis 3 and look forward in the knowledge that the power of evil, hidden behind the all-too-subtle mask of the serpent, will one day be exposed, and overcome, on the cross outside a city wall.”

For hundreds of years this Scripture constituted “the Gospel”. It was the only light that was available to the first believers. We must therefore conclude that, in these words, in some manner, Christ was presented, and it was possible through these words for people to believe in Him. Let us examine the text phrase by phrase in order to discover its core meaning.

“I will put enmity...” (Genesis 3:15)

It is God who creates this enmity. God wants man to continue to live in perpetual opposition to the Evil One, therefore He instigates this enmity.

“between you and the woman..” (Genesis 3:15)

The woman is mentioned here, not the man, possibly because the woman was deceived in the first temptation while the man was not deceived. (1 Timothy 2:14). But from the seed of the woman the serpent will be defeated, therefore the one at whom the devil aimed his attack will turn out to be the one who brings about his downfall.

“and between your seed and hers...”(Genesis 3:15)

It is impossible to understand the phrase “your seed” except in terms of the children of the Evil One. Jesus interpreted it in this way when in John 8:44 He referred the evil plans of the Pharisees in these words:

“You belong to your father, the Devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning...” (John 8:44)

It is clear that Genesis 3:15 speaks of two categories of individual and their seed.

*“between you and the woman
and between your seed and hers...”(Genesis 3:15)*

Since “seed” refers to the whole class in a collective sense in the one half of the statement, therefore “seed” in the second half or parallel part of the statement must be used collectively for the descendants or posterity of the woman.

“he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

Calvin (1965:168) comments here;

“Meanwhile, we see that the Lord acts mercifully in chastising man, whom he does not suffer Satan to touch except in the heel; while he subjects the head of the serpent to be wounded by him. For in the terms head and heel there is a distinction between the superior and the inferior. And thus God leaves some remains of dominion to man.”

When a man treads on a snake’s head, the head is crushed and the snake is killed. But during the encounter the snake may strike at the heel or lower leg inflicting injury, but such an injury if treated is not deadly. Yet suffering is caused. One endures defeat and death, while the other experiences triumph, yet through suffering. In this very striking metaphor, victory is guaranteed to the seed of the woman. The struggle does not go on for ever; it has an end and the end is the destruction of Satan.

2.1.3. The meaning of the term: “the seed of the woman.”

The term has sometimes been taken to signify all mankind. Yet in this instance it seems to be qualified by the term “I will put enmity...” All mankind do not have enmity against Satan. This enmity is something God gives, but not to all. Here is a division in the human race. There are humans who are the seed of the serpent, and humans in whom God has put enmity against Satan, these are “the seed of the woman.”

There is surely a reference here to the doctrine of Election. The true seed of the woman are God’s chosen ones. They find their cause taken up by an “individual” in whom the designation “seed of the woman” finds its ultimate fulfillment, that is, in Christ.

In speaking of the seed of Abraham Paul makes a distinction between the two possible meanings of the term “your seed” and concludes:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds”, meaning many people, but “and to your seed”, meaning one person who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

Using the same reasoning in our discussion concerning the “seed of the woman”, we conclude that the ultimate and highest fulfillment is in Christ.

But which woman in history will produce “the Seed?” By leaving this an open question God mocks Satan keeping him for thousands of years in constant suspense and causing him to live in constant fear of every woman’s child – until Jesus was born.

As we find in this verse the beginnings of the revelation of the doctrine of Election, so we may also find that which agrees with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth though it would be pushing the case too far to say that the virgin Birth is predicted here. It is stated that the

conqueror will be from the seed of the *woman*. We know from the New Testament that this was literally true and that no man's seed was involved in the conception of Jesus. It cannot be said that this passage explicitly predicts the doctrine, perhaps not even implicitly, but it can certainly be said that it coincides and agrees with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

Here we have the first announcement of God's purpose to justify sinners. It is not made in any detailed way but in general terms of a deliverance for a portion of the race, through one who would be from the race, yet in some way still to be understood, He would be powerful enough to triumph over Satan and undo the damage done by His first predecessor. This announcement (Gen.3:15) contains the first evidence of **grace** as we understand the word in Scripture.

The Creator had already revealed Himself as the lawgiver and Judge but in this announcement He is revealed as Saviour and Deliverer.

For Adam and Eve the object of their faith was their God as He showed Himself in this saving revelation, holding out the Original Promise of the Saviour. This revelation would inspire in them feelings of reverence for the justice of God, feelings of hope and trust in God's mercy even to the point of placing that hope and trust in the seed of the woman.

Leupold (1972:170) draws our attention to a significant fact:

"After Christ's public ministry is officially inaugurated by his baptism, he encounters the devil in a temptation, even as the first parents encountered him. This, first of all, confirms the fact that the first tempter was the devil, but it more distinctly displays the first crushing defeat that the seed of the woman administered to his opponent. On the cross this victory was sealed and brought to its perfect conclusion. The cry, 'It is finished!' marked the successful completion of the task."

2.1.4 Basic Elements of the Doctrine found in Genesis 3:15

The basic elements of the doctrine of Justification by Faith have been theologically set out in the historic Confessions of the Reformation as generally consisting of the following elements:

- **Grace (A free and loving act of God toward the sinner)**
- **Pardon**
- **Full acceptance**
- **The righteousness of Christ**
- **Imputation**
- **Faith**

It is not the purpose of this study to simply identify these elements in the Biblical data but rather to investigate the context and background in order to determine initially what

elements were present in the experience of those to whom these Scriptures originally came. The basic elements cannot be imposed on the text. They must arise from it and not be read into it. We cannot, however, ignore the findings of thousands of years of Biblical and Theological history but for the purpose of this study we shall seek to understand the basic elements in each text of the Biblical data by chiefly considering it in its initial setting.

While it cannot be said that the doctrine of Justification by Faith is explicitly taught in Genesis 3:15, yet this verse has a bearing on the subject. It stands at the beginning of the doctrine of Salvation in Scripture and is related to everything that follows. The basic elements in the verse are:

- **Grace**
- **Promise**
- **The Representative Principle**
- **Deliverance, Victory, (Salvation)**
- **Suffering**

It is true that not all these elements are related to the basic elements of justification. Yet we shall see that few, if any, are unrelated.

2.1.4.1. Grace.

Grace is clearly displayed in the action of God set out at the beginning of this promise.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman...” (Genesis 3:15)

Man has sinned. The Fall has occurred. God has made a covenant and it has been broken. Logically speaking there can only follow the penalty of a broken covenant. The curses are pronounced yet in the midst of the curses there is this star that shines in the blackness. “I will put enmity...” This is a free act of God, but not in connection with the curse, rather an act of grace. Man does not deserve it, nor does he request it yet it is here like a beacon in the night. It is undeniably grace. It is the same grace which later led to the provision of sacrifice, and the principle of imputation. Herein lies its link with justification.

2.1.4.2. Promise.

Here God makes a promise. It is often referred to as “the first promise,” or “the first promise of salvation”. God’s promises are always gracious. He is under no compulsion to make them and they proceed with a kind intent. This promise is the first of many. The Old Testament is the era of promise. After the initial promise of deliverance, God then elaborates on the Protevangelion:

To *Abraham* He promises that

“in his seed all families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3)

To *Jacob* He promises that

“the sceptre will not depart from Judah until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations will be His.” (Genesis 49:10)

To *Moses* He promises that

“a prophet will the Lord your God raise up like you from among your brothers...”
(Deuteronomy 18:18)

To *Isaiah* He promises that

“a virgin shall conceive and be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel...” (Isaiah 7:14)

To *Jeremiah* He promises...

*“The days are coming
Declares the Lord
When I will raise up to David
A righteous Branch
A king who will reign wisely
And do what is just and right in the land
In His days Judah will be saved
And Israel will live in safety
This is the name by which he will be called:
The Lord Our Righteousness.
(Jeremiah 23:5)*

The God of the first promise, goes on promising and delivering to unworthy recipients.

As the centuries pass the promises become less general, less vague and more and more detailed and specific until the Deliverer arrives...who is the Lord Our Righteousness. The first promise is opened up in the rest of the Old Testament. We see that in essence it contains the promise of a deliverer whose righteousness is imputed to his people.

2.1.4.3. The Representative Principle

“he will crush your head...”

The Lord declares to the serpent that the Seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. One to be born of woman will be victorious over Satan. It will not be the seed of the woman in general that will overcome the seed of the serpent but *one* individual who will

overcome not the seed of the serpent, but the *one* who is Satan. *One* will represent Man and *one* will represent the Seed of the serpent and the battle will be between only two individuals. The *one* who is the seed of the woman will represent the seed of the woman, and the Serpent will represent the seed of the serpent. This is the representative principle And it is truly present here in the Protevangelium. It was later graphically illustrated in the contest between David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) when David alone represented the Israelites and Goliath alone represented the Philistines and the destiny of both nations hung upon the struggle between the two individuals.

The representative principle is present in the doctrine of Justification. Christ by his victory on the cross and by his lifelong struggle against Satan produced righteousness on behalf of His covenant people as their representative. Because of the representative principle, that righteousness becomes ours by God's gracious act of transfer. This was the experience of Paul when he spoke of "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Philippians 3:9)

It may be going too far to state that in the Protevangelium there is the element of Imputation. There is certainly imputation in the doctrine of Justification. But here we find the beginning of that road in the representative principle.

2.1.4.4. Deliverance (victory, salvation)

The struggle envisaged in this Scripture is of great proportions since the destiny of two peoples depends upon the outcome. The outcome for the Seed of the woman will be victory and deliverance from bondage to the enemy. Here is the first evidence of the concept of salvation in Scripture and salvation throughout Scripture history is said to come to us through justification by faith. It may therefore be said that the deliverance spoken of in Gen 3:15 is the same salvation spoken of in John 3:16, Acts 16:31 and in the multitude of other passages that speak in the same way in both Testaments.

2.1.4.5 Suffering

"he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel...."

It is clear that the deliverance of the seed of the woman will involve suffering on the part of the deliverer. It is also clear that this suffering will be physical, ie. in the body. The deliverer will suffer physically yet will not be destroyed or rendered ineffective even though he suffers, while his opponent on the other hand will be totally defeated and finally destroyed.

The sufferings of Christ are central to the doctrine Justification. It is significant that the very first promise of salvation predicts that the deliverer will endure physical suffering.

2.1.4.6 Relation to other Passages of Scripture

(The purpose of this section is to draw attention to other parts of Scripture which are clearly related to the passage currently under study. It is not the purpose of this section to expound such passages but merely to draw attention to their existence. These passages will be listed in order of the importance of their relationship to the passage currently under study)

Romans 16:20 *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.*

1 Timothy 2:14 *And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

Galatians 3:16 *The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds" meaning many people, but "and to your seed", meaning one person, who is the Christ.*

Revelation 12:9 *The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.*

Revelation 20:2 *He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan and bound him for a thousand years.*

2.1.5 The Institution of Sacrifice

Following upon the first Promise there came the institution of Sacrifice. Throughout the Old Testament sacrifice dominates. It had its beginnings with the first human family. Immediately sin enters human history, sacrifice also enters. But sacrifice does not just become another factor in the human scene. Sacrifice becomes central to the human worship of God. There is no approach to God without sacrifice. Furthermore, for fallen man there is no justification without the central involvement of sacrifice.

Beckwith (Alexander ed. 2000:754) comments:

Once introduced, sacrifice continues throughout the patriarchal age, and altars are recorded as having been built or sacrifice as having been offered, by Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The gift offered is a basis for prayer, for calling on the Name of the Lord. The link with prayer continues throughout the OT, and when the temple is dedicated, Solomon requests that it may be the place at which prayer is answered."

Sacrifice carries with it the following implications about God.

2.1.5.1. God is just.

One can only contemplate offering a sacrifice if one is convinced that it will be accepted by God according to the terms which He has stated. That is, that God will not change his mind and make new demands or reject what He has already stated that He will accept. Sacrifice presumes fairness and equity on God's part. Paul speaks of this justice in Romans 3:26, "God is just and the one who justifies the man who believes in Jesus."

2.1.5.2. God is saving.

The heathen offer sacrifices in the hope of placating an angry deity and perhaps protecting themselves from disaster. Yet generally they are without assurance or proof that their god does either. But the Biblical concept of sacrifice focuses far more on the positive. Our God is a good God and sacrifice is offered in Scripture because God has revealed Himself as a saving God and extended explicit promises of salvation to those from whom He asks sacrifice. There is evidence of this in the First Promise.

"I will put enmity... You will crush his head."

God promises protection to the seed of the woman from the ravages of the Serpent and the head of the serpent will be crushed. The God of our first parents is a saving God

2.1.6. The Basic Principles involved in Sacrifice.

2.1.6.1 Substitution.

It is the sinner that has committed the sin. The blame lies solely with him. Sin is his responsibility and "the soul that sins shall die". Yet God in His mercy and grace introduces a completely new concept into the situation. He finds a way to let the sinner live. It is called substitution. It enters the scene in Genesis immediately after the entry of sin. God permits an animal to be substituted for the sinner. But how can an animal be equal to a human and be accepted in his place? Of course an animal is not equal to a human but both share something in common – life. The sinner deserves to die, to forfeit his life, but God is willing to accept the forfeiting of another life, that of an animal. Therefore in the whole sacrificial emphasis of the Old Testament, blood takes on a special significance because blood represents life that is forfeited.

2.1.6.2 Penalty

To offer a sacrifice is to pay a penalty. To incur a penalty implies guilt. Both guilt and penalty have to do with the law. Guilt implies a breach of law. Therefore sacrifice and law are linked in the economy of God. Sin is a breach of God's holy law and he who offers a sacrifice pays a fine or penalty thereby admitting his guilt and status as a

lawbreaker. In the case of our First Parents (and later the Patriarchs) sacrifice had the following implications:

1. The life of the animal is substituted for the life of the sinner who deserves to die as the penalty for his sin.
2. Personal confession of guilt is involved together with the personal admission of liability to punishment.
3. There is the hope of divine forgiveness and acceptance.

2.1.7 The Connection between Sacrifice and Justification

As the institution of sacrifice was continually observed, the effect upon the sinner would involve the strengthening of reverence and trust in God and of repentance and faith. The institution of Sacrifice also brought to the attention of the worshipper certain central ideas in God's revelation to man, such as substitution, imputation and propitiation, ideas yet to be more fully developed in Scripture with the passage of time, as will be seen in this dissertation in due course.

When such sacrifices were offered in faith, that is, believing the great truth embodied in the concept of sacrifice, there can be no doubt that the worshipper was justified just in the same way as believers today. In all ages believers obtain forgiveness and acceptance with God. This can be particularly demonstrated in the case of Abel of whom it is said in Hebrews 11:4

“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying to his deeds.”

Chapter 2.2

The Doctrine of Justification in relation to the Patriarchs

2.2.1. Introduction

The Protevangelium or first promise of the Saviour was in essence the First Gospel. It was delivered to our First Parents. It was illustrated by the sacrifices, which God commanded, and these formed an integral part of the worship of God. This Gospel embodied in worship and sacrifice was communicated from one generation to the next. At that time there were apparently no written records, therefore the revelation from God had to be transmitted by word of mouth. Our earliest forefathers lived to a great age – some to almost a thousand years. This was of great benefit in preserving the purity of the Gospel, in the early days of revelation. It enabled one man to communicate the message directly and at first hand to many generations.

Even though the nature and detail of God's revelation of the Gospel was limited in those early days, yet it is clear that such revelation was sufficient to enable men to know God, experience justification and live godly lives. There is abundant evidence of this in the lives of the Patriarchs Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham.

It is to the experience of these Patriarchs that we now turn in this chapter.

2.2.2. Study of the Biblical Data in relation to Abel

“But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering.” (Genesis 4:4)

Since Biblical revelation is progressive, it is not possible to fully understand this scripture without the New Testament comment upon it. This is recorded as follows ...

“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks even though he is dead.” (Hebrews 11:4)

We shall consider these two Scriptures in turn.

2.2.2.1. Context and basic meaning of Genesis 4:2-5

The effects of sin in the human family are seen in the stark fact that the first baby born into the world became a murderer. The evidence of the Fall is immediately seen in the behaviour of Cain. There is no gradual Fall. There is no evidence that a lengthy period was necessary to gradually introduce mankind first to the lesser sins then to the more serious and eventually to capital sins such as murder. No, mankind is capable of

murder immediately sin enters the human race. The foulest sin is present in his mind, his words and his behaviour. But all is not dark in Genesis 4. There is another side that we must consider – the side of grace. Genesis 3:15 set forth the division of mankind into two groups - into the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

Now in Genesis 4, we are able to identify one who belongs to each of these groups. Here is one who has faith and one who has not. Here is one on whom God looks with favour, and one on whom he does not look with favour. Clearly Abel responded to the revelation of God while Cain did not.

Considering the narrative in Genesis 4 the question arises, “Why does God accept one offering and reject the other?” It is true that Cain’s offering was bloodless and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. But that conclusion presumes that both offerings were sin offerings presented in order to gain forgiveness. If that was so, then the shedding of blood would have been necessary but if that was not the case then we must remember that certain thank offerings in the Old Testament were bloodless yet acceptable. (E.g.: The Grain Offering Leviticus 2:1-4)

Commenting on this, Leupold (1972:196) writes...

“Those that see the merit of Abel’s sacrifice in the fact that it was bloody certainly do so without the least warrant from the text. Nothing anywhere indicates that that particular aspect of sacrifices had as yet been developed or considered at such an early age.”

The words in Genesis 4:2 *“Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil”* may be understood in terms of each man bringing something associated with his occupation. It is more likely that the reason for the acceptance of Abel’s offering and the rejection of Cain’s offering lies in the words:

*“...some of the fruits of the soil.” (4:3) compared with
“...fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.”*

Cain’s offering was just a sample of his produce. There appears to be nothing special or excellent about it. It was simply something that came to his hand and did not require any special effort on his part.

But the description of Abel’s offering suggests that he brought the very best to God,

“fat portions, of the firstborn”

and that the attitude of his heart was different from that of Cain.

2.2.2.2. Context and basic meaning of Hebrews 11:4

The context of Hebrews 11 is the life of faith. In this chapter the author sets forth the faith of the most prominent Old Testament believers. In verse 4 the life of Abel is summed up in three statements and each one highlights his faith:

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did.
By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings.
 And *by faith* he still speaks even though he is dead.

It is evident that Cain and Abel had received revelation from God. Abel clearly believed the revelation and acted upon it. His response to it was wholehearted and enthusiastic. It was the response of faith. This is the focus of the writer to the Hebrews. As he chooses his subjects under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he sets forth that particular aspect of faith which is exhibited in their character. He reveals its quality and extent and gives us one or more examples of how it is displayed in their lives. In the case of Abel, his faith is seen in the quality of his sacrifice which in turn reveals the attitude of his heart.

2.2.2.3 Basic Elements of the Doctrine found in Genesis 4v4

The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering.
 The basic elements in this verse are:

Acceptance

The element of acceptance is basic to the doctrine of Justification by Faith. The words "*the Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering...*" (Genesis 4:4) deserve careful consideration.

It is clear from this Scripture that God accepted the person of Abel. God did not merely accept something which Abel brought. He accepted Abel. The acceptance of the person is basic to the doctrine of Justification.

Leupold (1972:196) makes the following comment on this verse...

"Our narrative gives expression to this thought by stating, 'Yahweh regarded Abel and his offering; but Cain and his sacrifice he did not regard.' The meaning of the verb sha'ah is 'to gaze' but when it is used with 'el in a connection such as this, it means, 'regard with favour.' But the significant thing, noticed by Luther and most commentators since, is that this regarding with favour directs itself first to the person, then to the offering; so in the case of both the brothers. This fact very significantly shows that the determining factor in worship is the attitude of the individual. Him or his heart, God weighs. If he is not found wanting, the gift is acceptable. If he fails to please the Almighty his gift is reprobate. This fact is so important that it alone is stated.

The writer regards it as quite unimportant to record how the divine favour or disfavour was expressed."

Basic Elements of the Doctrine found in Hebrews 11:4

"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks even though he is dead." (Hebrews 11:4)

Faith

Abel offered in faith to God. There was a difference in the principle that governed the heart of Abel. He offered with a consciousness of God's will and God's glory and in dependence on the promise of a Saviour (Genesis 3:15). Therefore we may conclude that this faith was not a general belief in God but that it was in fact Justifying Faith. He had received the Promise of the Saviour and he believed the Word of God given to his parents. In gratitude he offered to God that which God required and received assurance that he was accepted.

Abel was a penitent believer and therefore like the tax collector in the story of Jesus, he went home justified. (Luke 18:9-14) On the other hand, Cain's confidence was in himself, and like the Pharisee in the same story, he received nothing from God.

What was involved in the faith of Abel? There was to begin with, a belief in the existence of God. Abel's faith had an intellectual basis. It is stated a few verses hence, that .. "Anyone who comes to God must believe that He exists." (Hebrews 11:6) Abel's faith was more than confidence in a person. It was first of all, belief in a proposition... "God exists". Though assent to certain propositions is not the whole of faith, it is a necessary element in faith. One cannot trust a God if in our minds we understand Him to be either non-existent or untrustworthy. But the nature of Abel's faith went much further and rested on the Word of God and the promise contained therein.

This is the view of Buchanan (1961:45) who states...

"By offering that sacrifice "in faith" – by believing the great truth which it symbolized and typified as it was revealed in the first Gospel promise, - the worshipper was justified then, as he is justified now: he obtained forgiveness and acceptance with God; and not only so, but he might enjoy the assurance of both, when, as in the case of Abel, he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts."

Righteousness

"By faith he was commended as a righteous man." (Hebrews 11:4)

Righteousness is a basic element in Justification. Abel is described as righteous in this verse and Jesus also calls him "righteous Abel."

"And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berakiah..."
(Matthew 23v35)

It cannot be asserted from these scriptures that Abel understood in detail the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness as it was understood later in the writings of Paul. When Bible characters are described as "righteous" It may simply refer in general terms to their moral character in the eyes of the world, as was said of Noah "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time" or it may refer to their forensic standing before God as in the case of Paul in Philippians 3v9 *'not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is by faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.'*

Also in certain situations it may refer to both these categories at the same time, as in 1 John 3:7

"He who does what is right is righteous even as He is righteous."

Into which category does Abel fit? We may say he lived a righteous life, but it is not clear that his righteous life was the basis of his acceptance with God. The LORD looked with favour on Abel before He regarded his offering because his offering was merely the evidence of his heart – a heart that believed the promise of God and loved God. There is therefore evidence that his righteousness was imputed by God upon his believing as in the doctrine of Justification by Faith.

2.2.3. Brief Study of the Biblical Data in relation to Enoch and Noah

The next person of significance in the era of the Patriarchs is Abraham. However before we deal with him it is necessary to look briefly at two men who lie between Abel and Abraham. These are Enoch and Noah. Both are mentioned as heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. They are therefore worthy of brief inclusion in this study. The book of Genesis records

"Enoch walked with God then he was no more, because God took him away". (5:24)

The writer to the Hebrews gives us the following information

"By faith Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death. He could not be found because God had taken him away. For before he was taken he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him..." (Hebrews 11:5,6)

"Enoch pleased God..." This can only mean that he was acceptable to God, that he was justified. The context in Hebrews 11 makes it clear that faith was the means by which Enoch gained acceptance.

Atkinson (1990:128) writes:

“Enoch is singled out among these representatives of the godly line of Seth; of him it is twice said that he walked with God. The writer wants to underline the significance of the obedience of faith which Enoch illustrates. And by faith, we learn Enoch ‘was taken up so that he would not see death’. Here is a vivid portrayal of the power of God over death, and the faith that in God death is ultimately conquered by life.”

Though the details about Enoch and his faith are few yet it is firmly established by Hebrews 11:5,6 that Enoch’s faith was placed in God who had promised the Saviour to Adam. Enoch knew of that promise and embraced it and was counted righteous, that is, justified in God’s sight.

We now consider the case of Noah.
It was written of him as follows:

“But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. This is the account of Noah... Noah was a righteous man blameless among the people of his time and he walked with God.” (Genesis 6:8)

It might be argued that Noah’s righteousness was achieved by a good life lived before a wicked world and that in this context his righteousness must be interpreted as godliness. But the Holy Spirit inspired the writer of Hebrews to record that Noah’s righteousness was inherited from God. It was a gift imparted to him and received by faith. It was not of his own accomplishment. In the case of Noah, the righteousness that rendered him acceptable to God was not achieved by personal performance but granted in grace by faith.

As Leupold (1972:264-265) shows in his comment on Genesis 6:8

“Few as the words are that describe his character, they have unusual weight. First of all he was “righteous-perfect.” By hyphenating these two adjectives we really do not intend to express a compound but rather to indicate that we have here two words that constitute a phrase or a double expression. Together then these two words constitute an expression that covers a state approximating perfection as nearly as man can. “Righteous” (tsaddiq) is a word commonly used in reference to men. It means that they conform to a standard. Since Noah conformed to the divine standard, he met with God’s approval. However the term is basically forensic. Therefore though there be divine approval, that does not imply perfection on Noah’s part. It merely implies that those things that God sought in man were present in Noah. Primarily God desired man to believe Him and His promise of help through the seed of the woman. This basic requirement Noah met, and his conduct showed it. Because of such faith Noah is justified... They who see in the word “righteous” the idea of righteousness by faith interpret soundly, even though the fullest New Testament connotation dare not yet be laid into the expression.”

The Book of Hebrews records:

“By faith Noah when warned about things not yet seen in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Hebrews 11:7)

It is clear that the Patriarchs whom we have examined up to this point were justified by grace through faith in the promised Saviour. They showed their faith by worshipping God as the great Creator in the way that He had appointed; that is, by offering blood sacrifices on his altar. The Scriptures mention these few, not because they were few, but because they were samples of those in that age who believed and were justified.

The basic elements of the Gospel were revealed to them and were sufficient for them as they worshipped in faith. God's Promise was conveyed from generation to generation by oral tradition and symbolized by sacrifice. It was the object of their trust and became for them “the power of God unto salvation.” (Romans 1:16)

In those early days the Promise was universal since at that time there was no distinction between the Jew and Gentile. Indeed the only division in these times was the cleavage caused by sin between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

2.2.4 Study of the Biblical Data in relation to Abraham.

2.2.4.1 Introduction

A more full and detailed revelation of God's purposes began to emerge after the Flood. The Saviour had been identified in the Protevangelion as the conquering Seed of the Woman. But as redemptive history began to run its course, God gave new information regarding the coming Saviour. He did it in such a way that each revelation was building upon the previous one. Soon we learn of the line of descent of the Coming One, the occupations or offices He would hold and the work He would undertake on behalf of His people.

In our study of the Patriarchs we come now to the character of Abraham; the most prominent of the Patriarchs, especially with respect to the doctrine of Justification by Faith. The rest of Scripture bears frequent testimony to this fact.

Many of the characters mentioned in Hebrews 11 are typical examples of people who were justified by faith, but Abraham is in a different category. New Testament writers set him forth as an example of God's method of Justification in all ages. He is not referred to simply as a specimen of Old Testament justification, but as a universal model for believers in all ages. Those parts of the Old Testament that deal with Abraham's experience are often used by the New Testament writers to prove the doctrine of Justification by grace through faith. The most notable being;

“Abraham believed the Lord and he credited it to him for righteousness”
(Genesis 15:6)

This statement is repeatedly quoted in the New Testament.
(Romans 4:3 Galatians 3:6 James 2:23)

The account of Abraham begins in Genesis 11:27 with the Generations of Terah. This is a pivotal point in the Scripture. Up to this point the Scripture narrative deals with all mankind but from this point onwards there is a narrowing as the focus of God's salvation revelation is in general directed to Abraham and his seed. This focus continues throughout Scripture as far as Pentecost. By the time that point in Biblical history is reached the Coming One has arrived and completed His work and God's saving purposes are seen to embrace all mankind. Returning to this pivotal point in Genesis 11:27 we begin to trace the development of the doctrine of Justification by Faith in the life of Abraham.

2.2.4.2 Study of the Biblical data: Genesis 12:1-3

God called Abraham and entered into a covenant with him – even calling Abraham His Friend. (Isaiah 41:8) To him He gave special promises,

*“I will make you into a great nation
And I will bless you
I will make your name great
And you will be a blessing
I will bless those who bless you
And whoever curses you I will curse
And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*
(Genesis 12:1-3)

This foundation promise, given to Abraham is worthy of close examination. We can see that it is really seven promises building up to a climax in the seventh promise:

“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:3)

Calvin (1960:119) comments on this verse as follows:

“Therefore God in (my judgement) pronounces that all nations should be blessed in His servant Abram, because Christ was included in his loins. In this manner He not only intimates that Abram would be an example, but a cause of blessing so that there should be an understood antithesis between Adam and Christ. For whereas from the time of man's first alienation from God, we are all born accursed, here a new remedy is offered unto us... The covenant of salvation which God made with Abram is neither stable nor firm except in Christ. I therefore thus interpret the present place; that God promises to his servant Abram that blessing which shall afterwards flow down to all people.”

Commenting on these words Paul writes in Galatians 3:8

“God announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham.”

God was conveying the message of the Gospel to Abraham. He was informing him that the Messiah would be born through his seed and inviting him to respond in faith to the One who would come.

Luther (1972:237) has the following comment on this verse:

“Hereof it followeth that the blessing and faith of Abraham is the same that ours is; that Abram’s Christ is our Christ; that Christ died as well for the sins of Abraham as for ours. For ‘Abraham saw my day and rejoiced’ (John 8:56) All things therefore are the same... Now what doth Abraham? He believeth those promises. And what doth God to that believing Abraham? He imputeth faith unto him for righteousness; and addeth further many more promises: as, ‘I am thy defender,’ ‘In thee shall all nations be blessed,’ ‘Thou shalt be a father of many nations,’ ‘So shall thy seed be.’ These are invincible arguments, against the which nothing can be said, if the places of the holy Scripture be thoroughly considered.”

It is clear that Abraham possessed this faith that brings justification, when we read our Lord’s words.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day, he saw it and was glad.” (John 8:56)

2.2.4.3. Basic elements of the doctrine found in the life of Abraham

2.2.4.3.1 Faith (as opposed to works)

Throughout the life of Abraham faith is the foremost quality that shines in his character. As a heathen idol worshipper in a land of idolatry he hears the call of God. His response is faith. He believes the God who speaks and responds in obedience by leaving his homeland. After the death of his father he receives the Messianic Promise. (Genesis 12:1-3) Again he believes. This involves a resting of all his hopes upon One who will descend from him. With the eyes of faith he sees through the centuries the day when He will arrive and he rejoices. The promised Messiah is his confidence.

Calvin’s (1972:234-235) comment is worth noting...

“Abraham’s rejoicing testifies that he looked upon the knowledge of Christ’s kingdom as an incomparable treasure; and we are told that he rejoiced to see the day of Christ that we may know that there was nothing he valued more. But all the godly receive from their faith the fruit that they are satisfied with Christ alone and in him are fully and completely blessed and happy, their consciences calm and cheerful. And indeed none knows Christ aright save he who gives Him the honour of resting entirely on Him.”

In the history of Abraham further revelation emerges as the Lord continues to unfold His purposes to Abraham.

*“Do not be afraid Abraham,
I am your shield
Your very great reward.”* (Genesis 15:6)

On this occasion Abraham’s response is to complain about his continuing childlessness – a crucial element in God’s dealings with him. The Lord does not rebuke him but assures him that a son, coming from his own body will be his heir. The Lord then provides an ‘object lesson’ for encouragement.

“He took him outside and said Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them, then He said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (Genesis 15:5)

Abraham’s response is faith:
“He believed the Lord ..”

Then comes the this amazing statement:

“and He credited it to him as righteousness.” Genesis 15:6

This is not the comment of Paul or of John or of any other New Testament writer. This is the comment of the author of Genesis. It is here in Genesis that the idea of the crediting of righteousness is first expressed in Scripture.

It is true that Abraham had done many righteous works especially in obedience to the call of God. Yet it was not for these works that God accepted him. God spoke to him giving him a promise - a Gospel promise. Abraham believed in the character of the God who had revealed Himself to him. The word he had received – that the blessing of the world would come through his seed - he accepted as the Word of God. He took God at His Word – he believed. The response of God was to credit righteousness to Abraham’s account and to accept him as perfectly righteous in his sight.

2.2.4.3.2 Imputation

The words *“he credited it to him as righteousness”* (Genesis 15:6) introduce us to the Biblical doctrine of Imputation. Calvin (1960:144-145) explains it in the following way as it applies to Abraham.

“In the first place, the faith of Abram is commended, because by it he embraced the promise of God; it is commended in the second place, because hence Abraham obtained righteousness in the sight of God, and that by imputation. For the word “chashab” (reckon) which Moses uses, is to be understood as relating to the judgment of God, just as in Psalm 106:31 where the zeal of Phineas is said to have been counted to him for righteousness. The meaning of the expression will, however, more fully appear by

comparison with its opposites Just as we understand that they to whom iniquity is imputed are guilty before God; so those to whom He imputes righteousness are approved by him as just persons; wherefore Abraham was received into the number and rank of just persons by the imputation of righteousness."

2.2.4.3.3 The Time Factor.

The question may be raised whether Abraham had been justified by faith before this time or whether it was only from this point onwards that he possessed justification. It is true that the rest of Scripture would suggest that Abraham was justified from the very first moment that he believed the promises of God, which was probably a considerable time before this event. Why then is his justification connected to this event? It seems that Justification by Faith is first mentioned in the Bible in connection with the promise of the Saviour so that we should always be aware that our justification could never be separated from Christ.

Calvin (1960:146) writes on the time factor as follows:

"If anyone object, that Abram previously believed God, when he followed Him at his call and committed himself to His direction and guardianship, the solution is ready, that we are not here told when Abram first began to be justified, or to believe in God; but that in this one place it is declared, or related how he had been justified through his whole life."

Chapter 2.3

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith in relation to Moses and the Law

2.3.1 Introduction to the era of Moses and the Law

As we pursue the history of the doctrine of justification in the Old Testament the next great period we come to is that of Moses and the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. In this new era we shall see some changes from the situation under the Patriarchs. However we must not see these changes in opposition to the situation under the Patriarchs but rather as a development in the unfolding of the Gospel until it reached its fulfilment in the coming of the Messiah. During the era of Moses and the Law the changes that took place were designed by God to teach new truths which therefore contributed in time to the fullness of the doctrine of justification.

2.3.2 Study of the Biblical Data in relation to this period.

The Ten Commandments.

"And God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in the heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour." Exodus 20:1-17

It is our intention in this chapter to deal with the Decalogue as a whole and not to make reference to any particular commandment.

2.3.3 Context and basic meaning of this passage.

The Decalogue opens with “*And God spoke all these words, saying...*” (20:1) The scene at Mount Sinai was terrifying and unparalleled elsewhere in history. The Decalogue was spoken by the voice of God Himself. There was no intermediary. On this occasion God used neither man nor angel to communicate His Word. This is proof that the Decalogue was, and remains, unique and unparalleled. Further proof of this is given in the fact that God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone. They were not written on clay tablets or in a book. This is the Moral Law and it is perfect. “The Law of the Lord is perfect.” (Psalm 19:7) The Moral Law is permanent and unalterable and still remains in force. The ceremonial and judicial laws of that era are no longer in force but the Ten Commandments were delivered by God’s own mouth and are perpetual and universal in obligation. The Decalogue is an exact model and basis for religion; it is the standard of truth and the judge of all disputes. But the Law is not a Christ to justify us rather it is a rule to instruct us.

In the era of Moses and the Law the “two tablets of stone” are referred to again and again. (Exodus 31:18, 32:15, 40:20) They constitute the testimony and were placed in the ark of the testimony. Even at this early stage the close connection between law and grace is seen by the fact that the Mercy Seat was directly above the testimony which was placed in the ark. (Leviticus 16:13) The Law would instruct and condemn, but the place of atonement through sacrifice is near.

We note that there were two tables of the Law. We are not told how the Ten Commandments were divided up. The fact that the first four speak of our duties to God and the rest speak of our duties to man would seem to make a natural division. We would expect that the duties to God would come before the duties to man. We cannot truly love our neighbour unless we have first learned to love God.

2.3.4 Two Approaches to the Law

Buchanan (1961:51) outlines two ways of looking at the whole era of Moses and the Law.

“First, as a system of religion and government, designed for the immediate use of the Jews during the term of its continuance; and secondly, as a scheme of preparation for another and better economy, by which it was to be superseded when its temporary purpose had been fulfilled.”

The first purpose was for the well being of Israel. They had been lately formed into a nation and were about to receive the fulfilment of the promise God had made to Abraham concerning the land He would give to his seed. The second purpose taught them about the coming Messiah. In the era of Moses and the Law they were like children in their minority, being trained and tutored until they reached their majority or full maturity. (As in New Testament times) The purpose of that era was to give them information concerning their need of Him and the fact that He would be the Righteous One, keeping the Law with absolute perfection. These were the purposes of the Law.

2.3.5 The Relationship between the Law and the Promise

In order to understand the era of Moses and the Law, and how it relates to the doctrine of justification by faith, we turn to the explanation given by Paul. In the book of Galatians, Paul explains the nature of this dispensation and its relation to the doctrine of justification. Paul also explains the connection between the Law and the Promise given to Abraham. Though we turn now to the New Testament, the passage we quote refers specifically to the era of Moses and the Law and its bearing on the doctrine of justification.

“What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come....

Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” Galatians 3:17-25

In this passage Paul explains that the Law was added to the Promise. First God gave the Promise to Abraham, then He gave the Law to Moses. Paul explains that “the law was added because of transgressions” (3:19) This does not mean that the law was intended to alter the basis or method of the justification of the sinner as if obedience to the law was now being put in place of faith in the Promise. No, the Promise was not being replaced. The Promise was free and unconditional. It was like a will, freely giving the inheritance to the future generation, and like a will, the Promise was unalterable. God does not make promises in order to break them. The Law, however, had a different purpose; its function was not to justify, but to convince men of their need for justification.

It is true that the law had always been in existence in the conscience of man since the beginning of the world. But with the giving of the Law on Sinai the Law became explicit and public. As Buchanan (1961:52) explains:

“...but it was now added and promulgated anew with awful sanctions amidst the thundering and lightning of Sinai, to impress the Jews, and through them the Church at large, with a sense of the holiness and justice of Him with whom they had to do, - of the spirituality and extent of that obedience which they owed to Him, - of the number and heinousness of their sins, - and of their utter inability to escape the wrath and curse of God, otherwise than by taking refuge in the free promise of His grace.”

It is clear therefore that believers were justified under the Law, not by obedience to the Law, but by fleeing from the threats of the Law to the refuge of faith in the

Promise given to Abraham. This is how they became children of Abraham and heirs with him of the same promise.

We may sum up the relationship between the Law and the Promise in the words of Luther: (1998:159) (Edited by McGrath and Packer)

“Why then was the law added? It was not so that Abraham’s descendants might obtain the blessing through it, for the role of the law is not to bless but to bring people under the curse. It was so that there might be in the world a certain people that would have the word and testimony of Christ, and out of which Christ might be born, and so that people shut up under the law, might long for deliverance through the seed of Abraham, that is through Christ who alone could bless...”

Let the law and the promise meet and we shall see who is the stronger – that is, whether the promise can abolish the law, or the law the promise. If the law abolishes the promise then it follows that we by our works make God a liar and His promise is useless, for if the law justifies us and sets us free from sin and death, and consequently our works and strength fulfil the law, then the promise made to Abraham is utterly void and pointless, and so God is a liar and a cheat....

Therefore, just as the promise came before the law, so it is far more excellent than the law.”

2.3.5.1 The Law as a National Covenant

On the other hand, the Law, in that age, may be looked upon as a national covenant. It was an agreement between God and Israel. God was saying, I establish you as my people in my land; the land of Canaan, upon the following conditions; that you keep my Law. As you obey my commandments, I will bless your welfare; your families, your flocks and herds and secure your boundaries. I will guarantee your temporal welfare as a nation as long as you keep my Law. Viewed in this way, the Law had no bearing on the spiritual salvation of individuals except in so far as it may have affected the availability of the means of grace. For example, in times of apostasy God might withdraw the prophets, or permit the priesthood to become corrupt. But viewed as a national covenant the law was not a means of spiritual salvation.

2.3.5.2. The Law and the ongoing Revelation of the Doctrine of Justification

The era of Moses and the Law understandably placed great emphasis on the Ten Commandments. Yet that era was also an era of Grace. The Promise given to Abraham was not set aside at that time by the Law or nullified by it. The era of Moses and the Law was founded upon the Promise and both Promise and Law continued in the history of divine revelation until the Promise reached fulfilment.

“The law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”.
John 1:17

The era of Moses and the Law amalgamated all previous revelations of divine truth such as the Sabbath, Sacrifice, and Circumcision. To these were added many other laws which were suitable for that particular era and which were significant symbols and signs of spiritual blessings. Those who lived in that era and possessed faith could look beyond the sign to the thing signified and see Christ as they partook of the

ordinances of that era and could obtain forgiveness and acceptance with God. The Jewish believer of that era was justified by grace through faith in the same basic way as the Christian believer today.

Buchanan (1961:54) explains how this took place:

“The divine Law, spiritually understood, awakened a deep conviction of sin; the divine promises embodied and exhibited in the divine ordinances, - in those especially which related to the expiation of sin and the removal of ceremonial defilement, - pointed to a divine method of deliverance based on the principles of substitution and atonement, and produced trust in God's mercy and hope of his gracious acceptance; while the prospective character of these ordinances, as types of better things to come, and their utter insufficiency in themselves to ‘take away sin’ or to make ‘the comers thereunto perfect’ as pertaining to the conscience, directed their thoughts forward to the time when the work of redemption should be actually accomplished by the promised Seed.”

2.3.6 Basic Elements of the Doctrine found in Exodus 20:1-17

Our treatment of this section will deal mainly with the Decalogue and its relationship to the doctrine of Justification by Faith. Some reference will also be made to other parts of the Pentateuch. Two elements of the doctrine are present here; *righteousness and justice*.

2.3.6.1 Relationship between the words righteousness, justice and justification.

These three words are closely connected in biblical usage as Seifrid (2000:740-741) points out:

“The biblical terms often translated as “righteousness” or “justice” belong to a single word group, that associated with the ‘sdq’ root in Hebrew or that based on the ‘dik’ root in Greek. Furthermore, the Hebrew usage, which influences that of the NT writers, tends to be relational and concrete: one is righteous with respect to another human being or to God in a particular kind of conduct, or in a particular contention which has arisen. (eg. Deut6:25; Ps.106:31; Is. 5:7; etc.) The ‘sdq’ root does not signify a proper inward disposition, even though it may presuppose it. On the other hand, while ‘sdq’ terms often carry forensic overtones they generally signify the outcome of a contention or lawsuit rather than the act of judging or its content.”

After showing the relationship between these words, Seifrid (2000:740-741) goes on to show that God and His law provide the basis for all righteousness and justice.

“For the Biblical writers, God is the source of all righteousness, both in His saving intervention in human affairs and in the requirements which he places upon the world. While human beings acknowledge God's righteousness and justice as it is revealed, they cannot judge it according to their standards when it is hidden; to do so would be to reverse the roles of Creator and created.”

2.3.6.2 Righteousness

Righteousness is central to the doctrine of Justification and the Decalogue sets before us the nature of righteousness. God is holy, just and good and the Law which is also holy, just and good, reflects these attributes in God. Man is created in the image of God and because he is related to God as a responsible and dependent creature therefore his moral being must be conformed in heart, mind and will to the moral perfection of God. This is the nature of righteousness. Immediately before the giving of the Law at Sinai, God told Israel: *"You shall be a holy nation."* (Exodus 19:6) Later Jesus was to reiterate the same truth to his disciples:

"Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

Therefore we must conclude that no rational being can ever be relieved from the obligation to love the Lord our God with all the heart and soul and strength and mind, and his neighbour as himself. Righteousness is the moral perfection of God coming to expression in life and conduct on a daily basis.

It is true that the obligation to righteousness was present in the conscience of man when he was originally created. Paul makes this clear when he writes about the Gentiles.

"Indeed when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."

(Romans 2:14-15)

Murray (1976:196-197) however, shows us the limitations of the conscience and the need for a visible and external manifestation of the will of God:

"But the conscience of man though indispensable to the fact and sense of obligation, and though not eradicated by sin, has nevertheless suffered just as much damage by the ruin of sin as does any other function or activity of his being..."

Can man by the movements of conscience in relation to the various experiences of life determine what is right and good and holy? Is man's conscience so perfect and accurate a reproduction of God's perfection that it can reveal to us what is in accord with his will? Does it so derive its lifeblood from the eternal God that its heartbeat is in perfect accord with his?

Yes the conscience of man may give us the dictum that there is a distinction between right and wrong., that it is right to do right and that it is wrong to do wrong, but it cannot tell us what the right is or how we are to apply it and fulfil it. The fact is that in the matter of right and wrong we are just as dependent upon special divine revelation as we are in the realm of truth."

Only in the Law of God can righteousness be clearly seen. Without the Law there is no knowledge of righteousness. Man cannot know what is required from him without the revelation of the perfect standard. Furthermore man must recognise that when God forgives and justifies a sinner, He does not relax that perfect standard but finds another way of meeting that standard, as Paul indicates:

“But now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

(Romans 3:21-22.)

2.3.6.3 Justice

Like righteousness, justice is a basic element in the doctrine of justification. As the doctrine unfolds throughout Scripture the justice of God is always prominent, for example in Romans 3:25,26:

“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because of his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.”

It is in the context of a court of justice that the doctrine is defined. In the Decalogue God is the Law Giver and here the justice of God is set forth. The question of our relationship to God is viewed here from the standpoint of God’s just judgement. Law is basic to justice. Without law there can be no justice. Law therefore introduces the whole concept of justice and this is seen particularly in the Decalogue.

Back in the era of the patriarchs Abraham was already conscious of God as King and Judge. God’s justice was foremost in his mind when he was pleading for the city of Sodom:

“What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

(Genesis 18:24f)

Abraham appeals to God’s absolute standards of justice, the very standards that God Himself had set down as the supreme and universal judge. But God is not like other kings. Nor is he simply a king over other kings. His absolute justice derives from His own nature as Creator and Governor of heaven and earth. At the beginning of the Decalogue His sovereignty is stated with particular reference to his covenant people.

“And God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

(Exodus 20:1)

He is the Law-Giver. Israel and the people of God are the law keepers or the lawbreakers as the case may be. Consequently they stand in relation to him as either innocent or guilty. In ancient times, kings were judges with power to enforce their laws. The Israelites made this clear when they petitioned the prophet Samuel for a king.

“You are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to judge us such as all the other nations have.” (1 Samuel 8:5)

At a much earlier stage in Israel’s history, after the deliverance from Egypt, Moses affirmed the justice and sovereignty of God over the people of God in their relationship to Him when he wrote these words in the song of deliverance.

*“He is the Rock, his works are perfect,
And all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
Upright and just is he.”
(Deuteronomy 32:4)*

The nature of the justice of God in His relationship with His people is seen repeatedly throughout the Books of the Law as in the following examples:

In this first example we see that the Lord is the just judge, He is no respecter of persons, He cannot be bribed – yet in His sovereignty He shows mercy and kindness.

*“For the LORD your God is God of Gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.”
(Deuteronomy 10:17,18).*

The justice of God must be reflected in the justice meted out by the judges of Israel who must be impartial and not subject to bribery. Also, the person of the poor is no more to be respected in judgement than the person of the rich.

*“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great but judge your neighbour fairly.”
(Leviticus 19:15).*

*“Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man for judgement belongs to God.”
(Deuteronomy 1:17)*

Individuals experience the justice of God; He renders to each man what he has done.

*Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. “This time I have sinned.” he said to them. The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.”
(Exodus 9:27)*

2.3.7. Conclusion

In the Decalogue the righteousness and justice of God are set forth. When the law was spiritually understood it awakened in the sinner a deep conviction of sin, an awareness of the great distance between his attempts to keep the law and God’s absolute standard. That drove him back to the promises which were set forth in the divine ordinances of the Old Testament. The law therefore had no power to save him, but the law had a vital part to play in his journey to salvation. It revealed to him and

to the whole world, the nature of righteousness and justice, without the knowledge of that, salvation could never be found.

The doctrine of justification by faith deals with the problem of sin and the law reveals the nature of sin and is used by the Spirit of God to convince the sinner of his sinfulness.

The doctrine of justification by faith also deals with the justice of God. It shows how a God of justice may pardon our sins, how God can be just and the justifier of the man who believes in Jesus. The law sets out the justice of God and establishes his position as Creator, King and Judge over the human race

The doctrine of justification by faith also deals with the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to our account. The law shows the nature of this righteousness and sets out in detail those commandments that Christ obeyed in order to achieve perfect righteousness so that it might be imputed to us.

Chapter 2:4

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith in relation to the Prophets and Psalms

2.4.1 Introduction to the Era of the Prophets

As we continue to survey the doctrine of justification in the Old Testament we come next to the period of the Prophets. Since David (Acts 2:30) was a prophet, we shall also include references in the book of Psalms in this chapter. There is a clear correlation between the era of the Law and that of the Prophets. Having given the Law, the Lord required that it be explained and applied to the people and for this purpose he raised up the Prophets. The Law had been given through Moses who was himself a prophet so it was natural that there should be a succession of prophets to carry on Moses' prophetic work until the great final prophet would appear. Moses spoke in this way about him:

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." (Deuteronomy 18:15)

The Law contained many types and symbols of the Coming One. It was the prophet's work to explain these truths in a way that could be understood by the common people and not just by the priests who administered the Law. God also required the prophets to set forth the Promise which had been made in the Protevangelium and which later had been more fully declared to Abraham. God commissioned them to proclaim the Messiah who would come. During this era, the revelation of the person and work of the coming Saviour became more definite and specific, and the doctrine of justification became more fully expressed.

We now begin the study of the Biblical data in Prophets and Psalms.

2.4.2. Isaiah 53

There are many references to the doctrine of justification in the Prophets. We shall make a representative choice beginning with the well-known passage from Isaiah 53:4,5,11.

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.

But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.

After the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities."

2.4.2.1. Context and basic meaning of this passage.

Isaiah wrote during the stormy period when the Assyrian empire was expanding and Judah was declining. Though Assyria threatened Jerusalem itself, it would not be Assyria but Babylon that would eventually carry the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity. The latter part of Isaiah seems to have been written to comfort the people during this period. The Lord calls the Messianic King “my servant” in chapters 42-53. It is through the suffering of the servant that salvation in the fullest sense is achieved.

The section: 52:13 – 53:12 is generally known as the fourth of the Servant’s Songs in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah begins the song with an enigma: How can such victory and glory result from such suffering? As the song unfolds it becomes clear that the servant’s suffering is a bearing of sin.

The entire text of the Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53 is of great importance to the subject of Justification. It deals with the themes of substitution and sacrifice. “Another” becomes our substitute and by suffering obtains forgiveness; therefore the direct and specific mention of Justification in this passage (53:11) gives this verse great importance among the writings of the prophets on this subject.

“After the suffering of his soul he shall see the light of life and be satisfied, by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many for he will bear their iniquities.”
(Isaiah 53:11)

Calvin (2000:327-328) comments.

“Isaiah declares that after Christ has suffered, he will obtain the fruit of his death in people’s salvation. By the word “justify” he points out the effect of this teaching. Thus people are not only taught righteousness in the school of Christ but are actually justified. This is the difference between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of the law. Although the law shows what it is to be righteous, Paul affirms that it is impossible to obtain righteousness by it, and experience proves the same thing... Now the doctrine that Christ teaches concerning righteousness is nothing but the knowledge of him; and this is faith – embracing the benefits of his death and fully relying on him,”

Motyer (1999:339) further elucidates the meaning of “justify” in his comment on this verse:

“The verse goes on to say what it is that delights the Servant: “by his knowledge”, i.e. because he knows exactly what is required in order to save sinners, “my righteous servant” i.e. “that righteous One, my Servant”, an emphatic divine commendation., “will justify many” (a unique turn of Hebrew phrase), i.e. “will provide righteousness for the many.” “The many” is Isaiah’s keyword for those whom the Servant designed to save: what Jesus calls “all that the Father gives me” (John 6:37) Over these he casts the robe of his righteousness. We are not only family members but wear the family likeness... Every benefit and blessing comes from the substitutionary work.”

Oswalt (1998:404) comments on the cumulative aspect of the revelation of redemption in the Law and shows that the Servant is the embodiment of all that the Ceremonial Law spoke of, when he states:

“In contrast to Cyrus, this man’s servanthood is redemptive. It finds its true fulfilment in the realisation of what the whole sacrificial system prefigured. When an offerer accepted and carried out the provision of God for his guilt as stated in the manual of sacrifice (Leviticus 1-11) he could be clean in the sight of God. But that cleansing was only symbolic, because an animal life is no substitute for a human one. Now a human life, yet obviously more than a human life (he will make “many” righteous), has been freely given and the symbol is a reality. Fellowship with God is possible... No prophet could do this for Israel, much less the world, and neither Israel as a whole nor any segment of Israel could do it either. Whoever he is, the Servant stands in the place of God, pronouncing a pardon that the Sinless One alone can offer.” (51:4-6)

2.4.2.2 Basic Element of the Doctrine found in this passage.

Substitution

Substitution is a basic element in the doctrine of justification by faith as historically understood:

“Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone” (Westminster Shorter Catechism [1994:33].)

Imputation and substitution are closely allied. Imputation and substitution both involve a transfer from one person to another. The substitution which is everywhere seen in the Old Testament sacrificial system develops into the doctrine of imputation seen in the New Testament especially in the writings of Paul in such passages as 2 Corinthians 5:19&21:

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them... God made him who had no sin to be a sin offering for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Throughout Isaiah 53 there is constant reference to the substitutionary nature of the Servant’s work.

*“Surely he took up our infirmities
And carried our sorrows... (4)*

*He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities,
The punishment that brought us peace was upon him
By his wounds we are healed. (5)*

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (6)

He will bear their iniquities. (11)

For he bore the sin of many...”(12)

The Servant becomes a substitute who carries our infirmities and sorrows. He endures punishment and suffering on our behalf. That which belonged to us is loaded upon him. It is the Lord who has appointed him our substitute. It is the Lord who has laid our sins upon him. He bears or carries those sins in a substitutionary way. So in the doctrine of justification by faith our sins are imputed to Christ and his righteousness is imputed to us. It is true that this is not explicitly stated in Isaiah 53, but the basis of his truth is clearly present.

In conclusion, we may say, that instead of the Levitical offerings for sin presented by the priests, the Servant of the Lord offers himself as the sacrifice for sin. The Levitical offerings pointed to the expiation of sins through the shedding of blood and to the appeasing of God's wrath indicated by the symbolism of the smoke ascending thus indicating a pleasing sacrifice to God. The Servant is described as the Righteous One who justifies many. The righteousness that Abraham received through faith in the promise, is now shown by Isaiah to be the same, and provided by the Servant of the Lord.

2.4.3 Jeremiah 23:5-6

This is our second passage for consideration in the era of the prophets.

*“The days are coming declares the Lord,
When I will raise up to David a righteous branch,
A king who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called:
The LORD Our Righteousness.”*

2.4.3.1 Context and basic meaning of this passage.

Jeremiah began prophesying in Judah in 626 BC during the reign of Josiah and continued throughout the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah right up to the fall of the Judean state. It was a period of great stress among the nations including Judah and the book of Jeremiah was written in the midst of all this upheaval. The Book of Jeremiah is one of the most political of all the Old Testament prophecies.

Chapter 23 falls among the group of chapters 21- 25 which treat the fall of Jerusalem as a “fait accompli” and show that it will happen because of the failure of the monarchy and of the office of prophecy to act righteously and honour the Word of the Lord. These chapters offer instructions on how to survive the disaster. There is an important transition here from imminent punishment to a doctrine of hope. In calling for surrender to the

Babylonians, Jeremiah does not repudiate the Davidic covenant. In future God will establish shepherds for Judah (23:1-4) and the Righteous Branch that will be raised up for David in the uncertain future will bear the name; *The LORD Our Righteousness*. Most scholars have recognised these words as messianic.

Thompson (1980:490) explains the immediate historical significance of the messianic name:

“In both the OT and in the later rabbinic writings there were two facets of the doctrine of Messiah: teaching about the Messiah as a person, and teaching about the Messianic Age. We have these two aspects here with the person of the Messiah in v.5 and the messianic Age in v.6...”

As in Isa. 9:6 a symbolic name is given to the coming King, Yahweh sidqenu, Yahweh is our Righteousness. The interpretation of the name varies. It is probably a play on the name of Zedekiah, sidqi-yahu, My righteousness is Yahweh. The noun sedeq was firmly anchored in the concept of kingship in Israel, and it would not be surprising for a king to take such a name as Zedekiah. If the king failed to live according to the symbolism of his name, “Yahweh is my righteousness” it would be appropriate for a prophet to draw the contrast as though to say: “but our Righteousness is Yahweh.”

Calvin (2000:132) however not only treats the prophecy as messianic, but goes much further and applies it to believers in terms of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

“This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.” The prophet shows here that he is not speaking generally about David’s posterity, however excellent they may have been, but of the Mediator who had been promised and on whom depended the salvation of the people. And he says his name will be “The LORD our Righteousness.” By saying that God is Our Righteousness the prophet shows that we have a righteousness in common with him, for Christ possesses a righteousness that he communicates to us. Here we do not see Christ coming to show divine justice but to bring righteousness, which would affect salvation. If, then, we want to have God as our righteousness, we must seek Christ, for it cannot be found except in him. Christ is made our righteousness, (see 1 Corinthians 1:30), and we are counted the righteousness of God in him. He is not only righteous for himself but He is our righteousness.

2.4.3.2 Basic Elements of the doctrine found here.

Righteousness

In the previous passage under consideration (Isaiah 53), we identified the element of substitution. We concluded that there was a transfer involved in Christ’s work on the cross. This transfer involved the sins of his people being transferred to him. In this passage, Jeremiah 23, Calvin, quoted above, sees another transfer, the transfer of righteousness,

“Christ possesses a righteousness that he communicates to us” ... “Christ is made our righteousness, and we are counted the righteousness of God in him.” (2000:132)

In support of this interpretation Calvin then quotes 1 Corinthians 1:30

“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” (2000:132)

This is not the first time in the history of revelation that the Messiah is described as being righteous or establishing righteousness, (e.g. Isaiah 53:11. “My righteous servant...”) and in this passage he is called “a righteous branch” but it is the first evidence that he will become “our righteousness.” This is a notable point in the progress of revelation and the theme of “Messiah – our righteousness” is one that will recur again and again in the ongoing revelation of the doctrine. Indeed it is the seed thought expressed in older Protestant theology by the phrase “the imputation of Christ’s righteousness”. The point that it makes is that believers are counted righteous before God because he permits them to share Christ’s status of acceptance before him.

In our study of the Biblical data we now move to the **Book of Psalms:**

2.4.4 Psalm 32:1-2

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”

2.4.4.1 Context and Basic Meaning of this Passage

In their liturgical tradition, the early Christians numbered this Psalm with the seven penitential Psalms; (Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). However, it is really a song of gratitude for God’s gift of forgiveness. The psalm is in the form of a liturgical dialogue between the Forgiver (God) and the forgiven (David). This dialogue takes place in the presence of the worshippers at the sanctuary. The Psalm opens with a joyful proclamation of the happy state of those who experience God’s forgiveness. It is reminiscent of the opening of the book of Psalms: In Psalm 1 the Psalter opens by proclaiming the blessedness of the godly: *“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked...”*

In Psalm 32 there is the expression of great joy:

“Blessed...” “Blessed...are forgiven... are covered... does not count against him.” The repetition and variations give emphasis and illumination.

To the Psalmist forgiveness is real and present. It is not simply a future hope but a present reality. It is also clear that in the Psalmist’s experience there is such a status as; the LORD not counting his sins against him.

2.4.4.2 Basic Elements of the Doctrine found in this passage.

Forgiveness and Imputation.

The Psalmist describes what God has done for him in three ways:

1. *"transgressions are forgiven."*
2. *"sins are covered"*
3. *"sin ... not counted against him."*

How are we to understand the Psalmist's description of the blessing he has received? Is he simply using poetic language to say: "I have been forgiven" as Craigie (1983:266) suggests:

"The three terms designating the manner of forgiveness are poetically parallel, but taken together, they indicate the completeness of divine deliverance from evil which makes happiness possible."

That may certainly be true, but the third phrase, *"sin ... not counted against him."* Is particularly noteworthy in connection with the study of the doctrine of justification by faith, as Boice (1994:279) points out:

"The third word for what God does with sin is negative; that is, it describes what God does not do. He "does not count" the sin against us. The word "count" is elsewhere translated "impute", and it is a bookkeeping term, as "count" especially suggests. It is the word used by Paul in Romans to explain how God writes our sin into Christ's ledger and punishes it in him while, at the same time, writing the righteousness of Christ into our ledger and counting us as justified because of his merit. That is why Paul quotes these particular verses rather than others in Romans 4:7."

This adds a new concept not entirely covered by the term "forgiveness", that is; the concept of "imputation". We can interpret it in this way with confidence, because of the way Paul picks up on this passage in Romans 4, where he uses both this passage and Genesis 15:6 to show God's method of justification in the Old Testament.

Commenting on Paul's use of Psalm 32, John Piper (2002:117-118) writes:

"Paul asks whether David's blessing of forgiveness was pronounced on the circumcised or on the uncircumcised, but he answers by saying that "righteousness was credited to Abraham (v11) before he was circumcised. Does this not suggest strongly that the "blessing" referred to in David's words from Psalm 32 is "the crediting of righteousness" to believers, not simply the forgiveness of sins?"

Now why might this be? The answer I would suggest is that Paul assumed two things: First, Paul assumes there is no justification – no positive declaration and imputation of righteousness – where there is no forgiveness. Forgiveness is a constitutive element of

justification. The sins that stand in the way of declaring a person righteous must be blotted out, covered, forgiven. Second, Paul assumes that if a saving “blessing” is pronounced over a person, he must be counted as righteous. That is why he had no problem explaining David’s blessing with Abraham’s justification.

When Paul put Psalm 32:1-2 and Genesis 15:6 together, he saw two essential aspects of justification: forgiveness and imputation – “blotting out” and “crediting to.” So when he heard David say that a forgiven person is “blessed” he heard in the “blessing” the complete work of justification without which there is no blessing – namely the work of forgiveness and imputation.”

These words of Piper help to elucidate the relationship between forgiveness and imputation in Psalm 32 and to explore further the ongoing revelation of the Biblical basis of justification.

2.4.5. Psalm 130

For our second study in the Psalms we now turn to Psalm 130. Unlike most of the other passages we have studied, this passage is not cited by any New Testament writer. However, it might just as well have been cited by Paul, in Romans or Galatians, as any other Old Testament passage in defence of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is clear that a number of notable figures in the history of the church (Luther, Calvin, Wesley etc.) have seen the doctrine of Justification by faith in Psalm 130.

2.4.5.1 Context and basic meaning of this passage.

Psalm 130 is another penitential Psalm. It is number six in a list of seven. The Psalm begins in the depths of despair but makes progress steadily upward and climbs towards assurance and encouragement. In fact, Psalm 130 is literally a Song of Ascents. This upward progression is seen in each of the four stanzas as we make the transition through guilt, forgiveness, faith and assurance. “The depths” (v.1) is a term used elsewhere in the Psalms as a picture of near despair (Ps. 69:1,14) Such passages make it clear that self-help is not an option in that situation.

The nature of the Psalmist’s trouble emerges in verses 3 and 4. It is not illness or loneliness as in other Psalms, but guilt. However, despite the sorrow produced by guilt, there is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a reality. Indeed if Paul had wished he could have added verse 4,

“For with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.”

to Psalm 32:1 in his proof that unmerited pardon was already a reality in the Old Testament. The Lord is the one longed for by the Psalmist. His metaphor of the watchmen shows the certainty of forgiveness, since morning always comes. Therefore the hope of forgiveness is certain. The Psalm ends far from where it began in gloom and uncertainty. It ends (v.7,8) with resounding confidence in the following realities.

1. There is forgiveness with the Lord.
2. There is full redemption with the Lord.
3. Israel will be redeemed from all their iniquities.
4. The Lord himself will redeem his people.

2.4.5.2 Basic Elements of the Doctrine found in this passage.

2.4.5.2.1. Sin/Guilt

In the doctrine of justification by faith we affirm that God “pardons all our sins”. By implication we are therefore affirming the doctrine of Sin. The Psalmist is also setting the doctrine of Sin before us in Psalm 130. It is implied throughout the Psalm but explicitly stated in verse 3:

“If you, O Lord kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?”

And again in v.8.

“He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.”

It is not suffering or circumstances that is troubling the Psalmist in this Psalm; it is sin. He mentions a “record of sins” in verse 3, and makes reference to forgiveness and redemption later in the Psalm. He cries out as though he was sinking in the sea under the weight of guilt. He has discovered how dreadful is his condition apart from God. He knows that God is his Judge and that he has a right to mark iniquity; yet his cry to God is about mercy and forgiveness. Justification by faith has no meaning apart from knowledge of the doctrine of Sin. Where there is no consciousness of sin there will be no desire for forgiveness or a right relationship with God.

2.4.5.2.2 Forgiveness

“But with you there is forgiveness.”

In the Hebrew there is no verb in this sentence. It literally reads:

“With you forgiveness.”

How can the Psalmist be sure about this? In v5 he says:

“In his word I put my hope.”

Centuries earlier, Moses asked to see God, and received this definitive revelation of the nature of God:

“The LORD, the LORD the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” (Exodus 34:6-7)

The Psalmist's faith was no doubt strengthened by the sacrificial system with all its symbols and signs, with the emphasis on substitution and atonement, and the revelations of a suffering messiah who would bear the sins of the people. The revelation received warranted confidence that God was a forgiving God and that atonement having been made forgiveness was not only possible, but sure and certain to all in covenant with Yahweh.

The second half of this verse:(4)

"... therefore you are feared"

Initially, this seems to be a puzzling response to God's forgiveness, but we remember that in the Bible fear has to do with a holy reverence of God that is the basis of true religion. It is what is drawn from us when we realise that we have been loved and rescued by God in spite of our sin and former rebellion. So, for us, "fear" means loving respect and service. God's forgiveness leads to godly living.

In the closing verses (7,8) the Psalmist testifies to his fellow Israelites about forgiveness and assurance. This gives the Psalm a greater usefulness especially in a communal setting promoting a communal sense of acceptance with God, as Allen(1983:196) comments:

"The communal implications already contained in this fine individual Psalm evidently encouraged its re-use in a completely communal setting. Vv1-6 became the voice of the personified community pouring out before Yahweh their prayers, confessing their sins and imploring him to forgive and restore (cf. Daniel 9:4-19). They lay claim to divine promises of a glorious future for the covenant nation and, encouraged by a now priestly voice in vv 7-8, look forward to a new redemption surpassing that of the Exodus (11:9) and the return from Babylonian exile (Isaiah 50:2). Convinced that God has much more salvation and blessing in store for them than they have yet enjoyed, they plead with him to surmount the barrier of their own sinfulness, as they know he can."

The confidence and assurance expressed in this Psalm find their zenith in the New Testament in the fullness of time, not only for the individual but also for the community. Allen (1983:196) again expresses this concept forcefully:

"The NT with its revelation of Christ gave a new dimension to the longings and affirmations of Psalm 130. On the individual level 1 John 1:8-2:2 is its counterpart, assuring the believer that his failure can via confession ever find its remedy in God's grace. For the Christian this grace is grounded not only in a heart of love but in its disclosure through the death of Jesus as the objective basis of divine deliverance. From this initial redemption (Romans 3:23-25; Eph 1:7) is traced an arc which is to culminate in an awaited sequel for the church."

Chapter 2:5

Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew

2:5:1 Introduction to the New Testament Era

The ministry of John the Baptist introduces the New Testament era. He is the link between the two Testaments – the prophet with a foot in both camps, so to speak. Jesus had the highest regard for John and paid this tribute to him:

“Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.” (Matthew 11:9-14)

John was the messenger sent to prepare the way of the Lord. His preaching and practice were revolutionary. He demanded repentance and baptism from his fellow Jews. He challenged those who were proud of their status as the people of God. The Jews of John’s day looked upon Gentile sinners as unclean whereas they (the Jews) were pure since they possessed God’s Law. By calling such people to repent, John was doing what Paul did later; declaring that all men everywhere,

“Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. There is none righteous not even one.” (Romans 3:10)

All were unclean sinners and not in a right relationship with God. This was a revolutionary concept for first century Jews.

The rule of God was considered by the Jews in national terms and linked to the promised land, but John declared that the Coming One would change all that, and introduce the Kingdom of God. The privileged position of the Jews as the people of God could no longer be cited as a ground of acceptance for membership of the new kingdom of God. Both John and Jesus proclaimed to their own people the need for repentance from sin and the paramount importance of heart religion. There must be a real recognition of the sinfulness of the human heart and a looking to God’s promised Messiah. This is the only way to be justified.

2.5.2. First Century Judaism

There has been much discussion, especially in the last 30 years on the subject of First Century Judaism. Some modern scholars (e.g. E.P.Sanders; J.Dunn; N.T. Wright etc.) have sought to reverse the traditional thinking on the subject. They believe that it is wrong to think of first century Judaism as a legalistic religion in which the Jew tried to earn righteousness and gain God’s favour by good deeds. In their view, the New

Testament writers were not attacking Judaism because it was legalistic, but because it was nationalistic. For example: Sanders (1977:32) writes:

“It is completely wrong to think of Rabbinic religion as a religion of legalistic works righteousness.”

While it is true that the Jews of the first century were nationalistic, there is abundant evidence in the New Testament that for most first century Jews, acceptance with God depended on works-righteousness.

That first century Judaism was characterised by legalistic works-righteousness is clearly demonstrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, which Jesus told in order to address this common problem.

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God I thank you that I am not like all other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-15)

In this parable, Jesus draws attention to the Pharisees as an example of self-righteousness. Pharisees were constantly boasting in their moral superiority. It is not Jewish ethnic privilege that we see here but self-righteous assurance in a moral superiority gained by works of the law as understood by the tradition of the elders. It is the tax collector who pleads nothing but God’s mercy – it is he who is justified.

Legalistic self-righteousness can also be seen in Paul’s reference to the mind-set of his compatriots in Romans 10:1-4

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man that does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says.....that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.”

It is clear that Paul is not here speaking exclusively about the Jews priding themselves in their Jewishness when he refers to their own righteousness (v3). He speaks of their lack of knowledge of the “righteousness that comes from God” and about their efforts to “establish their own”.

As far as extra-biblical sources are concerned, we know that the Qumran community held firmly to the doctrine of predestination and to a belief in the grace of God.

However, it is also clear that they believed that good works possessed atoning value and helped towards their spiritual standing. It is clear that one could only be clean from sin by belonging to the community and observing their strict regulations. There was a yearly examination and ranking of community members according to their understanding and deeds. The community consciously linked religious standing to the deeds of the individual.

We may conclude therefore that first century Judaism was a religion in which the dominant feature was legalistic works-righteousness.

2.5.3. Occurrence of the term “Righteousness” in the Gospel of Matthew

The occurrence of the term “righteousness” (*dikaiosyne*) and associated terms, in the Gospel of Matthew is remarkable. According to the N.I.V. Study Bible Concordance (1989:2098) there are no references to the word “righteous” or “righteousness” in Mark or Luke and only one reference in John, while Matthew has more than a dozen references to “righteous” or “righteousness” as listed below:

*Matt 5:45...sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
9:13...I have not come to call the righteous but sinners...
10:41...anyone who receives a righteous man in my name...
13:43...then the righteous will shine like the sun...
13:49...separate the righteous from the wicked...
25:37... Then the righteous will answer him, Lord...
25:46...to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.*

*Matt 3:15...proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness...
5:6...those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...
5:10...who are persecuted because of righteousness...
5:20...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees...
6:1...to do your acts of righteousness before men...
6:33...but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...*

2.5.4. The Need for Righteousness.

Our studies in the Gospel of Matthew will be generally confined to the basic element of Righteousness, and we shall deal with the context and basic meaning of each Scripture as it arises.

*“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:20)*

The kingdom, the King and entering the kingdom – these, and related themes occupy much of Matthew's Gospel. (see chapters 2,13,22,24,25) Added to that, there is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in the life and ministry of Jesus. The needs of the people of Jesus' day; both Pharisees and tax collectors, especially the need for righteousness, was one of Jesus' prime concerns as depicted by Matthew. When the Pharisees asked his disciples:

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

Jesus replied:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'desire mercy not sacrifice', for I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." (Matthew 9:11-13)

When Jesus calls the Pharisees 'righteous' he cannot mean that they are entirely righteous in meeting the demands of God's law, because he has already told his disciples in Matthew 5:20:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

As Yri (Carson ed.1992;97) explains:

The thrust of the argument in Matthew's Gospel is adequate demonstration that the righteousness of the Pharisees is presented as not being from God: it is self-righteousness, it is based on a man's ability to obey what he himself has understood to be God's will in the written law. But a failure to recognise the distinction between this kind of righteousness and that which Jesus demands makes it impossible to grasp the profound hiatus between human ability and God's demand for righteousness.

The term "surpasses" in Matthew 5:20, (*perisseue pleion*) though it is usually a quantitative expression in Semitic thought, can also be used in reference to qualitative distinctions. Though the Pharisees had the highest standing in Jewish religious life, Jesus is hardly demanding more righteousness of the same kind – legalistic works-righteousness infected with hypocrisy. The quantity of their works was great, but the quality of such works was seriously defective. The righteousness of the disciples must be, in essence, totally different, if they are to enter the kingdom of heaven.

2.5.5. The Nature of this Righteousness

The nature of the righteousness described in Matthew 5:20 is now discussed. There are compelling reasons for understanding this righteousness as absolute perfection, according to the law of God, a righteousness that meets all God's demands, that is, the perfect doing of his will. This is the Old Testament understanding, that righteousness opens the gates of heaven: (Isaiah 26:2)

"Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith."

This concept is also seen in Psalm 118:19,20

“Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.”

If the Pharisees who were the very best law keepers of the Jewish nation, and the strictest in their interpretation of the law, were unable to enter the kingdom, what hope was there for the rest of the Jewish race? Clearly another kind of perfection is in view. The whole ethos of the Sermon on the Mount helps us to see that the righteousness Jesus speaks of, is in a totally different category; it is not based on merit or human activity. By insisting on such a high standard, that is, perfection, Jesus is showing that the mind-set of the Pharisees is working in a different direction and cannot possibly achieve this kind of standard. The righteousness needed to enter the kingdom must *exceed* that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The standard is so high, that it demands from the disciple of Jesus, nothing less than perfection. Is this perfection relative? Is it simply the obedient sincere life of the disciple? Does Jesus mean “perfect” (*teleios*) in the absolute sense? That certainly seems to be the meaning in Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

It is clear that the flow of the argument from Matthew 5:20-48 suggests a righteousness and perfection that is beyond the ability of fallen human nature. On the other hand, if we were to take an eschatological view of this perfection and insist that although there is imperfection along the way, perfection would be certain in the end, this is clearly not what Jesus had in mind in the Scriptures quoted above. He is clearly insisting that enemies must be loved now, and that attitudes must be revolutionised now, not in the end.

We conclude therefore that an absolute meaning of “perfect” is required in v48. It seems that Jesus has in mind Leviticus 19:2.

“Be holy, because I the LORD your God am holy.”

The rule of measurement in these passages is not human achievement, but Divine activity. God himself is the measure of perfection. We must be like him. Therefore our interpretation of “perfect” must be taken in the absolute sense.

2.5.6. Matthew 19:16-22 and the significance of “teleios” (perfect)

“Now a man came to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’ Why do you ask me about what is good?’ Jesus replied. ‘There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.’ ‘Which ones?’ the man inquired. Jesus replied, ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother’, and ‘love your

neighbour as yourself.' 'All these have I kept,' the young man said. What do I still lack?' If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth."

This young man comes to Jesus to know what is necessary to attain eternal life. Jesus sets before him the commandments. Though he claims to have kept these, he knows that he lacks something. Jesus continues, "If you want to be *perfect*..." What does Jesus mean? "If you want to be *mature*?" "If you want to be *complete*?" In order to understand what Jesus meant, we have to go back to Matthew 5:48

Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The perfection required is absolute. The rich young man did not understand that God requires more than performance, he requires the whole person, he requires love for God above everything else.

The need for righteousness is seen just here. There is no one who can do the will of God in this absolute sense. Jesus is setting before us a picture of the human heart that is far more radical than any picture a human can draw. No one can save himself. Jesus makes this clear in the ensuing discussion with the disciples: (Matthew 19:23-26)

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"

2.5.7. Jesus fulfils all Righteousness

Matthew wrote for the Jews, and presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah prophesied and predicted in the Old Testament. When John the Baptist attracted crowds at the river Jordan where he preached the coming kingdom, Jesus himself arrived requesting John's baptism. John tried to dissuade Jesus, but Jesus replied, (Matthew 3:15)

"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."

Yri (Carson ed.1992:101) comments on the significance of the phrase: *"to fulfil all righteousness."*

"Both John the Baptist and Jesus were under obligation to do what God had arranged for them. Understanding himself to be the servant of the Lord of Isaiah 53 (and other passages), Jesus knows he has come to take the sin of the world. He, the holy one, places himself under the burden of sin in front of God. Jesus does not himself need the baptism of sinners. Nevertheless, in this way he shows that he is taking the sin of the world upon himself, in order to fulfil all righteousness. Isaiah 53 had to be fulfilled and all Jesus efforts are directed to the fulfilment of the Father's will. By his obedience in this instance he simultaneously reveals his commitment to

pursuing God's will without any attempt to change it and shows himself to be the righteous one who self-consciously stands before the holy will of his Father."

There is undoubtedly a connection between "all righteousness" in Matthew 3:15 and the "righteousness" that surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The obedience of the Pharisees was neither quantitatively, nor qualitatively perfect. But Jesus is the servant who came to do the will of God perfectly, and with delight, as is set forth so beautifully in Psalm 40:7-9 which describes the true Servant's heart.

"Then I said, "Here I am, I have come – it is written about me in the scroll. To do your will O my God is my desire; your law is within my heart." I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly..."

He fulfils all righteousness. He has done what we left undone and he suffered and died to accomplish redemption in obedience to the will of God. He has established himself as the righteous one of God by unreservedly obeying the will of God from the heart.

Jesus made it clear that he had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets (5:17) rather, he came to fulfil them. The Law and the Prophets pointed to him, but the Law and the Prophets demanded righteousness. Until now the Law had only been broken, never kept, but this man never breaks it, he keeps it perfectly, he is the Righteous One, he is the eschatological fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. In his life, death and resurrection Jesus completed everything that was required to fulfil all righteousness; he was obedient to the Moral Law, keeping every commandment in both tables, The ceremonial and civil laws he also observed to the full, no man ever obeyed like this man. The climax of his obedience was reached when his blood ...

"was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28)

2.5.8. Seeking God's Righteousness

We direct our interest now to two passages in Matthew's Gospel that speak of the search for God's Righteousness.

First of all we consider **Matthew 6:33**:

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

It is possible to see in this verse two main lines of interpretation. On the one hand there is the righteousness involved in daily living in obedience to God's will. This is not the righteousness of justification but the pursuit of righteous living. On the other hand there is righteousness that is to be sought as a gift in order to enter the kingdom, since we are to seek both righteousness and the kingdom. Viewed in this way, we enter both righteousness and the kingdom at the same time.

There is no denying that the Christian must live a righteous life and the day to day pursuit of righteousness is a daily duty before God. In the context of the passage however it is better to follow the view that more closely links righteousness with the

kingdom because of the close link between these in the text. The connection between the kingdom and righteousness in this passage is similar to the connection between God's kingdom and God's will, in the Lord's Prayer: (Matthew 6:9-10)

*"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven."*

The doing of God's will on earth is synonymous with the coming of the kingdom. In the same way, God's righteousness comes to us the moment we are forgiven our sins and at the same time we receive motive and incentive for new behaviour – we enter a new kingdom. There is only one way into the kingdom and it is *dikaiosyne*. (righteousness) The crucial thing is the forgiveness of sins, that is, what we are to pursue. To receive the kingdom is to receive the righteousness that goes with it.

We now consider the second passage that speaks of the search for God's Righteousness: **Matthew 5:6**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

This passage comes from the Beatitudes. They describe the character of the Christian. These are characteristics that are found in the followers of Jesus. The Beatitudes do not point the way into the kingdom, rather, they describe those who have already entered the kingdom. These are not seekers for the kingdom, but members of the kingdom. They are already blessed; already in possession of these qualities (at least in some degree). A hunger and thirst for righteousness is characteristic of all God's people. Their greatest desires are spiritual rather than material.

Throughout Scripture, righteousness is viewed in at least three ways: legal, moral and social. Legal righteousness is justification, that is, a right relationship with God. It is unlikely that justification is in view here since Jesus is addressing those who are his disciples and have a right relationship with him.

It is more likely that moral and social righteousness is in view here, that is, the righteousness of conduct and character. Stott (1978:45) explains what is involved:

It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that the biblical word "righteousness" means only a right relationship with God, on the one hand, and a moral righteousness of character and conduct on the other. For biblical righteousness is more than a private and personal affair; it includes social righteousness as well. And social righteousness, as we learn from the law and the prophets, is concerned with seeking man's liberation from oppression, together with the promotion of civil rights, justice in the law courts, integrity in business dealings and honour in home and family affairs. Thus Christians are committed to hunger for righteousness in the whole human community as something pleasing to a righteous God,"

Such righteousness has an eschatological aspect, as it will never be ultimately satisfied until judgement day when righteousness will triumph universally and demonstrably. But Luther (1521:27) will not allow us wait idly for that day:

“The command to you is not to crawl into a corner or into the desert, but to run out if that is where you have been, and to offer your hands and your feet and your whole body, and to wager everything you have and can do.....a hunger and thirst for righteousness that can never be curbed or sated, one that looks for nothing and cares for nothing except the accomplishment and maintenance of the right, despising everything that hinders this end. If you cannot make the world completely pious, then do what you can.”

2.5.9. Conclusion

We have considered the theme of Righteousness in Matthew. We have looked at what Matthew has to say about the need for righteousness. We have viewed this against the background of the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus. We have also looked at first century Judaism and mentioned the opposing theories. We have tried to establish the understanding of the Pharisees on the subject of Righteousness. We have concluded that the nature of the righteousness spoken of in Matthew is two-fold. While verses like Matthew 5:20 speaks of justifying righteousness,

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:6 and related verses speak of moral and social righteousness.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

However, our main focus has been on the Righteous King who as the Servant of the Lord fulfils all righteousness, and thus becomes our righteousness.

Chapter 2.6

Forgiveness and Justification in Luke and Acts

2.6.1. Introduction

Since the writings of Luke account for approximately one quarter of the New Testament - about the same proportion as the writings of Paul, it is necessary for us to examine justification and related themes in the Gospel of Luke, and the Book of Acts.

F.F.Bruce (1951:5-6) introduces us to the link between Luke and Acts:

“At first Luke and Acts formed a single work in two parts, but after a few decades the first part was detached and bound up with the other three Gospels, receiving the distinguishing caption ‘Kata Loukan’... We infer then that the two-fold work circulated at first under some such title as ‘Luke to Theophilus’ and that when the two parts were separated, the ‘former treatise’ had its title changed to ‘According to Luke’, the author’s name being taken over from the original title. The name ‘Acts of the Apostles’ was probably attached to the second part about the time when its canonicity was recognised.”

At the beginning of his Gospel Luke sets out his *modus operandi* and his objectives: (Luke 1:1-4)

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.”

Since it is generally agreed that Luke and Acts are two parts of one literary unit, the above prologue almost certainly may be taken to cover Acts as well. Both books are Christocentric; the Gospel dealing mainly with the humiliation of Christ and the Acts dealing with the exaltation (that is, with its immediate consequences). Since Luke wrote the prologue and the gospel in the post-exaltation setting, his selection of material for both the Gospel and Acts will have been influenced by that setting. A major unifying theme, therefore, in the two-volume work is the Coming of the Holy Spirit. There is a definite connection between the Spirit and the kingdom throughout the Gospel. Note the following references, at his birth, baptism, temptations and teaching ministry.

Luke 1:33-35 ... he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, his kingdom will never end..... the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...

Luke 3:21-22 When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him...

- Luke 4:1 Jesus full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert.*
- Luke 4:5,6 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, I will give you all their authority and splendour...if you worship me it will all be yours.*
- Luke 4:14-15 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit... he taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him.*

This link between the Holy Spirit and the kingdom is seen in the overlap between the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts. Between his resurrection and ascension we know that Jesus “spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3) yet also commanded the disciples to wait at Jerusalem for baptism with the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was God showing the world and the church that the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ – his entire work of atonement - was received in glory as full payment for the sins of God’s people.

Gaffin (1992:112) explains it in this way:

“Pentecost, then, is the ‘de facto’ justification of the church. Along with Christ’s resurrection and ascension (with which it forms a complex of inseparable, once-for-all events; cf.2:32-33) it is a declaration, in effect, of the church’s righteous standing before God. Pentecost is not only the efficacious empowering of the church for kingdom service (it is that to be sure), but is also the effective demonstration that the church is no longer subject to God’s wrath. The eschatological life of the Spirit poured out on the Church at Pentecost seals its acquittal and the definitive removal of its guilt. The baptism with the Holy Spirit openly attests that ‘there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.’ (Romans 8:1) The Spirit of Pentecost is the Spirit of Justification”.

2.6.2. Occurrence of term “forgiveness of sins” in Luke (Basic Element of the doctrine of Justification)

There are eleven occurrences of the expression “forgiveness of sins” in the New Testament. Eight of these are found in Luke and Acts. Since forgiveness is a basic element in the doctrine of Justification by Faith, it is necessary to study the occurrence of the term in these two books.

In Zechariah’s song we have the first occurrence: (Luke 1:77)

“to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins, because of the tender mercies of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven..”

This reference is to John the Baptist who will give to believers the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. We note here the close connection between forgiveness and salvation - a major theme in Luke and Acts; it has already been mentioned three times in Zechariah’s song. (vv. 47,69,71)

John the Baptist’s ministry is introduced by Luke in the following way:
(Luke 3:3)

“He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

John did not offer this forgiveness in his own name but in the name of the Coming One.

When Jesus arrived and began his ministry in Galilee at the synagogue in Nazareth the theme of release *aphesis* (usually translated ‘forgiveness’) was clear from the outset. Jesus identifies himself as the Spirit anointed one predicted by Isaiah: (Luke 4:18-19)

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer also mentions forgiveness (Luke 11:4)

“Forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”

And right at the end of the Gospel, Luke sums up the essence of the Gospel message to be proclaimed world wide in this way: (Luke 24:46-49)

“He told them: ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”

2.6.3 Jesus’ Authority to Forgive Sins

On two occasions Jesus explicitly declares someone’s sins to be forgiven. We shall consider these two passages together.

(Luke 5:18-24)

“Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven’. The Pharisees and teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, ‘Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?’ Which is easier to say: ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say: ‘Get up and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...”

(Luke 7: 36-50)

“Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping she began to wet his feet with her tears.....

46. You did not put oil on my head but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little. Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The

other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

In the first passage the central issue is the authority of Jesus; and especially to forgive sins. The healing was in response to the scepticism of the Scribes and Pharisees but the crucial thing is the declaration of forgiveness. Jesus behaviour was revolutionary in first century Judaism. He is not just promising forgiveness in the future, or assuring that God will forgive, but he himself, there and then, is forgiving sins! This is further stressed by the phrase "*the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins.*" The Pharisees sense this and accuse him of blasphemy. The title "Son of Man" is also significant as Gaffin (1992:114) points out:

"The coming of the Son of Man means that the sentence of justification will not only take place before the future heavenly tribunal, but is also pronounced now, on earth; or, better: the irreversible, eschatological verdict of absolute unqualified acquittal is already rendered in history. This is the prerogative of the Son of Man, the eschatological king, the messianic baptiser-judge: this, too, is perhaps the most awe-inspiring of the 'paradoxes' witnessed by the crowd that day (v26)."

Turning now to the second passage (Luke 7: 36-50):

Twice, Jesus announces the forgiveness of sins, first, in pointing out to Simon the loving act of the woman and then to the forgiven sinner herself. The situation in the home of Simon is pregnant with meaning. Simon has invited Jesus, not because of respect for him but in order to satisfy his scepticism. The woman was uninvited and shunned by Simon, yet from Jesus she receives the welcome of all welcomes – the forgiveness of her sins.

2.6.3.1. The Role of Faith in both passages.

Neither party made an explicit request for forgiveness of sins, yet Jesus sovereignly grants it. Yet is not granted where no faith is evident. When the paralytic is pronounced forgiven, the pronouncement is undoubtedly linked to the fact that "*Jesus saw their faith...*" (5:20)

We do not know how much was understood about Jesus, by these who had faith, but it seems they recognised him to be the Lord's promised One, therefore they were seeking him out and depending on his power to meet their needs. The fact that Jesus *sees* their faith and *knows* the thoughts of the Pharisees is also evidence that he was worthy, as The Son of Man, of their wholehearted confidence.

In the case of the woman in Simon's house, the climax of the whole encounter is surely v50:

"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

This is the culmination of Jesus words to her when he told her that her sins were forgiven, that she had loved much and given much in evidence of her faith and love. Love is the result or the evidence, not the basis or cause of forgiveness. Indeed this is the whole point of the parable of the two debtors that Jesus told on this occasion. Forgiveness leads to loving, not the reverse.

2.6.4 Forgiveness and Repentance

Forgiveness is linked also to repentance in other passages in the Gospels. We see this in Luke's reports of the preaching of John the Baptist:

(Luke 3:3,8)

"He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves; 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."

Forgiveness is further linked to repentance in Luke's account of the Great Commission: (Luke 24:47)

"He told them, 'This is what is written: 'The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'"

In general, we may say that in Luke and Acts, the terms, faith, repentance, and conversion all refer to a resolute change of direction away from sin and reliance upon self, and towards God, towards dependence upon his power to forgive sin and enable us to live a new life pleasing to him.

We have looked at the two instances where Jesus actually pronounces sinners forgiven, but there is a whole series of incidents and allusions where, though forgiveness is not actually pronounced, it is implied by the context. Eg:

The conversion of Zacchaeus. (Luke 19)

The calling of Levi. (Luke 5)

The three parables in Luke 15, (The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Son)

2.6.5. Forgiveness Based on Christ

Jesus' declarations of forgiveness were not just a declaration that God forgives. They were declarations that God forgives in the Messianic context; that God's forgiveness is Christological. The truth of forgiveness is staked on Christ's unique person and work. He already has authority on earth to forgive sins, as Gaffin (1992:117) so aptly says;

"The messianic baptiser can grant remission from guilt to the believing and repentant, because by his own baptism on the cross he bears away God's just wrath and punishment on their sins."

Luke knows of no forgiveness of sins apart from the reality of Messianic sin-bearing.

2.6.6. References to Forgiveness of Sins in Acts

We find the references to forgiveness of sins in Acts in the sermons of Peter and Paul. This, we would expect since Jesus their Master had told them:

“Repentance and forgiveness will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47)

2.6.6.1. Peter’s Pentecost Sermon

“This is what is written: ‘The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”

Therefore Acts presents us with examples of the preaching of forgiveness just as Jesus had commanded it after his resurrection. Right at the beginning of Acts, in Peter’s Pentecost sermon, as he concludes, he preaches forgiveness. (Acts 2:38-39)

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”

Bruce (1951:97) comments:

“The call to repentance had been previously sounded by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2) and by our Lord. (Mt. 4:17, etc.) It was an essential element in the sounding of the Good News... Repentance (metanoia ‘change of mind’) involves a turning with contrition from sin to God; the repentant sinner is in the proper condition to accept the divine forgiveness.”

Peter’s statement contains many basic elements already present in the Gospel (of Luke): Baptism, as in John the Baptist’s ministry is associated with repentance and forgiveness. What is new here is baptism ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’; receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and the outstretching of the gospel promise to ‘all who are far off.’ John’s baptism and Jesus baptism point to the same reality, that is, the Messianic Spirit and fire baptism, however, John’s baptism points from the angle of promise, while Jesus’ baptism points from the angle of fulfilment. On that historic day, Peter was presenting to the people not simply an experience of power, but entry to the church, and the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit as the seal that their sins were indeed forgiven.

On the occasion of the healing of the cripple beggar at the gate of the temple, when Peter addressed the crowd, he again addressed them in similar terms: (Acts 3:19)

“Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”

Here Peter elucidates the meaning of repentance by using the term ‘turn to the Lord’ and the meaning of forgiveness, by describing it as, sins being ‘wiped/blotted out’ or ‘cancelled’. This is the same forensic language that Paul uses in Colossians 2:13-14:

“He forgave us all our sins having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”
And David in Psalm 32:1-2:

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him..."

Clearly, Peter, Paul and David all speak in the same way and use the same terms to describe forgiveness. All use the same law-court language when they use the words; 'blotted out,' 'cancelled,' 'not counted against him'.

2.6.6.2. Peter and Cornelius

When Peter meets with the household of Cornelius, he summons the witness of the prophets to convince Cornelius about the reality of forgiveness: (Acts 10:43)

"All the prophets testify about him (Jesus) that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

In this case Peter stresses faith rather than repentance. We may conclude from this that faith and repentance are inseparable twins in the matter of receiving forgiveness. Peter also stresses to Cornelius that faith and forgiveness are both tied to Jesus, particularly his death and resurrection. (vv.39-41)

The question of the status of Cornelius before the visit of Peter is of interest to us, especially with regard to the doctrine of Justification by Faith. The report Peter received about Cornelius stated: *"He is righteous."* (v.22) and *"God-fearing."* (vv. 2,22,35.) It would appear that he was a true worshipper of God and, though uncircumcised, was in covenant with the God of Abraham. He is like the other centurion who is mentioned in Luke 7:1-10, a Gentile, yet as welcome among God's people as Rahab and Ruth were, centuries earlier. What is happening in Acts 10, is not only the individual conversion of Cornelius, but the welcoming of the Gentiles into the church as the eschatological people of God.

When we compare the treatment of the subject of forgiveness of sins, in both Luke and Acts we may come to the conclusion that it is the same forensic reality; that it is conditioned on repentance and faith in both books. However, in Acts it is clearly and demonstrably based on Christ's death and resurrection, and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

2.6.7. Use of the term 'Justify' in Luke and Acts.

In the Gospel of Luke, the verb 'to justify' (*dikaiousai*) is used five times:

- Luke 7:29 *"the tax-collectors justified (edikaiosan) God."*
- Luke 7:35 *"But wisdom is proved right (edikaiothe) by all her children."*
- Luke 10:29 *"but he, wishing to justify (dikaiousai) himself, said to Jesus..."*
- Luke 16:15 *"You are the ones who justify (dikaioentes) yourselves in the eyes of men..."*
- Luke 18:14 *"I tell you, that this man rather than the other, went home justified (dedikaiomenos) before God."*

Gaffin (Carson 1992:123) comments on these five uses as follows:

“All five have either a forensic or quasi-forensic meaning with either a declarative or closely related demonstrative sense. In 7:29,35 the thought is that of vindication before a forum: in the matter of Jesus’ teaching on John the Baptist, the listening crowd as a whole ‘vindicates’ God (acknowledged that God’s way was right’. NIV), and wisdom, in general, is ‘vindicated’ (‘proved right’ NIV) by her ‘children’. In 10:29 the law-expert ‘wanted to justify himself’ in the debate he had instigated with Jesus; before the forum of those present he seeks to vindicate himself, to show that he is in the right.”

2.6.7.1. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector.

Of greater doctrinal significance however, is the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Reference has already been made to this passage in Chapter 2.5.1 of this study, in connection with the religious state of First Century Judaism. Now it is time to look at its doctrinal significance in connection with Luke’s understanding of Justification.

(Luke 18:9-15)

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God I thank you that I am not like all other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Leon Morris (1974:290) comments on the ethical mind-set of the Pharisee as follows:

“The Pharisee in the parable speaks first of some vices from which he abstains and then of some pious practices in which he engages. The Law provided for but one fast, that on the Day of Atonement, so his fasting twice a week was a work of supererogation. The pious were in the habit of fasting more often than the Law required and fasting on Monday and Thursday is attested (e.g. Taanith 10a, 12a). The Pharisee also went beyond the Law’s requirements in tithing...”

What is wrong with the Pharisee’s prayer? On the face of it, it is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for commendable deeds. The problem is not with the content, but with the omission of sincere repentance for his own sinfulness and acknowledgement that he is indeed ‘even like this tax-collector.’ By contrast the tax collector acknowledges his sin by his words and deeds. His simple prayer, “*God be merciful to me, a sinner,*” is full of meaning. The verb the “*be merciful*” (*ilastheti*) is often used in the Greek Old Testament (e.g. Lev.4:35; 10:17; 16:30), and bears the meaning of propitiation, of mercy that turns away wrath. The tax collector as a Jew would know the force of his own words. In desperation he was asking, “Lord, turn your anger away from me because of the sacrifice.” It was this man, rather than the Pharisee who went home justified before God. Jesus declares him righteous. He was not made righteous, or shown to be righteous but declared righteous in a forensic sense. This is the same truth that Paul sets forth in Romans 4:5 where he states that; “*God justifies*

the ungodly.” Indeed, Paul’s teaching about righteousness has its basis in Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God.

2.6.7.2. Use of term “justify” in Acts 13:38-39

The verb “justify” repeatedly used by Paul in the epistles is also used in Luke’s account of Paul’s speech in Pisidian Antioch: (Acts 13:38,39)

“Therefore my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him, everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses.

Notice how Paul links forgiveness to the crucified and risen Jesus. But of great significance is the phrase *“everyone who believes is justified.”* This is the only place outside of Paul’s writings and the book of James where faith and justification are linked. This is Luke’s picture of Paul and it is the same picture that we find in Paul’s own writings. In this passage, Luke is simply providing a reliable sketch of the Apostle’s own teaching coming from the Apostle’s own mouth and in complete agreement with the Apostle’s own writings.

2.6.8. Summary

We have surveyed much of what Luke wrote on the subject of forgiveness and justification. As we conclude this section, we return to that passage which in our opinion best sets forth the doctrine of Justification by Faith, namely, the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector (Luke 18:9-14) The defining words are in v14:

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

We conclude with the apt comments of Gaffin: (1992:125)

“We can hardly quarrel with the conclusion, then, that not only the content of the Pauline doctrine of justification but also the terminology of an antedonated eschatological pardon goes back to Jesus. And we may even wonder whether in v.14 the translation ‘declared to be righteous’ fully captures what was done for the tax-collector; whether, without leaving the realm of the judicial or forensic, there is not reflection here upon the status constituted as well as upon the status declared to be; whether, that is, there is not involved here a constitutive sort of declaration that approaches Paul’s notion of imputed righteousness.”

Chapter 2:7

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith in relation to the writings of Paul.

2.7.1. Introduction to the writings of Paul

Justification is basic to Paul's doctrine of salvation, and, theologically, Paul's writings contain the most highly developed expression of this truth in the New Testament. Since the letter to the Romans is the most important with regard to our subject, most of our study in this chapter will be devoted to it. But we shall also look at passages in Galatians and 2 Corinthians.

The noun "righteousness" (*dikaiosyne*), its related adjective "righteous" (*dikaios*), and the verb "to justify", "to pronounce/treat as righteous" or "put right (*dikaioo*) are found in the Pauline writings over 100 times. The sheer volume of occurrences in their various uses and meanings gives us some idea of the prominent place they had in the teaching of Paul. As we begin to discuss Paul's doctrine of justification, we are immediately aware that we have come to the heart and core of Paul's gospel. Paul gives first place in Romans to the 'good news' that God graciously justifies sinners through faith alone in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law.

Packer (1980:842) describes the way in which Paul introduces the Gospel, and the Righteousness of God, in the book of Romans:

"In Romans, Paul introduces the Gospel as disclosing 'the righteousness of God' (1:17). This phrase proves to have a double reference: 1. To the righteous man's status, which God through Christ freely confers upon believing sinners (the gift of righteousness, Rom. 5:17 cf. 3:21f.; 9:30; 10:3-10; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9); 2. to the way in which the Gospel reveals God as doing what is right – not only judging transgressors as they deserve (2:5; 3:5f.) but also keeping his promise to send salvation to Israel (3:4f.), and justifying sinners in such a way that his own judicial claims upon them are met (3:25f.). 'The Righteousness of God' is thus a predominantly forensic concept, denoting God's gracious work of bestowing upon guilty sinners a justified justification, acquitting them in the court of heaven without prejudice to his justice as their judge".

We now begin the study of selected Biblical passages containing basic elements of the doctrine of Justification. As these basic elements arise, we shall treat them under subject headings, e.g. 'The Righteousness of God'.

2.7.2. Romans 1:16-17:

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew then for the Gentile. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'the righteous will live by faith'".

2.7.2.1. Context and Basic Meaning of this Passage

These verses contain Paul's thesis in the book of Romans: that the power of God is revealed through the gospel for all who have faith. In the remainder of the letter to the Romans he argues the case for this thesis and defends it against objections. He begins in 1:18 –3:20 by arguing that God is righteous and makes no difference between Jew and Gentile in the matters of sin, judgement and salvation. Both are justified in the same way, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and apart from works of the law.

2.7.2.2 The Righteousness of God

As we focus on the passage above (1:16-17) we come face to face, for the first time, with this important phrase: *"the righteousness of God..."* (v16) Much discussion has taken place on this phrase throughout history. The righteousness of God has been understood in three main ways and each of these has a bearing on this passage:

1. The 'Righteousness of God' as a Divine Attribute.

Righteousness describes the character of God, just as wisdom and holiness do. He is the Judge of all the earth and he will do right. For example, in Romans 1:18-22 that begins with the words

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men..."

Paul speaks of God recompensing the Gentile world according to their response to his revelation; here we see the Divine attribute. Again it is seen in Romans 2:5 against the Jews:

"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed. God will give to each person according to what he has done."

This attribute of God cannot be the only truth, or even the main truth that is revealed in the Gospel since it was already revealed in the law.

2. The Righteousness of God as God's covenant faithfulness.

This is God's saving intervention on behalf of his people. The emphasis is on his divine activity and his righteousness and his salvation are often coupled in Hebrew poetry as in Psalm 89:2:

"The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations".

N.T. Wright (1991:234) often interprets the righteousness of God in this way:

"The righteousness of God is essentially the covenant faithfulness, the covenant justice, of the God who made promises to Abraham, promises of a worldwide family characterised by faith, in and through whom the evil of the world would be undone".

3. The Righteousness of God as the gift of justification.

This is rendered 'a righteousness from God' by NIV in 1:17 and 3:21. It is a righteous status which God gives us and which God achieves through the sacrifice of the cross and reveals to us in the Gospel. He contrasts it with 'our own righteousness' which we mistakenly try to establish as the Jews did in Romans 10:2 rather than

submitting to God's righteousness. Cranfield (1979:100) also interprets 1:17 in this way:

"For in it (i.e. in the gospel as it is being preached) a righteous status which is God's gift is being revealed (and so offered to men) – a righteous status which is altogether by faith."

In Romans 4 this righteousness is 'credited' (reckoned or imputed) to us as it was to Abraham and David, also, in 1 Corinthians 1:30 it is Christ himself, 'who has become for us ... our righteousness'.

To sum up we may say that God's righteousness may include the divine attribute (our God is a righteous God), his covenant faithfulness, (he acts on behalf of his people) and his gift of justification. (*'this righteousness comes through faith.'* ... *'we are justified freely by his grace.'*)

2.7.2.2.1. Understanding the righteousness of God

Luther (1955-86: 185) found in this text (Romans 1:16-17) 'a righteousness given to faith' rather than a divine attribute. This passage was of great importance to Luther as he came to an understanding of righteousness as a gift of God... In the preface to his Latin works published in 1546 he reflects on his struggle to comprehend the expression, 'the righteousness of God' in this text. He had been educated to interpret it as the 'active' righteousness of God, by which God punishes sinners. But Luther saw that Paul is speaking here of a 'passive righteousness', i.e., of a righteousness given to faith. He describes his response:

"I felt myself reborn, and carried through the portals into Paradise itself..."

As he studied the other attributes of God in Scripture; 'strength of God', 'wisdom of God', 'truth of God', he discovered that they are used not merely to describe God, but to describe what God gives to human beings.

Kruse (1996:170-171) explains Paul's main use of the term "the righteousness of God":

"However, the central thrust of Paul's teaching about the righteousness of God in Romans is to explain the way God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel. And what he means by this is that God's power for salvation, by which Gentiles as well as Jews are justified freely by his grace, is revealed in the gospel. This is done without any compromise of his distributive justice (because he has set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice for sin), of his covenant faithfulness to Israel, or of his demands for righteousness of life in his people."

Further insight on the meaning of the term "the righteousness of God" in v17, is offered by Ridderbos (1975:163) who states:

"The revelation of the righteousness of God, then, intends to say that the time of salvation that has dawned with Christ and the gospel for man, brings along with it righteousness, understood in this sense, before God (or from God). We consider it established that the words in Romans 1:17 and 3:21 are intended in this latter sense;

that "righteousness" here is therefore not a divine but a human quality and that the righteousness "of God" further defines that quality of righteousness that can stand before God, (cf. Rom. 2:13; 3:20) which is valid in his judgement, the righteousness that God attributes to man as opposed to his own righteousness (Rom. 10:3), as it is also called in Philippians 3:9 "not having my righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God (ten ek Theou dikaiosynen), upon the foundation of faith.""

N.T. Wright (1991:234) however, throws the emphasis on covenant faithfulness:

"The righteousness of God is essentially the covenant faithfulness, the covenant justice, of the God who made promises to Abraham, promises of a worldwide family characterised by faith, in and through whom the evil of the world would be undone."

It is difficult to summarise the meaning of the term "the righteousness of God" on which so much has been written, but we offer the concise summary of Stott (1994:64)

"'The righteousness of God' is God's just justification of the unjust, his righteous way of pronouncing the unrighteous righteous, in which he both demonstrates his righteousness and gives righteousness to us. He has done it through Christ, the righteous one, who died for the unrighteous, as Paul will explain later. And he does it by faith when we put our trust in him, and cry to him for mercy."

2.7.2.2.2. The Righteousness of God Revealed

We note that Paul introduces justification as an act of revelation. He later says: *"But now a righteousness from God apart from law has now been made known..."* (3:21) The Gospel in which Jesus Christ is preached is a mystery hidden in the past, but has now been made known. This revealed righteousness of God is therefore not to be thought of as something entirely new. It agrees with what has been written (1:17) but it has remained hidden till the arrival of the gospel.

It is *"in the gospel"* that the *"righteousness of God"* is revealed. Paul may be referring to the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ, meaning that *"God's righteousness"* is his vindicating act of raising Christ from the dead, for us. So Habakkuk's promise of "life", *"the just shall live..."* may be fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ to which Paul gives prominence in the very first paragraph of Romans (1:4) and which Paul states in 4:25 is the basis of our justification:

"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

2.7.2.3. A Righteousness by Faith

The righteousness of God, which is revealed in the Gospel and offered to us, is *"by faith from first to last"* (NIV) or, *"from faith to faith"* (AV). There have been many interpretations of this phrase. Four are considered here:

Bengel's (1742:17) writes that it is the origin of faith that is in view here:

"From the faith of God who makes the offer to the faith of men who receive it"

Barth's (1933:41) view is similar but simpler:

"from God's faith (faithfulness) to our faith".

God's faithfulness always comes first (in time) and ours is only a response.

It may be the spread of faith that is in view (evangelism) i.e. from one believer to another. Or it may be the growth of faith as in, 'from one degree of faith to another' Finally, it may be the primacy of faith that is in view as it is rendered in NIV 'by faith from first to last'. Considering the dominant position of faith in the context, the N.I.V. rendering may be the true interpretation.

Seifrid (2000:37) sees faith as the main subject of 1:16-17

"In fact, the primary theme of Romans 1:16-17 is the demand for faith, as a glance at these verses shows. It is the exclusive means of salvation, of the revelation of God's righteousness, and of life. As we shall see, Paul regards it as integral to the way in which God justifies the ungodly...In this context he appeals to Scripture to undergird the central role he assigns to faith: 'as it is written, the righteous one shall live by faith'. The text which Paul cites, Habakkuk 2:4 speaks of the one who lives by the faithfulness of the vision of coming salvation, that is, by the promise of God. In interpreting this Scripture as speaking of the faith of the righteous one, Paul underscores the way in which Habakkuk's vision contains a call to faith."

2.7.2.4. The Habakkuk quotation

Let us examine the context of the Habakkuk quotation since there has been some debate concerning it. The prophet had complained that God was going to raise up the fierce Babylonians to punish Israel. How could God use the wicked to judge the righteous? God's answer was that, whereas the proud Babylonians would fall, the righteous Israelite would live by his faith, that is, by humbly trusting God. Many scholars however, translate Paul's quotation from Habakkuk differently:

"he who through faith is righteous shall live" (RSV)

Stott (1994:65) presents the arguments in favour of this translation as follows:

"First, Paul has already used this text, in Galatians (3:11) written some years earlier, as biblical support for justification by faith, not law. So this seems to be how he understands it. Secondly, the context almost demands this rendering, being an endorsement from Scripture of 'from faith to faith'. Paul's concern here is not how righteous people live, but how sinful people become righteous. Thirdly, this translation fits the structure of the letter..."

Whichever way the sentence is understood both renderings affirm that 'the righteous shall live' and that faith is essential. The only question is whether the righteous by faith will live, or the righteous will live by faith. Are not both true? Righteousness and life are both by faith."

Bruce (1963:76) sums up the position in a few words:

“The terms of Habakkuk’s article are sufficiently general to make room for Paul’s application of them – an application which, far from doing violence to the prophet’s intention, expresses the abiding validity of his message.”

It is important to make clear that there is nothing meritorious about faith. When we say that salvation is ‘by faith’ and not ‘by works’, we are not exchanging one kind of merit (faith) for another (works). Neither must we conceive of salvation as a joint operation between God and ourselves, in which there are contributions from both sides. There is no meritorious value in faith, rather the value is to be found in its object, Jesus Christ and him crucified. Faith is the eye that looks to him; the hand that reaches out for the gift.

2.7.3. Romans 3:21-26

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.”

2.7.3.1. Context and Basic Meaning of this Passage

If 1:16-17 is the theme and thesis of Paul’s letter to Romans, then 3:21-26 is the centre and heart of the book. We can scarcely over emphasise these verses. Leon Morris (1988:173) suggests that these words may be

“possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.”

In the chapters preceding this passage (1:18-3:20) Paul has described the sinful and lost condition of the entire human race. Jew and Gentile alike, stand guilty and inexcusable before God. And in the world, no hope of rescue can be found.

“But now...” (3:21)

The words are like the dawn of a new day. Paul tells us that God himself has intervened. The word “now” can be understood in three ways:

1. Logically, in terms of the developing argument,
2. Chronologically, in terms of, ‘just now’, ‘at this present time.’
3. Eschatologically, in terms of the arrival of a new age.

With the arrival of the Messiah and the completion of his salvic work, in those very days when Paul lived on earth, a new day had dawned.

“But now, a righteousness from God has been revealed...”

It is a fresh revelation, centring on Christ and his cross, yet the Law and the Prophets have already testified to it. After the black night of sin and hopelessness, the *“sun of righteousness has risen with healing in his wings.”* (Malachi 4:2)

2.7.3.2. The Righteousness of God

The key expression in this passage is “the righteousness of God”. We considered this phrase above in 1:16-17. It is interesting to note the similarities between 1:17,

“For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘the righteous will live by faith.’”
and 3:21

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.”

Both verses speak of ‘a righteousness from God.’

Both speak of this righteousness as being ‘revealed’ or ‘made known’.

Both indicate that it has recently been made known: ‘but now;’ ‘in the gospel’.

Both show this righteousness to be a fulfilment of Old Testament Scripture.

And both state that this righteousness is received by faith.

In v 22 this ‘righteousness from God’ is identified with justification.

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...and are justified freely by his grace...”

Stott (1994:109) describes this righteousness as

“a combination of (God’s) righteous character, his saving initiative and his gift of a righteous standing before him.”

2.7.3.3. The Meaning of ‘Justify’

It has often been assumed that justification and forgiveness are synonymous.

Jeremias (1966:66)

“Justification is forgiveness, nothing but forgiveness.”

It is true that justification involves forgiveness, but it is not the main element.

Morris (1983:283) defines the verb “justify” (*dikaioo*) in this way:

“The verb denotes the giving of the verdict whereby people are adjudged righteous or acceptable with God.”

Piper (2002:115) goes further:

*“The Greek word for justify (*dikaioo*) does not mean ‘forgive’. It means to declare righteous, usually in a court of law. A prisoner who is found guilty and is forgiven would not be called ‘justified’ in the ordinary sense of the word. He is justified if he is found not guilty. Forgiveness means to be found guilty, and then, not have the guilt reckoned to you but let go. So we should be careful that we do not assume justification and forgiveness are identical.”*

Justification and condemnation are opposites, as Paul made clear in Romans 8:33-34

“it is God who justifies, who is he that condemns...”

Hodge (1835:82) develops this antithesis:

"To condemn is not merely to punish, but to declare the accused guilty or worthy of punishment; and justification is not merely to remit that punishment, but to declare that punishment cannot be justly inflicted... Pardon and justification therefore are essentially distinct. The one is the remission of punishment, and the other is a declaration that no ground for the infliction of punishment exists."

2.7.3.4. Christ and His Cross – the Basis of Justification

"We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement...so as to be just and the justifier of the man who has faith in Jesus." (v24)

It is God who takes the initiative to save us. We were dead in sin and without any movement toward God. Our situation is hopeless. *"But now..."* the grace of God appears. God loves, God stoops, God gives himself generously through Jesus Christ. But how can God declare the unrighteous to be righteous? And, clearly, that is what he does. Paul states it bluntly in 4:5 *"God... justifies the wicked."*

How can God justify the wicked?

We find the answer in the cross of Christ. Paul states the answer in three ways in this passage:

Firstly, God justifies us *"through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

Secondly, *"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood."*

Thirdly, *"He did this to demonstrate his justice, so as to be just and the justifier of the man who believes in Jesus."*

Paul uses the word *"redemption"* (*apolytroxis*), a commercial term often used in the Old Testament in connection with slavery. He sees mankind in slavery to sin. But Jesus Christ has redeemed us. His blood was the ransom price.

Another significant term Paul uses is *"sacrifice of atonement"*, (*hilasterion*) translated *"propitiation"* in AV. However, since the Enlightenment, the notion of a wrathful God has been rejected by many theologians. The most notable of these, C.H. Dodd succeeded in promoting the translation of *hilasterion* as 'expiating' in the New English Bible. There are serious reasons for retaining the translation 'propitiation', when we look at the context. In the previous section (1:18-3:20) Paul has been speaking at length about God's wrath upon sin. There is nothing unprincipled or uncontrolled about God's anger. It is a settled, implacable, and uncompromising opposition to evil. We, in our fallen sinful state cannot placate the righteous anger of God, but God, in grace has done that for us. *"God presented him (Christ) as a 'hilasterion'.* The Apostle John supports this view when he writes (1 John 4:10):

"God sent his own Son as an atoning sacrifice (hilasmos) for our sins."

This is how the 'propitiation' has been accomplished; Because of God's great love, he himself propitiated his own wrath by giving his own Son who took our place. Stott (1994:115) sums it up concisely:

“Thus God himself gave himself to save us from himself. This is the righteous basis on which the righteous God can ‘righteous’ the unrighteous without compromising his righteousness.”

In summary, we may say that justification is the very heart of the Gospel. Its source is God and his grace, its ground or basis is Christ and his cross, and the means of receiving it is faith alone apart from works.

2.7.4. Romans 4:1-5 The Case of Abraham

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness’.

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

2.7.4.1. Context and basic meaning of this passage.

This passage really continues what Paul is teaching in 3:29-31. Paul has been emphasising that God justifies both the circumcision and the uncircumcision by faith and this is the main thrust of chapter 4. In discussing the case of Abraham, Paul is teaching that God makes no difference between Jew and Gentile in the matter of salvation. He is also appealing to the Old Testament Scriptures to defend his gospel in the light of possible Jewish objections. He presents the experiences of two of the greatest Old Testament heroes to support his case. His choice of Abraham was particularly strategic since among Paul’s contemporaries it was believed, and frequently taught by the Pharisees, that Abraham was a prime example of justification by works, since he was willing to offer up his son Isaac. So, if Paul’s gospel was to have credibility in the synagogue, he must prove that Abraham was, in fact, justified by faith.

The basic meaning of the passage is that Abraham has no ground for boasting before God because Scripture (Genesis 15:6) says he *“believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”* Paul argues that one who works for justification receives it not as a gift but as something that is due. But the one *“who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked,”* his faith is counted as righteousness. Abraham falls into this category: He had righteousness credited to him because he believed God. (Genesis 15:6)

It is important to notice Paul’s strategy here. He is showing that his teaching on justification is Scriptural, that is, that it agrees perfectly with the general teaching of the Old Testament. He wants the Jews to grasp that his gospel is no novelty but that it is in line with the revelation that the people of God have always received throughout their history. On the other hand, he also wants Gentiles to grasp the rich spiritual heritage which has become theirs by faith in Jesus. The references, therefore, to Abraham and David show that there is only one way of salvation in all Scripture. It is a mistake to suppose that in the Old Testament, believers were saved by works and in the New Testament, by faith.

2.7.4.2. Abraham: nothing to boast about.

At the end of Romans 3 the Apostle Paul raises the issue of boasting and rejects any possibility of human beings boasting before God. Whether the boasting is about national privilege or personal achievement makes no difference to Paul; to him such boasting is unthinkable, since all have sinned and fall short of his glory.

Ridderbos (1974:141) comments:

“That there is no place for boasting becomes quite clear only from the gospel, in which the ‘law of works’ has given way to the ‘law of faith’, that is, in which another order governs. From that other order, as it is evident already in Abraham’s life and as it already for him excluded every boast (Rom 4:2) the unfoundedness, indeed the mortal peril of every human boast as trusting in the flesh is manifest: ‘that no flesh should boast before God’ (1 Cor 1:29) and that but one possibility and one ground of boasting should remain: boasting in the Lord (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17), and in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Gal 6:14)

2.4.7.3 The Role of Faith

We note the following references to ‘faith’ in this passage;

‘Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness’. (v3)

“his faith is credited as righteousness.” (v5)

These references to faith, have historically been understood in terms of the means of receiving justification. But in recent times, some theologians have departed from the historic Reformed position that regarded faith as the means of receiving Justification, to a new position in which faith is regarded as the ground or basis of Justification. This new teaching states that Christ’s righteousness is not imputed to us in justification, rather it is our faith which is imputed to us, becoming the ground or basis of our Justification. For example, Robert Gundry (2001, I.9 II. 15) sees himself as part of a larger shift away from the historical doctrine: He writes:

“It is no accident, then, that in New Testament theologians’ recent and current treatments of justification, you would be hard pressed to find any discussion of an imputation of Christ’s righteousness. (I have in mind treatments by Mark Seifrid, Tom Wright, James Dunn, Chris Beker, and John Reumann, among others.) The notion is passe. Other recognised scholars could easily be added to the list, so many in fact that it would not exaggerate to speak of a developing standard in biblical theological circles.”

It is the position of this study, that in the New Testament justification does involve the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers and that this righteousness does not consist of faith but is received by faith. It is our view that Paul does teach in this passage (4:1-6) and in many other places, that God does impute to believers an external righteousness, which is a gift of his grace.

2.4.7.4 Significance of ‘logizomai’. (credited, reckoned, counted)

In Romans 4, the Old Testament Scripture quoted by Paul in this case is Genesis 15:6

“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Here, the verb ‘credited’ (*logizomai*) is of great significance. Paul uses it five times in six verses (3-8). The word means to ‘reckon’, ‘impute’ or ‘credit,’ as in commercial language when something is put to someone’s account. In the letter to Philemon, Paul relates an incident from his own monetary affairs, when he instructs Philemon concerning Onesimus; (Philemon 18):

“If he owes you anything, put that to my account.”

Paul is here introducing the idea of imputation to show that Abraham was not justified by works. He is linking justification and imputation and he is placing the idea of imputing or crediting in the framework of wages and debts in a book keeping context. What then does Paul mean when he says:

“his faith is credited as righteousness.”? (v5)

He means that faith is the means by which an external righteousness is received as credited to us by God, that is, not by *working* but by *trusting* him who justifies the ungodly.

Commenting on Genesis 15:6, which Paul quotes here, Murray (1980:358-358) explains how God-righteousness and faith-righteousness are correlative:

“It is the righteousness of God brought to bear upon us because it is by faith, and it is by faith that we become the beneficiaries of this righteousness because it is a God-righteousness. So indispensable is this complementation in the justification of the ungodly that the righteousness may be called ‘the righteousness of God’ or ‘the righteousness of faith’ without in the least implying that faith sustains the same relation to this righteousness that God does... When faith is said to be imputed for righteousness, this variation of formula is warranted by the correlativity of righteousness and faith and it is in terms of this correlativity that the formula is to be interpreted rather than in terms of equation.”

Faith in Christ is simply the regenerated sinner’s saving response to the effectual call of God by means of which the righteousness of Christ – the only ground of justification - is imputed to him.

2.7.5. 2 Corinthians 5:21

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2.7.5.1. Context and basic meaning

This verse comes at the end of the section (2 Corinthians 5:11-21) on “the ministry of reconciliation”. Paul is describing his motives for evangelism:

1. **Fear** (v11) *“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men...”*
2. **Love** (v14). *“For the love of Christ compels us...”*

This leads him on to describe how God has reconciled people to himself by the work of Christ on the cross so that forgiveness of sins is granted and a right standing with God is acquired.

In general, Paul does not speak much in 2 Corinthians about Justification but what he does say, reflects important aspects of Paul's view on the subject. This is especially true in 2 Corinthians 5:21 where we have one of the most powerful statements in the New Testament on justification, setting before us the fact that an external divine righteousness is imputed to believers. The parallel between the two halves of the verse is of crucial importance. Hodge (1972:149) draws attention to this parallel when he says:

"His being made sin is consistent with his being in himself free from sin; and our being made righteous is consistent with our being in ourselves ungodly."

There is a clear parallel here, between Christ's being 'made sin,' and our 'becoming righteous.' Christ was 'made sin' for our sake; our sins were reckoned to Christ. Although he was sinless, he identified himself with our sins and suffered the penalty for our sins. Christ's righteousness is reckoned to us, even though we remain in nature, sinners. There is no way of avoiding the logical conclusion that those who have faith are justified because Christ's righteousness is imputed to them.

2.7.5.2.

Basic element of the doctrine found here:

Imputation of Christ's Righteousness.

This passage is teaching that believers, because they are in Christ, become God's righteousness in the very same way as Christ was made sin though he was a sinless person; that is, by imputation. This same truth is taught explicitly in Romans 5:19:

"For just as through the disobedience of one man, the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous."

This leads us to the conclusion that Christ's perfect righteousness was credited or imputed to our account, in the same manner as our sin was credited to his account when he was made a sin offering in our place.

Hodge (1972:150-151) sums it up in this way:

"There is probably no passage in the Scriptures in which the doctrine of justification is more concisely or clearly stated than in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Our sins were imputed to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed to us. He bore our sins; we are clothed in his righteousness... Christ bearing our sins did not make him morally a sinner... nor does Christ's righteousness become subjectively ours, it is not the moral quality of our souls... Our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that they were a satisfaction of justice; and his righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God, so that our pardon is an act of justice...It is not mere pardon, but justification alone, that gives us peace with God."

To put it in another way, we may say that 2 Corinthians 5:21 gives us reason to believe that the righteousness of God which, in Romans chapters 3 and 4 was imputed to believers is none other than the righteousness of Christ.

2.7.6. Galatians 2v15-16

"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So, we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law because by observing the law no-one will be justified."

2.7.6.1 Context and basic meaning of this passage

Paul's readers in Galatia were people who had believed his preaching of the gospel of the cross. *"Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified."* They had received the Holy Spirit and had abundant evidence of the power of the gospel as people were changed. But more recently they had come to the conclusion that if they were to be true children of Abraham and if they were to inherit the promises, then they must be circumcised and observe the Jewish calendar. The believers had come to these conclusions under the influence of those whom Paul calls "troublers" (*hoi tarassontes*) (1:7) They seem to have taught that salvation depended upon works of the law, and that observance of the law (of Moses) was necessary in Christian living.

Paul's defence was that his apostleship and his gospel were not derived from the other apostles but received directly from the risen Lord by revelation. He not only defends his own integrity but attacks the integrity of his opponents and exposes their ulterior motives.

2.6.7.2 The meaning of "the works of the law" in Galatians

On the face of it, it would seem that the expression "the works of the law" refers primarily to circumcision and possibly observance of the Jewish calendar. However, theologians have differed over the meaning of this term.

Traditionally, the Reformed view has been that "the works of the law" referred to those works by which Jews tried to build up merit before God in order to be justified. In recent times, there has been a tradition of protest against this view. It is true that the Jewish observance of the "works of the law" was the primary thing that distinguished them from the Gentiles and had become a ground for Jewish boasting. But Paul is attacking much more than the Jew's foolish dependence on what is outward and physical, as Kruse (1996:68) makes clear:

"The evidence of Galatians seems to indicate that Paul's critique of the law was far more thoroughgoing ... He believes that the coming of Christ had put an end to the role of the law as a restraining force as far as believers were concerned. In 3:23-25 Paul speaks about the time before faith came, when 'we' were under the law's guardianship, but when faith came, 'we' were no longer under it. The guardianship of the law involved restraint of the Jewish people in a wide range of religious, moral and ethical matters, as well as requiring circumcision and the observance of sabbaths and food laws. When Paul referred to the works of the law, then, he had something more than Jewish identity markers in mind. The works of the law are the carrying out of all those things which the law requires."

Kruse's conclusion then is that the term 'works of the law' signifies absolute obedience to everything that the law requires. This is basically what Paul is saying in 3:10:

"For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law'"

Paul's argument was not with Judaism, as such, and certainly not with the Old Testament, but with those 'troublers' in Galatia who were placing an intolerable burden on the believers by requiring obedience to the law.

2.6.7.3. Basic Element of the doctrine found in this passage: Justification: NOT by works of the law.

We have seen that 'the law' means the sum total of the commandments of God and by 'the works of the law' we mean acts done in obedience to it. The Jews expected to be justified in this way. The 'troublers' or Judaizers said they believed in Jesus, but they taught people to follow Moses as well. They taught that in order to be justified, believers must work, that is, they must do the works of the law, they must do everything the law commands, and abstain from everything that the law forbids. This involved not only obeying the Ten Commandments, but also the ceremonial laws including circumcision, and membership of the Jewish community. All this was involved in order to be justified by 'the works of the law'

To all this Paul replies: *"By observing the law no-one will be justified."* (v16)
Luther (1998:93) comments on this verse as follows:

"We must learn, therefore, to distinguish all actions and laws, even the law of God, from the promise of the gospel and from faith, so that we define Christ correctly. Christ is no law, and therefore he does not exact the law and its observance. He is 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,' (John 1:29) It is only faith that takes hold of this, not love. Love, however, must follow faith, as a sort of thankfulness. Victory over sin and death then, and salvation and everlasting life too, did not come through the law, nor through the observance of the law, nor yet through the power of free will, but through the Lord Jesus Christ alone... We do not dispute whether we ought to do good works, whether the law is holy, righteous and good, or whether it ought to be kept or not. This is another matter. Our question concerns justification and whether the law justifies or not."

Summary

Since the letter to the Romans is the most important with regard to our subject, most of our study in this chapter has been devoted to it. But we have also looked at passages in Galatians and 2 Corinthians.

We have considered the following basic elements related to the doctrine of justification in this section:

- The righteousness of God.
- The righteousness of God revealed.
- Righteousness by faith.
- The meaning of the term 'justify'.
- Christ and his cross: the basis of justification.
- The role of faith.
- The significance of *logitsai* (credited).
- Imputation.
- The works of the law.

In summary, we may say that, according to Paul, justification is the very heart of the Gospel. Its source is God and his grace, its ground or basis is Christ and his cross, and the means of receiving it is faith alone apart from works.

Chapter 2:8

Doctrine of Justification by Faith in relation to the writings of James.

2.8.1. Introduction to the writing of James

The Epistle of James did not receive general acceptance in the western church until the 4th century. This was partly due to uncertainty about the identity of the author who simply styles himself; "*James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*" (1:1) but later came to be identified with James "*the Lord's brother*" chairman at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). The resemblance in Greek words and phrases between the Epistle and James' address at the Council of Jerusalem, supports this conclusion. The book is probably an edited work comprising sermons preached by James and compiled to preserve his teaching after his martyrdom. The historical setting is the church in Judea before the fall of Jerusalem.

The Epistle addresses the need for Christians to resist the pressure to compromise with the world. He deals with the following subjects:

Trials and Temptations. (1:2-18)
Listening and Doing. (1:19-27)
Favouritism Forbidden. (2:1-13)
Faith and Deeds. (2:14-26)
Taming the Tongue. (3:1-12)
Two Kinds of Wisdom. (3:13-18)
Submit yourselves to God. (4:1-12)
Boasting about Tomorrow. (4:13-17)
Warning to Rich Oppressors. (5:1-6)
Patience in Suffering. (5:7-12)
The Prayer of Faith. (5:13-20)

2.8.1.1. Overall Theme

James moves quickly, and it would appear, randomly, from one subject to another. Therefore, casual reading of the Letter might lead us to the conclusion that there is no overall theme. The author is obviously concerned to encourage his readers to live out their faith in practice, and in spite of the disjointed nature of the letter, it persists in testing the professions of those who call themselves Christians. Therefore, 1:3 may be said to sum up the underlying theme of the epistle in the phrase:

"the testing of your faith."

Enduring the tests of faith is a subject that features prominently in the first and last chapters. (1:4, 12; 5:7-11) The middle of the letter (1:19-5:18) contains encouragement to good actions which agree with Christian faith and warnings against those that do not.

2.8.2. Scripture passage under consideration: James 2:14-26

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well: keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

2.8.3. Statement of the Problem

It has sometimes been assumed that James 2:14-26 teaches that God accepts men on two grounds, that is, faith and works, and it has been thought that the teaching of James is in direct contradiction with Paul’s teaching which makes faith alone the means of receiving justification. Martin Luther came to the conclusion that the Letter of James was “a right strawy epistle.” This view was expressed in the Preface to his 1522 edition of the New Testament and it has influenced many later interpreters. Luther had come to the conclusion that the Scripture; ‘Faith justifies’ (Rom. 3:28) stood in flat contradiction to the Scripture ‘Faith does not justify.’ (James 2:24)

If James and Paul are at cross-purposes on so fundamental a point as the believer’s justification, then the unity of New Testament Theology is called into question. Does James have the right to stand alongside Paul? For that matter, does Paul have the right to stand alongside James! Does this not mean that we have ‘a canon within a canon’? This is clearly an important question. It is therefore imperative that we examine the teaching of James in order to come to a conclusion about these questions. We shall therefore devote most of this chapter to the pericope 2:14-26 since, for all practical purposes the vocabulary of justification is confined to that section.

2.8.4. Exegesis of James 2:14-26

2.8.4.1. The Argument (2:14-17)

James began the second chapter by speaking about the man who, while claiming to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, shows favouritism. In v14, at the beginning of the passage we are discussing, James now moves from the particular, to the general, but

still dealing with the same problem – that of the man whose profession of religion is not supported by what he does. The contrast in v14 is between a man who *'claims to have faith'* but has *'no deeds'* to back up that claim.

Dauids (1982:120) explains v14 in this way:

“The opening sentence introduces the theme of this section and presents the partners in the imaginary dialogue: 1. The author, 2 the Christian readership ('adelphoi mou' being now a familiar mode of address at the beginning of a new section of argument), and 3 'tis' an imaginary member of the community who embodies the attitude James wishes to combat (this 'straw man' stylistic device is widely found in Greek literature; cf. Mussner, 130) The theme under discussion is that of faith which does not produce works. The examples in 2:15-16 and 2:21ff. Will show that the works being considered are not those of the ritual law, which were the works Paul opposed, but the merciful deeds of charity that 2:13 has already suggested.”

James continues with his rhetorical questions in verses 15 and 16. The Greek particle 'me' signifies that the question expects the answer 'no' to the question: “Can such faith save him?” The KJV translation; *'Can faith save him?'* misses the point of what James is saying. James is not denying that faith can save a person, rather in this very paragraph he is emphasising that the right kind of faith does indeed save. (vv.21-26) What the KJV misses is that the Greek article used with 'faith' refers back to a previous use of the same word, thus justifying the translation *'that faith'* or *'such faith'* as in NASB; NRSV; REB; TEV; NJB; and NIV. James is affirming that *such* faith, as he has just mentioned can save no one, in biblical terms, it is no faith at all.

At this point (v15) James introduces an example of faith without works; the example of a faithless reaction to a brother or sister who is one of 'us', who is in great physical need (*“without clothes and daily food”*). The response envisaged is calculated to shock the reader.

“Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed.”

Such behaviour is foreign to true faith. James then expresses his conclusion in v17: *“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

2.8.4.2 The Meaning of 'ergon' (works, deeds)

We now turn aside briefly from the main argument in order to discuss the meaning of the term *'ergon'* (works, deeds) since it arises in this verse.

Moo (2000:122-123) states that

“The word translated 'deeds' in the NIV is a critical word throughout this argument. It is the plural form of the very common Greek word 'ergon' which means simply, 'work,' 'action,' 'accomplishment'. The plural form we find here occurs often in the NT to denote behaviour with ethical and religious consequences. The 'works' can be evil, leading to condemnation from God, or good, leading to commendation from God. Particularly significant for the NT use of the word is the Jewish emphasis on works done in obedience to torah as the necessary response to God's election of the people of Israel. Paul's phrase 'works of the law' (Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5,10; Rom.3:20,28)

clearly echoes this Jewish emphasis. James uses works in a general sense to refer to actions done in obedience to God.

Dauids (2000:346) goes much further

“Not only is his (James’) definition of faith different from that of Paul; he also uses ‘works’ to refer to charity rather than to the ethnic markers of Judaism: circumcision and the observance of feast days and purity rules.

It is unlikely that Davids is correct here. Both Paul and James are writing with an understanding of works that is basically similar, that is, anything that is done in obedience to God. The difference is in the context in which they speak of works. Paul’s context is the ground or basis of justification before God, therefore he denies any value in pre-conversion works in the matter of justification, but James’ context is the demonstration of the genuineness of justification, therefore he demands post-conversion works as the evidence of justifying faith.

2.8.4.3 The “Interrupter” (2:18-20)

James brings forward a further example of spurious faith in v18. To begin with, he imagines someone interrupting with the following comment;

“You have faith and I have deeds.”

This interrupter is implying that God gives different people different gifts, to one he gives faith, to another he gives works. Should not each get on with exercising his gift rather than criticise someone whose gift is different? Indeed! But this comment implies a different question altogether, as James shows by the illustration of the demons. The faith in question is not in regard to a *special* gift which some possess but the question concerns the *general* gift of faith by which all become Christians. (i.e. saving faith) The example of the demons makes this clear. James takes the truth; *“There is only one God.”* The demons believe this, that is, they intellectually accept this fact. However they *do* nothing about this belief; they do not respond appropriately; they still remain demons; they do not have the saving faith of which James speaks.

2.8.4.4. The Example of Abraham (2:21-24)

Next, James brings forward the example of Abraham. Motyer (1985:113) sets out the structure of the argument here, as follows:

“These verses are crucial to our understanding of what James is saying, and we will start with a broad review of their content:

(a) Verse 21. The proposition stated:

- 1. Abraham was justified by works.*
- 2. The particular work in question.*

(b) Verses 22-23. Explanation ‘You see’ (22)

- 1. Faith promotes works (22a). Works are not an exercise by themselves. Faith co-operates with them as a senior partner with a junior.*

2. *Faith needs works (22b) By engaging in the activity of works, faith grows to maturity.*
3. *Faith precedes works (23) Faith is the first and basic reality in Abraham's relationship with God.*

(c) *Verse 24 The proposition re-stated: 'You see'*

It is in this sense that works have their essential part to play. A faith with no results is a demonic and bare affirmation. Results (works) prove the living reality of faith and bring assurance that the believer has entered into the benefits (righteousness, friendship) promised."

Adamson (1976:128-129) provides insight into the Rabbinic view of Abraham's actions:

"In rabbinic thought Abraham is reckoned righteous on account of works of merit. Though important, his "faith" is itself actually a kind of meritorious "work," to be equated with monotheistic belief and faithfulness to the Torah. This is the kind of "faith" and "works" which James seems to be combatting. The "binding of Isaac" shows that Abraham's faith, in this instance, is as unquestioning, untheological, and unsophisticated as the trust of a little child; hence his readiness to sacrifice Isaac. "When Abraham, " declared the rabbis, "without any questioning obeyed God's order to sacrifice his son he was inspired by his love to God. This is why Abraham was justified." The Greek verb 'dikaioo' means "to declare righteous" or (passive) "to be in the right relationship," and while the forensic and moral are both present in James, the latter dominates. The works by which Abraham, according to James, is justified are not "works of law" (mitswot) but what the rabbis called "works of lovingkindness" (Liebeswerke); his readiness to sacrifice Isaac was proof of his faith and revealed the basic relationship of obedience. His justification, therefore was based on merit, not of law, but of love."

James' use of the Genesis account of Abraham's faith is interesting. It is clear in Genesis 15:6 (*"Abraham believed the LORD and he credited it to him as righteousness."*) that the Lord already accepts Abraham's faith as genuine saving faith since he reckoned it to him as righteousness. Yet in Genesis 22:12 Abraham is about to kill his son at the command of God, but the Lord intervenes with the words: *"... now I know that you fear God"* Yet, did not the Lord always know that? What we have here is God bringing himself down to our level in order to teach us a great truth. God is portrayed as if he were a man. If God were human he would take account of Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 as satisfactory, but, on a "wait and see" basis. What will follow this faith? Will there be results? Or as James would say, "works".

As Abraham's life moves on, we have the episode of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16). Doubt is thrown on the genuineness of Abraham's faith. Has he abandoned faith to trust in his own physical ability to have a son? But, on Mount Moriah, when Abraham said to the servants, *"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you."* (Genesis 22:5) he had faith that God could raise the dead. (Hebrews 11:19) This is indeed real faith! Of course God did not need the death of Isaac, but Abraham's works were needed as evidence to himself and to posterity that he had saving faith. But the Lord is depicted here as if he came to a final conclusion about Abraham's faith by his works on Mount

Moriah. True faith always produces results. James is the only New Testament writer who brings out this full and complete view of the faith of Abraham.

Abraham's action in offering Isaac is now said (v23) to "fulfil" the Scripture just quoted (Genesis 15:6) "*Abraham believed the LORD and he credited it to him as righteousness.*" Here, James follows the LXX. The important word "reckon" is often used in LXX to express one thing as being equivalent to, or having the same force and weight as another. Something is transferred and imputed to Abraham which in and of itself does not belong to him; i.e. righteousness.

Fung (1992:156) sums up the teaching of vv.21-24 in this way;

"We may indicate James' position on the relationship between faith, works and justification as follows: Righteousness (= forensic justification) is by faith (23); out of this arise 'works' that show ('justify' in the demonstrative sense, 24) that one is a real believer (and hence by logical inference, justified in the forensic, declarative sense); or, as Buchanan puts it in his classical work on Justification: good works 'are the effects of faith, and as such, the evidence both of faith, and of justification.'"

2.8.4.5. The Example of Rahab. (2:25)

James' final example is Rahab (v25). Moo (2000:143) refers to a tradition recorded in a late first-century Christian writing; *1 Clement* that may have influenced James to include both Abraham and Rahab as examples:

"In this letter, both Abraham and Rahab are presented as models of faith and hospitality: Rahab because she welcomed the spies into her home, Abraham because he received the three men who, according to Genesis 18, visited him and brought predictions about his family (this latter incident is frequently mentioned in Jewish tradition). James may then intend the reader to see in the faith of Abraham and Rahab, a direct contrast to the "dead" faith of the man in vv15-16 who refuses to give aid to those in need."

The contrast in the persons of Abraham and Rahab is striking. Abraham is a major figure in Scripture, Rahab is scarcely mentioned. Abraham is the head of the Jewish race, Rahab a foreigner. He is highly respected; she is immoral. The contrast could not be more complete. Yet, what James intends to convey here, is not so much contrast as inclusiveness; that from Abraham, right down to Rahab, all believers without exception must give evidence by their works that their faith is genuine.

James completes the passage in verse 26 by restating the main point: "*Faith without deeds is dead.*" This is an echo of verses 17 and 20. When James compares faith without works to the body without the spirit, he is making a general analogy. The spirit is the life principle that gives life to the body, without which the body dies. James is therefore suggesting that faith unaccompanied by works, ceases to exist. It becomes an empty statement, and cannot claim to be Biblical faith.

2.8.5. The Relationship of the passage 2:14-26 to the rest of the Epistle of James.

We have concentrated attention upon the passage 2:14-26 since the main teaching on faith and works and the language and terminology of justification is concentrated there. We must now examine our findings in the context of the epistle as a whole.

We have seen that there are two senses of justification in James:

- (1) imputed righteousness (dikaioisynē) or forensic justification is acquired as a gift by faith (23).
- (2) justification (dikaiousthai) a demonstration of the possession of true faith by works (21, 24, 25).

It is necessary for us now to confirm that this view is supported by the remainder of the book of James. The following points help to show that this is the case.

1. James presents salvation as a gift of God,
"Every good and perfect gift is from above ... from the Father..."
2. James presents the means of regeneration as the word of God.
"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth..." (1:17-18)
3. James (like Paul) teaches the universality of sin.
"We all stumble in many ways." (3:2)
4. James (like Paul) teaches the inevitability of judgement.
"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that brings freedom, because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful." (2:12-13)

The "*crown of life*" is promised to those who love God and stand the test and persevere under trial. (1:12) These references are enough to indicate that in James' view salvation is a gift and not the result of human works.

2.8.6. Conclusion

Our discussion leads us to the conclusion that the apparent contradiction between James and Paul is just that – apparent, not real. We admit that James expresses himself in un-Pauline language, yet it cannot be said that James replaces Paul's plan of justification by another plan based on law-works. It might be said that James presents the active side and Paul the passive side of the same thing. In fact the two sides of the same coin are present in the pericope (2:14-24) i.e. righteousness by faith (23b) and "justification" by works (21,24,25). This means that James is at one with Paul in teaching forensic justification by faith and at one with Paul and the rest of the New Testament in demanding that the only faith that deserves to be called faith, is faith that produces the fruit of works.

3. DOGMA HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Chapter 3:1

The Doctrine of Justification in the Early Church and in the Middle Ages

3.1.1. Introduction To Dogma-Historical Perspectives

3.1.1.1. Scripture and Church History

In this new section, we pass from Scripture to Church History. It is important that we note at this stage that we are passing from the divinely inspired writings of Holy Scripture to ordinary historical human writings. Buchanan (1867:91) explains the wide difference between the Historical Theology of Scripture, and the Historical Theology of Church History:

“These writings, whether of ancient or modern date, possess no divine authority in matters of ‘Faith’, and their teaching on these subjects has no claim on our belief, except in so far as it can be proved to be in conformity with the unerring standard of God’s Word. Yet, in regard to matters of ‘Fact’, they may be unexceptional witnesses, and they are the only authorities to which we can appeal, in attempting to ascertain what was the belief of the Church on any particular doctrine in the successive ages of her history.”

3.1.1.2. The Nature of the Question

In this section, we are not seeking to prove that all the Fathers taught the doctrine of justification in accordance with Scripture. Rather, we are seeking to establish that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ may be traced in the writings of the Fathers even in the darkest times, and that true believers have always rested upon it. In addition, we hope to show that the doctrine of justification was not a novelty introduced for the first time by Luther and Calvin, but that it was believed and taught more or less explicitly by some writers in every age. It is untrue to say that this doctrine was unknown until the time of the Protestant Reformation.

3.1.2. Introduction to the Patristic and Scholastic Period

The Early Church Fathers lived in one of the most exciting and creative periods of Church History. A number of important issues were clarified during this time, such as the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. The Letters of Paul in the New Testament reveal the importance of this issue in the first century of Christian history. Apologetics also came to the fore, since the church was fighting for its very existence. The reasoned defence of the Christian Faith against its critics was of great importance in this period. It is easy to understand that there was limited space for theological debate at this early stage.

Towards the end of the Patristic period there arose a new method of theology, which, because of the time of its appearance, has been called 'Mediaeval.' It has also been referred to as 'Scholastic' because of the source from which it originated. Scholastic Theology attempted to explain the doctrine of the church by the philosophy of the Schools. Its prevailing philosophy was that of Aristotle who, not knowing Christianity, knew nothing of imputed righteousness. The application of his teaching in the church, at that time, led to the substitution of personal righteousness for imputed righteousness.

3.1.2.1. The Early Creeds

During the patristic period two creeds came to be treated with authority and respect throughout the church. These developed because of the need to provide a summary of the Christian faith for public occasions such as baptism. The historical evolution of the Apostles' Creed is complex. Its twelve statements were traditionally (incorrectly) attributed to the apostles. The tenth statement declares:

"I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

The Nicene Creed is a longer version of this creed that includes additional statements on the Person of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Responding to the debate on the divinity of Christ, this creed declares that Christ is "God from God" and "of one substance with the Father." The development of the creeds was an important factor in arriving at doctrinal agreement in the early church.

3.1.3. Evidence for the presence of the Doctrine of Justification during this period.

The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, and of eternal life, by faith in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and exalted, is found everywhere in patristic writings. It has been alleged that the faith of the early church was very simple. That is true, if by that we mean, that the articles of faith were reasoned out in less detail; but it is not true, if we mean that the early church did not believe in substance, these same articles which later came to be defined in detail. The early church was nourished by the Gospels and the Epistles and comprised those very churches to whom Paul addressed his reasoned doctrinal arguments. The doctrine of justification in particular was so clearly addressed in apostolic writings that the successors of the apostles had no reason to treat it as an undecided question. Indeed, its absence from first and second century debate is a silent testimony to its acceptance in the church in that period.

It would, however, be inaccurate to represent the early church fathers as being of one mind on the doctrine of justification. There is evidence from a very early date that the biblical truth about justification was obscured and that false views on the subject gained momentum throughout the mediaeval period.

T.F. Torrance (1948:133) has demonstrated that many early Christian writings did not understand or appreciate the doctrine of justification. He cites particularly the Didache, Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas and Ignatius. He states:

“Religion was thought of primarily in terms of man’s acts towards God, in the striving towards justification, much less in terms of God’s acts for man which put him right with God once and for all.”

However, in spite of these departures from the truth, there were theologians and preachers who, although they adopted teachings and practices that were not biblical, continued to hold firmly to the Biblical teaching concerning how God puts us right with himself.

It will be seen from the writings of the following church leaders, that after the apostolic period, the biblical view of justification continued to be held.

3.1.3.1. Clement of Rome (d.101 AD)

Clement of Rome (Lightfoot 1956:26) wrote to the Corinthians concerning the patriarchs, that

“they all therefore were glorified and magnified, not through themselves or their own works or the righteous doing which they wrought, but through His will. And so we, having been called through His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, but through faith, whereby the Almighty God justified all men that have been from the beginning; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

3.1.3.2. Epistle to Diognetus (152 AD)

In the **Epistle to Diognetus** (Buchanan 1961:99) written about the middle of the second century, the author clearly states the Biblical view on justification:

“God gave his own Son, the ransom for us: the holy for the transgressors; the good, for the evil; the just; for the unjust; the incorruptible for the corruptible; the immortal for the mortal. For what, save his righteousness, could ever cover our sins? In whom was it possible that we, transgressors and ungodly as we were, could be justified, save in the Son of God alone? O sweet interchange! O unsearchable operation! O unexpected benefit! That the transgression of many should be hidden in One Righteous Person, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors.”

3.1.3.3. Jerome (c. 347- 420)

Jerome (Buchanan 1961:109) commenting on Paul’s letters to the Romans and 2 Corinthians, writes as follows:

“When an ungodly man is converted, God justifies him through faith alone, not on account of good works, which he possessed not; otherwise, on account of his ungodly deeds, he ought to have been punished ... Christ, who “knew no sin”, the Father “made sin for us,” that, as a victim offered for sin was in the Law called “sin”, that “we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” – not our righteousness, nor in ourselves.”

3.1.3.4. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Augustine of Hippo is widely regarded as the most influential of the early church fathers. He was converted in 386 and became bishop of Hippo in 395. He was involved in two major controversies – the Donatist controversy on the church and the sacraments, and the Pelagian controversy, focusing on sin and grace.

McGrath (1998:79) outlines Augustine's attitude to God's sovereignty and man's responsibility:

"For Augustine, the total sovereignty of God and genuine human responsibility and freedom must be upheld at one and the same time, if justice is to be done to the richness and complexity of the biblical statements on the matter. To simplify the matter, by denying either the sovereignty of God or human freedom, is to seriously compromise the Christian understanding of the way in which God justifies man."

But let us examine Augustine's own words (Urba & Zycha 1913:235-236) as he writes on Nature and Grace:

"Human nature was certainly created blameless and without any fault (vitium); but the human nature by which each one of us is now born of Adam requires a physician, because it is not healthy. All the good things, which it has by its conception, life, senses, and mind, it has from God, its creator and maker. But the weakness which darkens and disables these good natural qualities, as a result of which that nature needs enlightenment and healing, did not come from the blameless maker but from original sin (ex originali peccato), which was committed by free will (liberum arbitrium). For this reason our guilty nature is liable to a just penalty. For if we are now a new creature in Christ, we are still children of wrath by nature, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, on account of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our sins, raised us up to life with Christ, by whose grace we are saved. But this grace of Christ, without which neither infants nor grown persons can be saved, is not bestowed as a reward for its merits, but is given freely (gratis), which is why it is called grace (gratia)."

Augustine's reasoning is masterly. He begins by using medical metaphors and terms to describe the impact of sin on human nature; *disease; physician; weakness and healing*. He next moves to law models, such as *"guilty" and "penalty"*. He emphasises the original integrity of creation. God is good, and everything He has made is good. He is concerned to defend God against any charge that he is the author of sin. The present state of the world results from original sin and the abuse of human free will. Augustine links together the words *gratis* (freely or without cost) and *gratia* (grace). In this way he comes to the conclusion that salvation cannot be looked upon as something earned or merited but that it is a gift from God.

The teaching of Augustine on sin and grace laid the foundation for Luther's later work on the doctrine of justification. While Augustine did not articulate the doctrine of justification clearly, his understanding of grace and his teaching on this subject clearly reveals empathy with the Reformers, to whom it fell, to restore the glory of this doctrine in the church.

John 15:5 “*Apart from me you can do nothing*” was one of Augustine’s favourite Scriptures. He taught that salvation is totally from God; that He does not leave us in our natural state, weakened by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but he gives us grace so that we may be made alive spiritually. Grace is God’s generous and undeserved attention to humanity, by which he rescues us from death and gives us eternal life.

3.1.3.4.1. Problems with Augustine’s view of Justification

It is a fact of history that Augustine dealt a great blow to Pelagianism by stressing the absolute sovereignty of God, man’s bondage in sin and God’s grace to helpless sinners. He insisted that justification is the result of God’s grace and not of man’s works. However, he failed to clarify justification as Luther later did.

Augustine interpreted the verb “to justify” in his Latin Bible as “to make righteous”. This led him to the view that when God justifies us he “makes” us inwardly righteous. This was a great mistake as it led to the doctrines of justification and sanctification becoming confused. In the mediaeval period justification took on this meaning (‘to be made righteous’) and it was regarded as involving inner transformation of the individual. This became, and continues to be the position of the Roman Catholic Church.

Cunningham (1960:41) gives the following reasons for the failure of Augustine to grasp the forensic meaning of justification.

“It is true that even Augustine, notwithstanding all his profound knowledge of divine truth, and the invaluable services which he was made the instrument of rendering to the cause of sound doctrine and of pure Christian theology, does not seem to have ever attained to distinct apprehensions of the forensic meaning of justification, and usually speaks of it as including or comprehending regeneration; and this was probably owing, in some measure, to his want of familiarity with the Greek language, to his reading of the New Testament in Latin, and being thus somewhat led astray by the etymological meaning of the word ‘justification.’”

It would appear that in this lapse, Augustine was no different from many of the greatest theologians in the history of the church, who did invaluable work in their particular fields of interest, or contemporary controversy. They almost invariably made mistakes in other areas that resulted in erroneous views being propagated long after their departure.

Cunningham (1960:41) also makes the following assessment of the relationship of Augustine to the doctrine of justification by faith in the context of Historical Theology.

“When Pelagius and his immediate followers, assailed the doctrines of grace, it was exclusively in the way of ascribing to men themselves the power or capacity to do God’s will and to obey His law, and to effect whatever changes might be necessary in order to enable them to accomplish this. And to this point, accordingly, the attention of Augustine was chiefly directed; while the subject of justification remained in a great measure neglected. But from the general soundness of his views and feelings in

regard to divine things, and his profound sense of the necessity of referring everything bearing upon the salvation of sinners to the grace of God and the work of Christ, his defective and erroneous views about the meaning and import of the word 'justification' did not exert so injurious an influence as might have been expected, either upon his theological system or upon his character; and assumed practically very much the aspect of a mere philological blunder, or of an error in phraseology rather than in real sentiment or conviction."

Despite the great respect given to Augustine throughout the history of the church because of the great work he accomplished especially in the doctrines of sin, grace, and the sovereignty of God, sadly, today he is often remembered for his defective views on justification. In the Middle Ages, men leaned upon what he wrote on the subject rather than carefully study the Scriptures in order to arrive at the truth concerning this doctrine.

Every error in the things of God is dangerous. Error tends to extend and propagate itself and to endanger the spiritual welfare of the church. When it comes to the scriptural meaning and spiritual importance of justification, the result involved the confounding, or mixing up together of the two great blessings of the gospel, i.e. justification and sanctification. The method of salvation thus became obscure and confused in men's minds.

However, in defence of Augustine it may be said that his attention was chiefly directed towards repudiating the errors of Pelagius. It is clear that he understood the grace of God and the work of Christ as biblically set forth and that he was the means of helping later Reformers to a biblical understanding of these great doctrines. His errors in the area of justification were not so much theological as philological. His understanding of the basis and means of right standing with God was the same as that of Luther or Calvin. He taught the free grace of God in opposition to the free will of man, as the source and spring of the sinner's whole salvation, which comprised both the remission of his sins and the renovation of his nature.

By establishing this fundamental truth, he laid the basis for the particular doctrine of free justification by grace through faith in Christ. His writings were later to contribute largely to the illustration of this great truth.

We turn now to two theologians of the Middle Ages to complete our studies in this period.

3.1.3.5. Anselm of Canterbury (1033 – 1109)

McGrath (1998:114) gives us the following summary of the work of Anselm:

"His work exhibits the characteristics which are typical of scholasticism at its best: The appeal to reason, the logical marshalling of arguments, the relentless exploration of the implication of ideas, and the fundamental conviction that, at its heart, the Christian gospel is rational, and can be shown to be rational.

Anselm's views (Buchanan 1961:110) on the Atonement and Justification agree with what was later taught by the Reformers. In his direction for the visitation of the sick, we find this practical and pastoral advice:

"Dost thou believe that thou canst not be saved but by the death of Christ? Go to, then, and, whilst thy soul abideth in thee, put all thy confidence in this death alone – place thy trust in no other thing - commit thyself wholly to this death, - cover thyself wholly with this alone, - cast thyself wholly on this death, - wrap thyself wholly in this death. And if God would judge you, say, 'Lord! I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and thy judgement. Otherwise I will not contend, or enter into judgement with Thee.' And if He shall say unto thee, that thou art a sinner, say unto Him, 'I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and my sins.' If He shall say unto thee, that thou hast deserved damnation, say, 'Lord! I put the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between Thee and all my sins, I offer His merits for my own, which I should have, and have not.' If He say, that He is angry with thee, say, 'Lord! I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and Thy anger.'"

The doctrine of justification is most precious at the hour of death. Here we see the practical implications of the doctrine as one faces the last great enemy. By his advice to the sick, Anselm clearly displays his belief; that right standing with God depends on one's appropriation by faith alone, of the benefits of Christ's death.

3.1.3.6. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

Our final quotation from the Fathers comes from Bernard: (Buchanan 1961:111)

"Whosoever feeling compunction for his sins, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, let him believe in Thee, who 'justifiest the ungodly;' and thus, being justified by faith alone, he shall have peace with God ... Thy Passion is the last refuge, the alone remedy. When wisdom fails, when righteousness is insufficient, when the merits of holiness succumb, it succours us. For who, either from his own wisdom, or from his own righteousness, or from his own holiness, shall presume on a sufficiency for salvation? Oh he alone is truly blessed to whom the Lord imputes not sin; for there is no one who has not sin. 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' Yet 'who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' To me, it is sufficient, only to have Him propitiated, against whom only I have sinned ... The Apostle says, 'If one died for all, then were all dead,' meaning thereby to intimate, that the satisfaction made by One should be imputed to all, even as One conversely bore the sins of all."

Bernard clearly believed that God 'justifies the ungodly' and that this justification is received 'by faith alone'. No one can 'presume on a sufficiency for salvation' from his own wisdom, righteousness or holiness. 'Thy Passion is the last refuge, the alone remedy.' ... 'That the satisfaction made by One should be imputed to all...'

These, and other words, reveal a mind that is in agreement with the basic elements of justification as understood by the faithful throughout the ages.

3.1.4. Summary

Our examination of the writings of the Fathers proves that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith was not something invented by Luther, at the time of the Reformation. We have seen that it was believed and taught by some of the greatest theologians, during the first thousand years of the church's history.

It is true that there is also abundant evidence to show that the doctrine of justification was corrupted in the early ages and especially towards the close of the Patristic period. However, the sound teaching of Anselm and Bernard on justification was not shared by most of their contemporaries.

Chapter 3:2

The Doctrine of Justification at the time of the Reformation.

3.2.1. Introduction to the Reformation Period.

In the sixteenth century, the mediaeval theology of Scholasticism gave way to new paradigms, and a whole new era known as the Reformation dawned. The Reformation was a movement that tried to return the western church to biblical foundations, that is, as far as its doctrines, morality and structures were concerned. Eventually, it led to the formation of a group of Protestant churches in Europe. However, its agenda went far beyond the reform of doctrine; it also addressed social, political, and economic issues. We must ask the question: How did such a great movement come about?

According to Buchanan (1961:114)

“The revival of the Gospel doctrine of Justification was the chief means of effecting the Reformation of religion in Europe in the sixteenth century.”

3.2.1.1. Clarification of the term ‘Reformation’.

Before we speak at length about the Reformation it is helpful to clarify the meaning of this widely used term. McGrath (1998:158) gives the following clarification of the term:

“The term ‘Reformation’ is used in a number of senses, and it is helpful to distinguish them. Four elements may be involved in its definition, and each will be discussed briefly below; Lutheranism, the Reformed Church, often referred to as ‘Calvinism’; the ‘radical Reformation,’ often still referred to as ‘Anabaptism’; and the ‘Counter-Reformation’ or ‘Catholic Reformation’. In its broadest sense, the term ‘Reformation’ is used to refer to all four movements. The term is also used in a somewhat more restricted sense, meaning ‘the Protestant Reformation,’ excluding the Catholic Reformation. In this sense, it refers to the three Protestant movements noted above.”

For the purposes of the present work, we shall use the term ‘Reformation’ in the broadest sense to include all four movements above.

3.2.2. Reasons for the Prominence of the Doctrine of Justification at the time of the Reformation.

At the heart of the Christian faith lies the idea that human beings can enter into a relationship with the living God. By the late Middle Ages, the term ‘justification’ had come to mean ‘entering into a right relationship with God’ or perhaps ‘being made righteous in the sight of God.’ Therefore, the doctrine of justification was seen as dealing with the question of what an individual had to do, in order to be saved.

As the sixteenth century dawned, the rise of humanism brought a new awareness of human individuality. In turn, this led to a new interest in how human beings as individuals could enter into a relationship with God. However, the prevalence of many great abuses in the Catholic Church was the main factor that led to the opening up of general discussion and enquiry on the subject of the sinner's pardon and acceptance with God. Scholasticism had produced, in particular, three doctrines that were directly opposed to the plain truth of Scripture, and therefore led to these abuses. Buchanan (1961:113) outlines these as follows:

“first, the doctrine that justifying grace consists, not in the free favour and blessing of God, as these are opposed in Scripture not to the guilt, but to the power of sin; secondly, the doctrine that good works are meritorious, in the proper sense of the term, as being the conditions of pardon and acceptance with God, - the effectual means of satisfying His justice, averting His displeasure, and securing His favour now, and eternal life hereafter; and thirdly, the doctrine, that there is a difference between the precepts of the divine Law which are binding on all men, and certain ‘Councils of Perfection’ which some may voluntarily undertake to fulfil, and by the fulfilment of which they may not only secure eternal life for themselves, but acquire a surplussage of merit, which may be imputed to others for their Justification – a merit arising from ‘works of supererogation’, which even the mild Melancthon characterised as ‘that irony of the devil.’”

These doctrines which emerged from Scholasticism resulted in the substitution of the inherent righteousness of man, for the imputed righteousness of Christ, as the basis of the sinner's acceptance before God. The doctrine of Merit was the foundation of the many abuses, such as the sale of Indulgences that eventually led to the confrontation between Luther and the Church authorities and in due course to the re-discovery of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

The spark that ignited the controversy that shook the church to its foundations was the public sale of Papal pardons. This controversy has often been represented as merely a practical abuse, it being said that there was no serious difference in doctrine between the two parties. However, it was more than a practical abuse; it was the visible face of a whole system of false doctrine that undermined the scriptural basis of eternal salvation.

3.2.3. Luther's Discovery

Luther was deeply troubled in his own mind on the subject of sin and salvation and was burdened by guilt and despair. Added to this, he was responsible for many penitents who came to him in the confessional with the same problems.

D'Aubigne (1847: vol 3.94) comments on this period of Luther's life, and early attempts to present the biblical doctrine of forgiveness, as follows:

“A pastor seeing the sheep of his fold in the course in which they must perish, seeks to withdraw them from it ...Luther, who was impelled equally by obedience to the Word of God, and charity towards men, ascended the pulpit. He forearmed his hearers but with gentleness... ‘No one can prove by Scripture, that the righteousness of God requires a penalty or satisfaction from the sinner. The only duty it imposes is true

repentance, a sincere conversion, a resolution to bear the cross of Christ and to perform good works. It is a great error to pretend of oneself to make satisfaction for our sins to God's righteousness; God pardons them gratuitously by his inestimable grace.' Next, attacking the pretences under which indulgences are published, he continued: 'They would do much better to contribute for love of God to the building of St. Peter's, than to buy indulgences with this intention.'"

As Luther dealt with his pastoral situation he knew that it was God's pardon and not man's that his people needed. He was therefore presented with the stark contrast between the indulgences of the Church and the Gospel of Christ. He saw that they rested on two totally different doctrines of justification, which were not only different, but absolutely opposed to one another. One was revealed by God, the other, invented by the church, one was a doctrine of grace, the other of Merit, one was based on the finished work of Christ, the other on the imperfect works of the sinner.

Just before he died, Luther, (1938:185-186) in his preface to his Latin Works, described how he had earlier come to discover the doctrine of justification.

"Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I had pleased Him with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punished sinners, I actually hated him... I was in desperation to know what Paul meant in this passage ('the righteousness of God is revealed in it' Romans 1:17). At last, as I meditated day and night on the relation of the words 'the righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written, the righteous person shall live by faith, I began to understand that 'righteousness of God' as that by which the righteous person lives by the gift of God (faith); and this sentence, 'the righteousness of God is revealed,' to refer to a passive righteousness, by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'the righteous person lives by faith.' This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, I saw the whole face of Scripture in a new light, and now, where I once hated the phrase, 'the righteousness of God', I began to love and extol it as the sweetest of phrases, so that this passage in Paul became the very gate of Paradise to me."

Previously, Luther had looked on human works as the basis of justification, but through his reading of Augustine, he became increasingly convinced that this was impossible. To him, "the righteousness of God" was a punishing righteousness, but in this passage he reveals how he discovered the true meaning, that is, a righteousness that God gives to the sinner. In other words, God satisfies his own demands, graciously giving sinners what they require if they are to be justified.

Luther came to the conclusion that the God of the Christian Gospel is not a harsh judge who rewards individuals according to their merits, but a merciful and gracious God who bestows righteousness upon sinners as a gift.

Of course, the church needed to make an official response to Luther, since his teachings raised serious issues and were spreading far beyond Germany. The church's answer was to summon the Council of Trent in 1545. Trent dealt with the doctrine of justification in four sections:

1. The nature of justification.
2. The nature of justifying righteousness.
3. The nature of justifying faith.
4. The assurance of salvation.

3.2.4. Discussion on the Main Issues of Justification.

Since these were the main issues relating to the doctrine of justification in the Reformation period, we turn now to consider the discussion, under these headings.

3.2.4.1. Discussion on the Nature of Justification.

We have seen that the Church brought to the debate, at this time, an understanding of the subject that was far from biblical. There was a confusion of the meanings of justification and sanctification. They used the term justification to speak of the whole of that great change which happens in the soul of the sinner at the time of his conversion, including the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of his nature.

Luther did not arrive at a full understanding of justification immediately. In fact, his thinking on the doctrine evolved over a period as McGrath (1998:191) indicates:

“In his earlier phase, around the years 1515-1519, Luther tended to understand justification as a process of becoming, in which the sinner was gradually conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ through a process of internal renewal. Luther’s analogy of a sick person under competent medical care points to this understanding of justification, as does his famous declaration in the 1515-1516 Romans lectures, ‘justification is about becoming’. In his later writings, however, dating from the mid 1530’s and beyond perhaps under the influence of Melancthon’s more forensic approach to justification Luther tended to treat justification as a matter of being declared to be righteous, rather than a process of becoming righteous. Increasingly he came to see justification as an event, which was complemented by the distinct process of regeneration and interior renewal, through the action of the Holy Spirit. Justification alters the outer status of the sinner in the sight of God while regeneration alters the sinner’s inner nature.”

Luther’s final and permanent view, that justification was an event, altering the outer status of the sinner before God, was strongly opposed by the Council of Trent (Denzinger 1948:285-286.ch.4) which made the following declaration on justification:

“The justification of the sinner may be briefly defined as a translation from that state in which the human being is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Saviour. According to the Gospel, this translation cannot come about except through the cleansing of regeneration or a desire for this, as it is written, ‘Unless someone is born again of water and the Holy Spirit he or she cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’ (John 3:5)

Trent's understanding of justification, set out here, clearly includes regeneration in justification. The Council went on to teach that the sinner is initially justified through baptism, though that justification may be lost because of sin, yet renewed by penance. Trent, therefore, maintained the medieval tradition, which began with Augustine in which justification comprised both an event and a process – the event being declared righteous on the basis of Christ's work, and the process; being made righteous by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Melanchthon and Calvin used the word justification only to refer to the event of being declared righteous, which was also Luther's final position. They regarded the process of internal renewal i.e. 'sanctification' or 'regeneration' as being theologically distinct. In their discussion on the nature of justification, the Reformers concluded that justification was a legal declaration made by God that believing sinners were righteous in his sight. They viewed it as a pronouncement concerning their right standing with God. They understood the verb 'to justify' to mean 'to declare righteous' and not 'to make righteous' as Augustine and the Schoolmen supposed. Calvin (Battles ed: vol.1 p.745) says in the Institutes:

"Therefore we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as righteous men. And that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness."

The Reformers held that the initial inward work of regeneration with which repentance and faith are associated, together with the ongoing process of renewal, to which sanctification refers, is closely linked to justification. But they insisted that regeneration and renewal must never be confused with justification. God pardons the guilty sinner and pronounces him righteous immediately he believes in Christ.

3.2.4.2. Discussion on the Nature of Justifying Righteousness

Luther's teaching on "the alien righteousness of Christ" set forth a righteousness that was outside of the sinner; a righteousness that was not internal but that was imputed rather than imparted. Those who opposed Luther and the Reformation argued, following Augustine's teaching, that sinners were justified on the basis of an internal righteousness, infused or implanted within their persons by God. This righteousness was itself given as an act of grace; it was not something merited. But, they argued, there had to be something within individuals that could allow God to justify them. But Luther dismissed the idea of an internal righteousness having any part in justification. Trent (Denzinger 1948:285-286. Ch.7.) refused to give up the Augustinian idea of an internal righteousness as the basis of justification.

"The single formal (direct) cause (of justification) is the righteousness of God – not the righteousness by which he himself is righteous, but the righteousness by which he makes us righteous, so that, when we are endowed with it, 'we are renewed in the spirit of our mind' (Ephesians 4:23), and are not only counted as righteous, but are called, and are in reality, righteous ... Nobody can be righteous except God communicates the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ to him or her, and this takes place in the justification of the sinner."

A compromise was proposed at the Colloquy of Ratisbon in 1541. The idea was mooted that two causes of justification should be recognised; an external righteousness, and an internal righteousness. Trent however, rejected it. Their use of the word “single” was final. For them, the only direct cause of justification was interior righteousness.

The Reformers insisted that the nature of justifying righteousness was not to be found in any inherent personal righteousness infused into the sinner, but in the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. Cunningham (1961:45) explains what the Reformers understood by the term “the righteousness of Christ”:

*“By the righteousness of Christ, the Reformers understood the whole vicarious work of Christ, including both his sufferings as satisfactory to the divine justice and law, which required that men’s sins should be punished, and his whole obedience to the law, as meriting the life that was promised to obedience; the former being usually called by later divines ... His **passive**, and the latter His **active** righteousness. By this righteousness being imputed to any man, they meant that it was reckoned to him, or put down to his account, so that God, from a regard to it thus imputed, virtually agreed or resolved to deal with him, or to treat him, as if he himself had suffered what Christ suffered, and had done what Christ did; and had thus fully satisfied for his offences and fully earned the rewards promised to full obedience. The Reformers taught that when God pardoned and accepted any sinner, the ground or basis of the divine act was this, that the righteousness of Christ was his, through his union to Christ...and that this righteousness... formed an adequate ground on which his sins might be forgiven and his person accepted.”*

The Reformers argued that only such a righteousness would satisfy all the requirements of God; that Christ had become ‘the end of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:4); that our inherent personal righteousness, even were it perfect, could not cancel the guilt of our past sins or satisfy God’s justice in respect of them; only the imputation of Christ’s active and passive righteousness to us, could meet our case.

3.2.4.3. Discussion on the Nature of Justifying Faith.

Buchanan (1961:133) explains the thinking behind the position of the Council of Trent on the nature of justifying faith:

“The main questions related to the nature of saving faith ... will not be discerned or appreciated aright, unless we bear in mind, that they are all connected with the fundamental principle of the Romish system respecting the ground of our forgiveness and acceptance with God, as being a righteousness inherent in man, and not the righteousness of Christ imputed ... Accordingly faith, to which so much efficacy and importance are everywhere ascribed in Scripture, was, first of all, defined as a mere intellectual belief, or assent to revealed truth, such as an unrenewed mind might acquire in the exercise of its natural faculties, without the aid of divine grace... This faith, in order to be effectual and saving, must be ‘informed with charity or love’; and forthwith, that which was barren before, becomes fruitful, it justifies, not because it rests on the righteousness of Christ, but because it is, itself, our inherent personal

righteousness, the product of a new birth, and the germ of a new creation. It was regarded as the seminal principle of holiness in heart and life, and, as such, the ground of our justification."

The practical outcome of such reasoning resulted in faith becoming the ground of justification rather than the means. Humanly speaking, justification was received not by faith but by the sacraments. Being regenerated by baptism and periodically purified by confession and penance, Trent concluded that the sinner was justified by an inherent righteousness sacramentally infused. Faith in Christ and his finished work was optional.

The Reformers rejected the whole concept of sacramental justification, arguing from scripture, that, just as in Old Testament times, Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, and received circumcision as a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith which he already possessed. So in New Testament times, justification is inseparably linked to faith, and not to baptism.

It was the main feature of all the disputations of the Reformers that they sought to prove everything from scripture and to interpret the Fathers by scripture. Melancthon (D'Aubigne 1847:178) in his dispute with Eck laid down this fundamental Reformation principle; that we ought **not** to interpret Scripture by the Fathers, but the Fathers by Scripture. He said:

"How often has not Jerome been mistaken, how frequently Augustine, how frequently Ambrose, how often their opinions are different and how often they retract their errors. There is but one Scripture, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and pure and true in all things."

Thus, arguing on scriptural grounds, the Reformers held, in opposition to Trent, that we are justified by faith alone, (Galatians 3:15) simply because faith receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, trusting in his righteousness as the ground of acceptance. They recognised that historical faith exists, but they argued that there is a faith, distinguished from it in scripture, which immediately secures the pardon of the sinner and his acceptance with God; a faith that involves the consent of mind, heart, and will, which actually receives Christ and all his benefits, looking only to his righteousness as its ground and plea. It unites the sinner to Christ and makes him a partaker of his righteousness, once and for ever.

They did not deny that this faith works by love, and produces all the fruits of the Spirit, but its justifying power, they attributed, not to its possession of love, but to its possession of the gift of Christ and his righteousness.

"A true and steadfast faith, says Luther (1998:88) must lay hold upon nothing else but Christ alone ... this our adversaries understand not; and therefore they cast away this precious pearl – Christ, and in its place, they set Charity, which, they say, is their precious diamond."

Calvin (2001:141-142) cites the example of Abraham as evidence beyond all doubt that faith stands alone as the means of receiving justification and that works have no place.

“This truth holds: Men are justified by believing, not by what they do. It is by faith that they receive grace; and grace cannot be earned as a payment for works.. Since Abraham with all his pre-eminence in virtue, after a long life of exceptional service to God was yet justified by faith, the righteousness of each perfected man consists in faith alone. It is important to say plainly that what is here told of one man must be applied to all men. For Abraham was called “father of the faithful” with good reason, and there are not diverse ways of seeking salvation. Paul rightly teaches that what is here described is not the righteousness of an individual man but true righteousness as such... Therefore Paul argues further that he to whom faith is reckoned for righteousness is not justified by works. For the merits of all who seek justification by works are measured by God, before whom they are worthy of condemnation. We understand the meaning of justification by faith when we know that God reconciles us to himself freely. Hence it follows that concern with the merit of works ends when justification is sought through faith. For if anyone is to possess righteousness by faith, it must necessarily be given by God and proffered to us through his Word.”

3.2.4.4. Discussion on the Assurance of Salvation

The Reformers believed that salvation was grounded upon the faithfulness of God. One could rest assured in one’s salvation. But this does not mean that the believer never experienced doubt. Calvin (1931: III. ii, 7;17.pp16,27) speaks clearly at this point:

“(faith)...is a steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence towards us, which is founded upon the truth of the gracious promise of God in Christ, and is both revealed to our minds and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

When we stress that faith ought to be certain and secure, we do not have in mind a certainty without doubt, or a security without any anxiety. Rather, we affirm that believers have a perpetual struggle with their own lack of faith, and are far from possessing a peaceful conscience, never interrupted by any disturbance. On the other hand we want to deny that they may fall out of, or depart from, their confidence in the divine mercy, no matter how much they may be troubled.”

Because the Reformers looked to the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, they had assurance that they were accepted with God. They were relying entirely on the grace of God in Christ. The re-discovery of the doctrine of “Assurance of Grace and Salvation” began to be noticed in the lives, and deaths of believers. It was even noticed in ‘wills’ made by those preparing to die. The following observation is recorded by Eveson; (1998:65):

“Those who still clung to the old religion of the pope committed their souls, not only to God, but to Mary and the saints, and requested that prayers and masses be said for their souls to bring a speedy end to their time in purgatory. Money was often left for this specific purpose. On the other hand, those who embraced the gospel of justification by faith alone expressed absolute certainty in Christ and his death to save them. In London, the famous English chronicler, Edward Hall, wrote out his will in 1546, yielding his soul to its ‘maker and redeemer by whose passion, and not by my

deserts, I trust only to be saved, for he hath washed away my sins, I doubt not by his precious blood.'"

Historians have raised the possibility that there was a degree of misunderstanding between Trent and the reformers on the matter of assurance of grace and salvation. However, the gap between the two parties seems much wider than can be accounted for in terms of misunderstanding. The Council saw the reformers as making human confidence or boldness the grounds of justification, almost as if justification rested on human conviction rather than on the grace of God. The reformers, however, were stressing that justification rested upon the promises of God, and that human failure to believe those promises called into account the reliability of God.

3.2.5. The English Reformers and the Doctrine of Justification

While the struggle continued on mainland Europe, the same battles were raging in England for the hearts and minds of the faithful. It is striking to discover the degree of unanimity on the doctrine of justification in all quarters. We look now at the writings of two English reformers.

3.2.5.1. William Tyndale (1494 – 1536)

The English Bible translator, William Tyndale, (1848:46) conveys to us his views on the subject of justification in his treatise on "the Parable of the Wicked Mammon" (1528) published in his *Doctrinal Treatises*.

"That faith only, before all works, and without all merits, in Christ's only, justifieth and setteth us at peace with God, is proved by Paul, in the first chapter to the Romans."

In "The Obedience of the Christian Man" Tyndale (1848:193) writes:

"I say that no man is so great a sinner, if he repent and believe, but that he is righteous in Christ and in the promises."

3.2.5.2. Hugh Latimer (1485 – 1555)

Another great English Reformer, bishop Hugh Latimer, (1843:330) who in 1555 was burned at the stake, in the reign of Queen Mary, once encouraged believers not to let their sins hinder them from their prayers.

"Our Saviour maketh them (our sins) nothing: when we believe in Him, it is like as if we had no sins. For he changeth with us: he taketh our sins and wickedness from us, and giveth unto us his holiness, righteousness, justice, fulfilling of the law, and so, consequently, everlasting life: so that we be like as if we had done no sin at all; for his righteousness standeth us in so good stead, as though we of our own selves had fulfilled the law to the uttermost. Therefore our sins cannot let us, nor withdraw us from prayer: for they be gone; they are no sins; they cannot be hurtful unto us. Christ

dying for us, as all the scripture, both of the old and New Testament, witnesseth... 'He hath taken away our sorrows.'"

3.2.5.3. The Confessions of Faith

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the English Puritans continued to hold the Reformed view of justification and laid great stress upon it. The Confessions of Faith produced at that time in all the main Protestant denominations taught the Reformed view of justification with great clarity. As is evidenced for example by the statement of the **Westminster Confession of Faith** (Ward edition 1994. Ch.11) which was drawn up in 1645. Under the heading of **Justification** it states:

"Those whom God effectively calls he also freely justifies. He does this, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting them as righteous. This he does for Christ's sake alone. And not for anything done in them or by them. He does not consider their faith itself, the act of believing, as their righteousness... nor any other obedient response to the gospel by them, but he credits the obedience and satisfaction of Christ to them. For their part, they receive and rest by faith on Christ and his righteousness, and this faith does not originate with themselves, but is the gift of God.

The faith that receives and rests on Christ and his righteousness, is the sole means of justification. Yet it is never alone in the person justified, but always accompanied by all other saving graces; it is not a dead faith but works by love.

By his obedience and death Christ paid in full the debt of all those who are justified, and made a proper, real, and full satisfaction of every claim of his Father's justice on their behalf. Since it was not for anything in them that Christ was freely given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction freely accepted in their place, their justification is only of free grace. Hence, both God's exact justice and his rich grace are glorified in the justification of sinners.

From all eternity God decreed to justify all the elect, and when the time was right, Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification. Nevertheless, the elect are not justified until in due time the Holy Spirit actually applies Christ to them.

God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified. Although they can never fall from their justified state, they may fall under God's Fatherly displeasure because of their sins, and they may not have the light of his countenance restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sins, ask forgiveness, and renew their faith and repentance.

The justification of believers under the Old Testament was in all these respects identical with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

This full statement on the doctrine of justification set out in the Confession of Faith was also summarised by the Westminster Divines in the Shorter Catechism. (Ward edition 1994. Q33.) It reads as follows:

“What is Justification?

Justification is an act of God’s free grace, in which he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, for the sake of the righteousness of Christ alone, which is credited to us, and received by faith alone.”

3.2.6. Conclusion

Justification was the great fundamental distinguishing doctrine of the Reformation and it was regarded as being of paramount importance, by all the Reformers. Their main objection to the Roman church was that she had corrupted the scripture on this subject in a way that put the souls of men in danger. There was greater harmony among the Reformers on the subject of justification than on any other subject. In fact it would not be an overstatement to say, that the rescue and rediscovery of this doctrine was the most important service which, under God, the Reformers rendered to the church, since the subject bears immediately and directly upon men’s relationship with God and their everlasting destiny.

Chapter 3:3

Modern Trends in the Doctrine of Justification.

3.3.1 Introduction.

Many changes have taken place in the world of theology since Luther rediscovered the doctrine of justification in the sixteenth century. Today, Luther's understanding of the Apostle Paul is challenged by many scholars. It is argued that the Reformers made justification too pivotal in the definition of salvation and that the controversy with Rome gave the Reformed Church too narrow a view of the gospel. In recent times there has been much re-interpretation of the Reformation debate on justification.

A recent statement by an Anglican Roman Catholic commission on 'Salvation and the Church' (ARCIC II 26) states:

"We are agreed that this (the doctrine of justification) is not an area where any remaining differences of theological interpretation or ecclesiological emphasis, either within or between our Communion, can justify our continuing separation. We believe that our two Communion are agreed on the essential aspects of the doctrine of salvation and on the Church's role within it"

We are left with many questions when we read such a statement: Did the theologians who composed the above statement make a comprehensive study of this centuries-old debate? Did the Reformation major in a minor? Was the great debate on justification all about a huge misunderstanding? Do modern trends in the debate lead us to this conclusion? Has there been sufficient development in the history of the doctrine of justification over the past 400 years to warrant such a claim?

It is our intention, as we consider these questions, to look at modern trends in two areas: in Roman Catholic debate, and in Evangelical and Reformed debate.

3.3.2 Situation from the Council of Trent to the Second World War.

Trent emphatically rejected the view of justification advocated by the Reformers. The Council rejected justification as a declaratory act on God's part, by which the believing sinner was declared to be forgiven, and righteous in his sight. Trent took a transformationist view: God's judgement is based on the transformation that his grace has effected in the sinner. Trent viewed justification as a part of sanctification, and considered it to be based on the renewal that has already taken place in the sinner.

In the following Canons of Trent, (Denzinger 1948:286) the Reformers' view is explicitly condemned:

9. *"If anyone shall say that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will – anathema sit (let him be anathema).*

11. *If anyone shall say that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity that is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the goodwill of God – anathema sit.*

12. *If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us – anathema sit.*

24. *If anyone shall say that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase – anathema sit.”*

Considering the above canons it is not surprising that since Trent, a sharp difference in the doctrine of justification was seen by both sides to be at the centre of the conflict. The distance between both sides was perceived, *by both*, as a great gulf. This is how all the Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries saw it. In the Reformed confessions, especially the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt, there is remarkable harmony on the central issue of *sola fide*. The same position was taken at that time, by all the other great confessions.

But the Reformers were not alone in seeing the doctrine of justification as the centre of the conflict. On the Roman Catholic side, the magisterium and all the leading theologians of the Reformation period and during the following centuries took the view that the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide* was a serious heresy. Right up to World War II almost all Catholic theologians were unanimous in rejecting the Reformation understanding of justification by faith as a complete misunderstanding of the biblical doctrine, and in defending the doctrine as set out in the canons of the Council of Trent.

3.3.3. Modern Trends in Catholic Theology

After the Second World War, a new assessment of the Reformers was carried out by a number of Catholic theologians. No longer were the Reformers seen as evil men but as sincerely trying to reform the church and listen to scripture. Klaas Runia (1992:199) describes the change in Rome's attitude as follows:

“The whole climate within the new Roman Catholic theology itself changed. It earnestly tried to get away from the scholastic methods of theologising which had dominated Catholic theology since the Middle Ages and made its own attempt to listen anew to Scripture itself. It also developed a new view of the church's dogma by emphasising the historical dynamics in its development and the historical, time conditioned aspect in its formulations. These changes in the understanding of the Reformation, of the Scriptures and of the historical nature of the church's dogma also deeply affected the traditional view of justification.”

In 1952 The Dutch theologian, W.H. van der Pol denied that there was an essential difference on the doctrine of justification between the Reformation and Rome. After stating Paul's view of justification, he wrote (Carson 1992:199):

"Without any merit on the part of the believer, his sins are forgiven him and the righteousness of Christ is granted him in exchange, strictly through grace alone. For if there were any mention here of merits, grace would no longer be grace. This is precisely the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. The sola fide, as the Apostle Paul has in mind, in particular in his letters to the Romans and Galatians, is fully accepted by the Catholic Church."

Van der Pol, however, was a voice in the wilderness. Hans Kung was to have much greater impact with his doctoral thesis in 1957 on: *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*. Kung came to the same conclusion as van der Pol, that there was no difference between Reformed and Roman Catholic theology on justification. Kung asserted that Protestant Theology had misinterpreted Trent. Although Protestant scholars such as Berkouwer, Ehrlich and McGrath regard Kung's understanding and interpretation of Trent as incorrect and historically untenable, (as do leading Roman Catholic theologians) yet, Kung's book is important in recent Catholic study of the Reformation.

In the end, however, the exegesis of Scripture must determine the correctness of either view. The decisive question is: Was Luther right or wrong when he appealed to the New Testament? Today, many Roman Catholic scholars like Kertlege admit that Paul uses the term 'to justify' in a declarative, forensic sense and that Luther's interpretation of Paul's doctrine of justification is correct. Kung (1977:73,74) wrote:

"Luther, with his chief statements on the doctrine of justification, with his 'sola gratia', his 'sola fide', his 'simul justus et peccator', is backed by the New Testament and in particular by Paul whose view is ultimate and decisive in the doctrine of justification."

3.3.4. Recent Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues.

The Lutheran World Federation and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity appointed a Joint Study Committee that published a statement in 1972 called the *Malta Report*. Though it had little to say about justification, it claimed that a far-reaching consensus was developing in the interpretation of justification. It was followed in 1983 by a much more important work.

3.3.4.1. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue. (1983)

In 1983 a joint Commission of American Lutherans and Roman Catholics produced a very important 24,000 word statement under the title *Justification by Faith*. McGrath (1987:31) refers to it as:

"by far the most important ecumenical document to deal with the theme of justification to date".

The document deals with three areas of the debate: The history of the question; reflection and interpretation; and perspectives for reconstruction. In the introduction there is a 'christological affirmation' to which both parties agree. It reads as follows: (Anderson, 1985:16)

"Our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Jesus Christ and on the gospel whereby the good news of God's merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God's promise and saving work in Christ."

In Part I they deal with the history of the question. The history of the development of Catholic thinking is traced back to Augustine whose teaching on justification is explained in terms of "*a transformationist process.*" The doctrine of merit that developed at that time was seen as:

"a basis of hope that God 'does not deny grace to those who do what is in them' (facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam)" (Anderson, 1985:19)

This could easily become a condition that had to be fulfilled in order to receive grace. It did, in fact, become one of the reasons for the terrible scrupulosity of the late Middle Ages.

The document reviews the 16th century debate, outlining the historical background to the Reformers' appeal to Paul's doctrine of justification, including Pelagianism, and indulgences. Dealing with the debate during the Council of Trent it is evident in the document that in spite of the emphasis on the absolute need of grace, Trent's view of justification is distinctly different from that of the Reformers. It is therefore surprising to find this statement in the document:

"The Tridentine decree on justification, with its own way of insisting on the primacy of grace... is not necessarily incompatible with the Lutheran doctrine of sola fide, even though Trent excluded this phrase." (Anderson, 1985:35)

Commenting on this, Runia (Carson.1992:205) says:

"I find this statement surprising because Trent emphatically upheld the Augustinian and Mediaeval transformationist view, in which justification is virtually nothing but the first stage of sanctification and in which therefore, man with his activity and good works is included from the very beginning. For Luther, on the other hand, justification is nothing but the gateway to salvation, in which God does everything, declaring the sinner just on the basis of the alien righteousness of Christ, while the sinner has nothing but an empty hand (sola fide) in which he receives this gracious gift of God."

In the second part of the document is entitled: "Reflection and Interpretation" the differences are related to 'contrasting concerns': Lutherans want to safeguard redemption in Christ alone and exclude all self-reliance for salvation, while Catholics are more concerned with renewal and sanctification. This may seem at first glance to be a straightforward description of the difference, as though it were a matter of two sides of the same coin. However, the document goes on to show in an honest way,

that the differences are much deeper, affecting such areas as; the forensic nature of justification, the sinfulness of the justified (*simul justus et peccator*), the sufficiency of faith, the concept of merit, the concept of satisfaction, and criteria for authenticity.

3.3.4.2 Catholic – Lutheran Joint Declaration on Justification. (1999)

The most recent, and indeed, most important statement to date is “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”, an official doctrinal statement jointly authored by representatives of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation that was signed on 31st October 1999 as a joint confessional agreement. This document is the culmination of 30 years of Lutheran – Catholic dialogue. The declaration is divided into five main sections and the whole is divided into 44 numbered paragraphs. The following are the headings...

Preamble (1-7)

1. *Biblical Message of Justification. (8-12)*
2. *The Doctrine of Justification as Ecumenical Problem. (13)*
3. *The Common Understanding of Justification. (14-18)*
4. *Explicating the Common Understanding of Justification. (19-39)*
 1. *Human powerlessness and sin in relation to justification. (19-21)*
 2. *Justification as forgiveness of sins and making righteous. (22-24)*
 3. *Justification by faith and through grace. (25-27)*
 4. *The justified as sinner. (28-30)*
 5. *Law and gospel. (31-33)*
 6. *Assurance of salvation (34-36)*
 7. *The good works of the justified. (37-39)*
5. *The Significance and Scope of the Consensus Reached. (40-44)*

Introductory Comments.

Coming from Lutheran and Catholic traditions, the declaration contains certain presuppositions peculiar to these two traditions which are not necessarily common in Reformed circles such as the idea that justification is by means of baptism. (1999: 28)

“We confess together that in Baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person.”

There is, however, much in this declaration that is commendable: It is clear that among many Catholic theologians there is a growing respect for the Reformed view of justification and it is clear that these men are influencing the thinking, particularly within the Catholic Church. It is also clear that the declaration removes many traditional misunderstandings. The declaration goes further than any previous one, in removing the difficulties between the two parties. Yet, serious differences remain which even the skilful use of language cannot overcome. We shall now select various passages in the declaration for comment.

3.3.4.2.1. The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

There is evidence that both parties are agreed that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers in justification. Considering the increasing pressure in recent theological studies, from such scholars as Wright, Dunn, Stendahl, etc., to move away from the traditional Reformed position on this point, it is gratifying to note the following references to the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer:

" Paul sets forth the Gospel as the power of God for salvation of the person who has fallen under the power of sin, as the message that proclaims that 'the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith' (Rom. 1:16f) and that grants 'justification' (Rom.3:21-31). He proclaims Christ as 'our righteousness' (1 Cor 1:30) applying to the risen Lord what Jeremiah proclaimed about God himself (Jer 23:6)... this righteousness will be reckoned to all who, like Abraham, trust in God's promise." (1999:10)

"...persons are by faith united with Christ, who, in his person is our righteousness." (1999:22)

"When Lutherans emphasise that the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness, their intention is above all to insist that the sinner is granted righteousness before God in Christ through the declaration of forgiveness." (1999:23)

3.3.4.2.2. Confusion between the doctrines of Justification and Sanctification.

However, in the declaration, we do not find a clear and consistent separation between justification and sanctification. Even in the heading of section 4:2

'Justification as forgiveness of sins and making righteous.'

the use of the word 'making' suggests that the old mistake of Augustine is still happening. Augustine interpreted the verb "to justify" in his Latin Bible as "to make righteous" rather than "to count, impute or credit as righteous". This led him to the view that when God justifies us he "makes" us inwardly righteous. This was a great mistake since it led to the doctrines of justification and sanctification becoming confused. In the mediaeval period justification took on this meaning ('to be made righteous') and it was regarded as involving inner transformation of the individual. This became, and, it would seem, it still continues to be the position of the Catholic Church. There is very little evidence in the declaration that the Reformed position of clearly differentiating between justification and regeneration or sanctification is respected as evidenced in the following references:

"The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace which makes us children of God." (1999:27)

" Justification is the forgiveness of sins, liberation from the dominating power of sin and death..." (1999:11)

"God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love"(1999:22)

This is contradicted by (1999:23) which states:

“Justification remains free from human cooperation and is not dependent on the life renewing effects of grace in human beings.”

3.3.4.2.3. The Justified as Sinner.

In Section 4.4 entitled, ‘The Justified as Sinner’, the Lutherans set out their understanding of the Christian as being “at the same time righteous and sinner”. (29) The traditional Reformed view of forensic righteousness is here adequately set forth. However, the Catholic response to this (see 30. below) is verbose in the extreme and all that can be gathered with certainty from it is the dependence of the sinner on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, rather than an understanding of justification in any forensic sense.

“Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in baptism takes away all that is sin “in the proper sense” and that is “worthy of damnation”. There does however remain in the person an inclination (concupiscence which comes from sin and presses toward sin. Since, according to Catholic conviction, human sins always involve a personal element and since this element is lacking in this inclination, Catholics do not see this inclination as sin in an authentic sense. They do not thereby deny that this inclination does not correspond to God’s original design for humanity and that it is objectively in contradiction to God and remains one’s enemy in lifelong struggle. Grateful for deliverance by Christ, they underscore that this inclination in contradiction to God does not merit the punishment of eternal death and does not separate the justified person from God. But when individuals voluntarily separate themselves from God, it is not enough to return to observing the commandments, for they must receive pardon and peace in the Sacrament of reconciliation through the word of forgiveness imparted to them in virtue of God’s reconciling work in Christ.” (1999:30)

3.3.4.2.4. Assurance of Salvation

In para. 36, there are some grounds for concluding that the Catholic position has moved closer to the Lutheran when we read:

“Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ’s promise, to look away from one’s own experience and to trust in Christ’s forgiving word alone.” (1999:36)

But at the end of the same paragraph, definite conviction based on the finished work of Christ is not to be found, but only a vague statement that God intends to save us.

“Every person, however, may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Recognising his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation.” (1999:36)

3.3.4.2.5. Conclusion.

It is clear in the declaration that there has been an opening up of understanding between Lutherans and Catholics. However, it is not clear that the differences in emphasis set out in the document are simply differences in emphasis. Skilful language has been used to accommodate the differences, but it is clear that at a number of points, such as forensic justification, and the blurring of distinctions between justification and regeneration, material differences remain which cannot be explained in terms of differing emphases. Having said all that, there are clear signs of a Catholic willingness to re-examine traditional teaching in the light of Scripture and history and this is to be welcomed.

3.3.5. Modern Trends in Reformed Theology.

Turning to the Reformed constituency, there have been some serious developments in the past 40 years in the doctrine of justification. Until then, it had long been taken for granted, at least since the Reformation, that the historic reformed view on justification was generally accepted. However, in recent times, this has been seriously challenged. Some modern scholars believe that all who have gone before them have, in various ways misread the New Testament concerning the whole issue of justification. They claim that neither the Protestant nor the Catholic understanding is fair to the Apostle Paul's teaching on the subject.

We shall attempt to survey the trends by examining some of the writers chronologically.

3.3.5.1 Stendahl.

In 1963 an article by **Krister Stendahl**, who later served as Lutheran Bishop of Stockholm, appeared in the *Harvard Theological Review*, entitled 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West'. This was later incorporated in his book *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*. He held that the traditional understanding of Paul in general and of Romans in particular, ie. that their focus is on justification by faith, is wrong. In his view, this mistake is due to the western church's morbid conscience, and especially to the moral struggles of Augustine and Luther. It was his view that the church had read this back into Paul. According to Stendahl (1977:13):

"Justification is not the pervasive organising principle or insight of Paul, but was hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs of the promises of God to Israel. Paul's concern was not his own salvation, for he himself had a robust conscience, claimed to be blameless and experienced no troubles, no problems, no qualms of conscience, no feelings of shortcomings."

According to Stendahl, Paul's concern is the salvation of the Gentiles, that they might come to Christ directly and not through the Law of Moses. He saw the epistle of Romans as being "about God's plan for the world and about how Paul's mission to the Gentiles fits into that plan."

Stendahl's corrective may be necessary to some extent. It is true that Paul is not exclusively occupied with justification. But the first eight chapters of Romans cannot be merely seen as a preface for Paul's Gentile concern. As for Paul's conscience before his conversion, and whether westerners have an introspective conscience, which we now read into Paul, these matters can only be answered by open-minded and careful exegesis of the passages concerned.

It is clear however, from Paul's words in Romans 1:18-3:20 that it is Paul himself and not Luther or Augustine, who, in this passage, establishes universal human guilt. It is also clear that Paul uses the terms like 'faultless' only in reference to external conformity to the law as in Philippians 3:6

"...as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."

3.3.5.2. Sanders.

E.P. Sanders published a major work in America in 1977 entitled *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. In this book, Sanders challenges the prevailing view that 1st century Palestinian Judaism was a religion of legalistic works righteousness, and that Paul's gospel was antithetical to Judaism. He declared that this view was completely wrong and that it was based on a complete misunderstanding of the evidence available. He stated that he had come to this conclusion after a meticulous survey of the rabbinic, Qumranic and apocryphal literature of the period. He found the religion of the period to be 'covenantal nomism'.

Stott (1994:26) outlines the highlights of Sanders' thesis as follows:

"(1) that Paul's starting point was not the belief that all human beings were guilty sinners before God, but rather that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour of both Jews and Gentiles, so that 'for Paul the conviction of a universal solution preceded the conviction of a universal plight'; (2) that salvation is essentially a 'transfer' from the bondage of sin to the lordship of Christ; (3) that the means of transfer is 'participation' with Christ in his death and resurrection; (4) that the reason salvation must be by 'faith' is not to obviate human pride, but that if it were 'by law' the Gentiles would be excluded and Christ's death would have been unnecessary ('the argument for faith is really an argument against the law'); and (5) that the resulting saved community is 'one person in Christ.'"

This is really an attempt to reconstruct Paul's gospel, leaving out the familiar categories of human sin and guilt, the wrath of God, justification by grace without works and peace with God.

In a further book, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, Sanders (1985:156) develops and clarifies his thesis. He is right in affirming that Paul's argument concerns the equal standing of Jews and Gentiles, both are under sin, and in order to have a change of status, both must place faith in Jesus Christ, but when he insists that:

"The supposed objection to Jewish self-righteousness is as absent from Paul's letters as self-righteousness itself is from Jewish literature..."

This is much more difficult to prove. Sanders shows that the theme of ‘reward and punishment is present everywhere in Tannaitic literature especially with regard to gaining eternal life. This surely means that human merit, though not the basis of entering the covenant, was yet the basis for remaining in it. But Paul would surely have strenuously opposed such an idea. To him, entering the covenant and remaining in it are both by grace alone. Not only have we been justified by grace through faith...

Romans 5:1 *“Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

But we continue in this grace, by faith...

Romans 5:2 *“Did you receive the Spirit by observing the Law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort.”*

The problem with the case that Sanders makes from the ancient literature is that there is abundant proof in church history that popular religion may be very different from the official literature of its leaders. Indeed, Sanders (1985:426) is forced to admit as much:

“The possibility cannot be completely excluded that there were Jews accurately hit by the polemic of Matthew 23... Human nature being what it is, one supposes that there were some such. One must say, however, that the surviving Jewish literature does not reveal them.”

It must be noted that Paul’s antipathy to boasting has always been taken as a rejection of self-righteousness. He boasted only in Christ and his cross, and not in himself or others. (1 Corinthians 1:31) However, Sanders interprets Paul’s antipathy to Jewish boasting as directed against pride in the Jews’ favoured status, which would be incompatible with the equal standing of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, not against pride in their merit, which would be incompatible with humility before God.

In the end, it all comes back to the question of exegesis. Paul’s gospel in Romans is antithetical. He is setting it forth against some alternative. But what is this alternative? We must allow Paul to speak for himself and not make him say what old traditions or new perspectives want him to say. It is difficult to understand how any interpretation of Paul can explain away the simple statements that...

“no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law” (Romans 3:20) and

“we are justified freely by his grace.” (Romans 3:24)

3.3.5.3 Raisanen

Much of the debate about Paul and justification has focused on the purpose and place of the law. Some contemporary are not convinced that Paul knew his own mind on this subject. The Finnish theologian, **H. Raisanen** (1983:11) finds that...

“Contradictions and tensions have to be accepted as constant features of Paul’s theology of the law. Paul contradicts himself, asserting both the abolition of the law, and also its permanently normative character. Paul struggles with the problem that a divine institution has been abolished through what God has done in Christ.”

It is true that when Paul is responding to different situations he makes different emphases. But the apparent discrepancies can be resolved.

Stott (1994:30) explains as follows:

“Our deliverance from the law is a rescue from its curse and its bondage and so relates to the two particular functions of justification and sanctification. In both areas we are under grace, not law. For justification we look to the cross, not the law, and for sanctification to the Spirit, not the law. It is only by the Spirit that the law can be fulfilled in us.” (Ezekiel 36:27)

3.3.5.4. Dunn.

James Dunn sees Paul in Romans as being in dialogue with himself, the Jewish Rabbi with the Christian apostle. In *The New Perspective on Paul* he follows the main theses of K.Stendahl, E.P.Sanders, and H. Raisanen. Dunn’s view is that when Paul states that no one can be justified by the works of the law, he was not referring to good works in a meritorious sense, he had in mind rather, circumcision, the sabbath and food laws which functioned as an identity marker and boundary, reinforcing Israel’s separateness from the surrounding nations. The reason Paul was against the works of the law was not because they were thought to earn salvation, but because they led to a boastful pride that excluded the Gentiles from God’s plan.

However there can be no doubt that Paul was aware of these two dangers when he used ‘law’ and ‘works of law’ interchangeably, therefore his reference was wider than to certain Jewish rituals. It was boasting in good works, not just in favoured status which Paul was opposing. This is clear from the case of Abraham set out in Romans 3:27-4:1-5.

3.3.5.5. Wright.

The most recent and the most prolific revisionist writer on justification is **N.T. Wright**. He has taught at Oxford and Cambridge universities and has published many books and papers on justification and related subjects: His interpretation of the Pauline texts is probably the strongest challenge to the traditional Protestant approach that has yet appeared. Since it comes from one who treats Scripture seriously and comes from the Evangelical and Reformed constituency, his views must be given serious consideration.

It is clear that Wright follows Sanders (1985:57) in his understanding of Palestinian Judaism. He agrees with Sanders that a false view of Judaism has arisen as a result of...

“the retrojection of the Protestant Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity taking the role of Lutheranism.”

Wright's (1992:335) assessment of Sanders' thesis is very positive:

"Despite some criticisms that have been launched it (Sanders) seems to me thus far completely correct as a description of first century Judaism."

In the area of the law, Wright presents much that is helpful and accurate. E.g., He states that Paul in Galatians and Romans is thinking particularly of the Jewish Torah, the law of Moses, not law in general. There are some exceptions such as Romans 2:14 and Galatians 5:23 but these only serve to highlight the fact that Paul uses law more often and most basically of the Mosaic Law.

It is true that the law was meant to keep Israel apart. God intended that it should separate Israel from the rest of the nations. But it did not shut out the Gentiles completely in the way that Wright seems to imply. Not only do we find Gentiles entering God's covenant people in Old Testament times, such as Rahab and Ruth, but Gentiles were also converting to Judaism in the Inter-Testamental period. Josephus, in *Contra Apionem* warmly welcomes Gentiles wishing to join the house of Moses

Wright and Dunn limit the phrase 'the works of the law' (NIV 'observing the law') to certain kinds of works such as food laws, circumcision, and the Sabbath. There is no justification for this narrowing of the meaning to those aspects of law that separate Jews and Gentiles. In the Early Church, this same view was advocated by Pelagius. 'Works' are good actions and 'works of the law' are simply what we might call 'good works' defined in Jewish terms. Paul's point is that no good works, not even the observing of the Mosaic Law can put a person right with God. He is insisting that no one can be justified by any kind of law work or human activity, because no one can perform perfect obedience. If the Jews, with the best law in the world cannot achieve justification through it, then no one can.

We have looked at those writers who have led or supported the trend to revise the traditional Reformed view of justification. We now turn to those who have in general, maintained the traditional Reformed position.

3.3.5.6. McGrath.

Alister McGrath, an Anglican evangelical and an expert in historical theology has written many learned books and articles on the doctrine of justification. These include:

1986. Iustitia Dei: a history of the Christian Doctrine of Justification. (2 vols) Cambridge.

1988. Justification by Faith: What it means to us today. Academie/Zondervan

McGrath's view is that the doctrine of justification should be allowed to develop a meaning which is broader than the biblical usage. In 'Iustitia Dei' he begins by making a difference between the *concept* of justification as Paul used it, and the *doctrine* of justification as formulated by the church. He argues that the *concept* or idea of justification is one of many used by Paul to describe God's saving action

towards his people. On the other hand, he maintains that the *doctrine* of justification as developed by the theologians has acquired a meaning in Protestant as well as Catholic theology that is virtually:

“ independent of its biblical origins and concerns the means by which mans relationship to God is established.” (McGrath 1986:2,3)

McGrath distinguishes between the Bible’s use of justification and what it came to mean for the medieval church and the Council of Trent. In general, McGrath supports the traditional reformed position, but he moves away from it when he attempts to broaden the meaning of the term, describing justification as a transforming experience:

“Justification changes us, initiating a new relationship with God that is charged with a creative power to transform us... In Justification God offers to dwell in us as his temple...we regard justification as a transformational experience.” (McGrath 1988:142-147)

3.3.5.7. Eveson

Philip Eveson, in his book; *The Great Exchange: Justification by faith alone, in the light of recent thought.* (1996:104) is critical of McGrath’s broadening of the meaning of justification. He writes:

“... his arguments for widening the meaning of justification are unconvincing and his definitions are actually dangerous to the evangelical or gospel truth. The dedicated preacher concerned to present the truth of justification by faith in today’s world has no right to impose his own meanings on to the term in order to make it relevant. Biblical terms are not like pieces of plastic, that can be made to bend at will, to suit a particular need. McGrath reasons that the Reformers, in proclaiming the doctrine of justification in legal terms, were drawing upon the ‘experiences, hopes and fears of their own day and age’. The doctrine of justification, he states, must be liberated from the forms of theological expression used in the sixteenth century. On the contrary, in using legal terminology the Reformers were being more faithful to Paul than medieval or modern scholarship...His argument that a term like justification should be allowed to evolve in a similar way to the word ‘atonement’ is not sound. ‘Justification’, unlike the word ‘atonement’, has already had a long history of fierce debate in the church over its precise meaning. There is a biblical ‘doctrine’ of justification, not merely a biblical ‘concept’.

3.3.5.8. Piper

John Piper a popular American Baptist writer, has contributed to the debate, a helpful book on one aspect of the doctrine of justification – imputed righteousness.

PIPER, J. 2002. Counted Righteous in Christ. Leicester. I.V.P.

Piper deals with the question: 'Are Christians merely forgiven, or does God credit them with the righteousness of Christ.' This is a central question today when there are many challenges to the historic understanding of justification. Piper carefully exegetes the biblical texts especially in Romans, Galatians and Corinthians, bearing on the subject showing that the righteousness imputed to us in justification is external and does not consist of our faith. He also shows clearly that Paul thinks of justification in terms of 'imputing' or 'crediting' in a book keeping sense.

Unlike the revisionists, Piper does not see justification as liberation from sin's mastery and views this as a paradigm shift and a betrayal of the Reformation. The structure of Romans is such that justification is the prior basis of sanctification and the bondage of guilt makes justification the necessary ground for liberation.

On the imputation of righteousness Piper (2002:115-116) writes:

"In addition to the meaning of the word 'justify' there are the texts...that speak of God's imputing righteousness to us, or of our 'having' a righteousness not our own (e.g., Romans 4:5,6,11,24; 5:17,18,19; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9). The language of the imputation of righteousness in these passages cannot simply be reduced to forgiveness. For example, the words, 'God credits righteousness apart from works' (Romans 4:6), or, 'that righteousness might be credited to them' (Romans 4:11), or 'not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith' (Philippians 3:9) – these words mean more than not having our sins reckoned to us; they mean more than forgiveness of sins. They mean that a righteousness is credited to our account (the accounting imagery is explicit in Romans 4:4)"

3.3.6. Assessing Modern Trends.

Can we dismiss Luther's quest for a guilt-free conscience before God merely as a western preoccupation? Are we being influenced by an age that dismisses absolute standards of right and wrong and has a very superficial attitude to sin? The Law is not only to be viewed in the Old Testament context of salvation history. It is part of the Holy Scriptures, and was preached by the prophets and lived out by Our Lord and must be preached today in order to awaken the so called 'robust' conscience to the danger of God's judgement. Pride in human achievement and self-satisfaction, using religious devotion to establish a claim on God is typical of fallen human nature in every generation and in every part of the world. It is inadmissible to re-interpret the New Testament material in such a way that evidence that the Jews thought in this way is removed.

The revisionists deny that 'the righteousness of Christ' is a Pauline expression. But the apostle Paul does refer to Christ as 'our righteousness' in 1 Corinthians 1:30 and justification is described in Romans 4:1-13 and 5:17-19 as both the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness. To deny this truth leaves the door open to moralistic self-righteousness.

According to N.T.Wright we must resist the temptation to view justification as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Other doctrines such as the Trinity he

suggests might be of greater importance. However, since the doctrine of justification by faith alone concerns the matter of our soul's eternal salvation, if it is not clearly and definitively presented, how can there be any hope of salvation?

We are convinced, with Calvin, (1958:137) that justification:

“is the main hinge on which religion turns so that we devote the greater attention and care to it...If the purity of this doctrine is in any way impaired the church has received a deadly wound and is brought to the very brink of destruction.”

SECTION 4: EVALUATION

4.1 Method

The Evaluation provides a summary of the substance of each chapter and explains how each chapter meets the Aims and Objectives as set out in 1.4.1. and 1.4.2.

4.2 Evaluation of chapter 2.1.

We begin detailed examination of the Biblical data relating to the doctrine of Justification by Faith, according to the prescribed method. The first Biblical passage chosen is Genesis 3:15 – The Protevangelion.

The doctrine of Justification by Faith is not explicitly taught in Genesis 3:15, yet it has a bearing on the subject. It stands at the beginning of the doctrine of Salvation in Scripture and is related to everything that follows. The basic elements in the verse are: Grace, Promise, The Representative Principle, Deliverance, Victory, (Salvation) and Suffering. Not all these elements are related to the basic elements of justification. Yet we shall see that few, if any, are unrelated.

For hundreds of years this Scripture (Genesis 3:15) constituted “the Gospel”. It was the only light that was available to the first believers. We must therefore conclude that, in these words, in some manner, Christ was presented, and it was possible through these words for people to believe in him.

The basic principles involved in Sacrifice are substitution and penalty. It is the sinner that has committed the sin. Sin is his responsibility and “the soul that sins shall die”. Yet God in His mercy and grace introduces a completely new concept into the situation. He finds a way to let the sinner live. It is called substitution. It enters the scene in Genesis immediately after the entry of sin. God permits an animal to be substituted for the sinner. But how can an animal be equal to a human and be accepted in his place? Both share something in common – life. The sinner deserves to die, to forfeit his life, but God is willing to accept the forfeiting of another life, that of an animal. Therefore, in the whole sacrificial emphasis of the Old Testament, blood takes on a special significance, because blood represents life that is forfeited.

When a sacrifice is offered a penalty is paid. To incur a penalty implies guilt. Both guilt and penalty have to do with the law. Guilt implies a breach of law. Therefore sacrifice and law are linked in the economy of God. Sin is a breach of God’s holy law and he who offers a sacrifice pays a fine or penalty thereby admitting his guilt and status as a lawbreaker. In the case of our First Parents (and later the Patriarchs), sacrifice had the following implications: The life of the animal is substituted for the life of the sinner who deserves to die as the penalty for his sin. Also, personal confession of guilt is involved, together with the personal admission of liability to punishment, and there is the hope of divine forgiveness and acceptance.

When the institution of sacrifice was continually observed the effect upon the sinner would involve the strengthening of reverence and trust in God and of repentance and faith. The institution of sacrifice also brought to the attention of the worshipper certain central ideas in God's revelation to man, such as substitution, imputation, and propitiation, basic elements in the doctrine of justification which will yet be more fully developed in Scripture with the passage of time.

The offering of sacrifices in faith, that is, believing the great truths embodied in the concept of sacrifice, was the beginning of the progressive revelation of the doctrine. There can be no doubt that the worshipper was justified, just in the same way as believers today receive forgiveness and acceptance with God.

4.3 Evaluation of chapter 2.2

In Chapter 2.2 we turn to the experience of the Patriarchs. It is evident that Cain and Abel had received revelation from God. Abel clearly believed the revelation and acted upon it. His response to it was wholehearted and enthusiastic - the response of faith. The writer to the Hebrews chooses his subjects under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, setting forth that particular aspect of faith which is exhibited in their character. He reveals its quality and extent and gives us examples of how it is displayed in their lives. In the case of Abel, his faith is seen in the quality of his sacrifice that reveals the attitude of his heart.

The basic element, faith, was the principle that governed the heart of Abel. He offered with a consciousness of God's will and God's glory and in dependence on the promise of a Saviour (Genesis 3:15). Therefore we may conclude that this faith was not a general belief in God, but that it was in fact 'justifying faith'. He had received the promise of the Saviour and he believed the Word of God given to his parents. In gratitude he offered to God that which God required and received assurance that he was accepted.

Abel was a penitent believer and therefore like the tax collector in the story of Jesus, he went home justified. (Luke 18:9-14) On the other hand, Cain's confidence was in himself, so like the Pharisee in the same story, he received nothing from God.

What was involved in the faith of Abel? There was to begin with, a belief in the existence of God. Abel's faith had an intellectual basis. It is stated a few verses hence, that ... "Anyone who comes to God must believe that He exists." (Hebrews 11:6) Abel's faith was more than confidence in a person. It was first of all, belief in a proposition: "God exists". Though assent to certain propositions is not the whole of faith, it is a necessary element in faith. One cannot trust a God if in our minds we understand him to be either non-existent or untrustworthy. But the nature of Abel's faith went much further and rested on the Word of God and the promise contained therein.

Righteousness is a basic element in justification. Abel is described as righteous in this verse and Jesus also calls him "righteous Abel." (Matthew 23:35) We may say he lived a righteous life, but it is not clear that his righteous life was the basis of his acceptance with God. The Lord looked with favour on Abel before He regarded his offering because his offering was merely the evidence of his heart - a heart that

believed the promise of God and loved God. There is therefore evidence that his righteousness was imputed by God, upon his believing, as is traditionally understood in the doctrine of justification by faith.

In the life of Abraham, faith is the basic element that shines in his character. As a heathen idol worshipper in a land of idolatry he hears the call of God. His response is faith. He believes the God who speaks and responds in obedience by leaving his homeland. After the death of his father he receives the Messianic Promise. (Genesis 12:1-3) Again he believes. This involves a resting of all his hopes upon One who will descend from him. With the eyes of faith he sees through the centuries the day when He will arrive and he rejoices. The promised Messiah is his confidence.

Abraham had done many righteous works especially in obedience to the call of God. Yet it was not for these works that God accepted him. God spoke to him giving him a promise - a Gospel promise. Abraham believed in the character of the God who had revealed Himself to him. The word he had received - that the blessing of the world would come through his seed - he accepted as the Word of God. He took God at His Word - he believed. The response of God was to credit righteousness to Abraham's account and to accept him as perfectly righteous in His sight.

It has often been disputed whether Abraham had been justified by faith before this time or whether it was only from this point onwards that he possessed justification. The rest of Scripture would suggest that Abraham was justified from the very first moment, when he believed the promises of God, which was probably a considerable time before this event. Why then is his justification connected to this event? It may be that justification by faith is first mentioned in the Bible in connection with the promise of the Saviour so that justification would always focus upon Christ.

4.4 Evaluation of chapter 2.3

During the era of Moses and the Law the changes that took place were designed by God to teach new truths which therefore contributed in time to the fullness of the revelation of the doctrine of justification. Israel had been lately formed into a nation and was about to receive the fulfilment of the promise God had made to Abraham concerning the land He would give to his seed. In the era of Moses and the Law they were like children in their minority, being trained and tutored until they reached their majority or full maturity. The purpose of that era was to give them information concerning their need of Him and the fact that He would be the Righteous One, keeping the Law with absolute perfection. These were the purposes of the Law.

Moving ahead in the progressive nature of revelation Galatians 3:17-25 explains that the Law was added to the Promise. First God gave the Promise to Abraham, then He gave the Law to Moses. Paul explains that "the law was added because of transgressions" (3:19) This does not mean that the law was intended to alter the basis or method of the justification of the sinner as if obedience to the law was now being put in the place of faith in the Promise. No, the Promise was not being replaced. The Promise was free and unconditional. It was like a will, freely giving the inheritance to the future generation, and like a will, the Promise was unalterable. The Law, however, had a different purpose; its function was not to justify, but to convince men of their need for justification.

Believers were justified under the Law, not by obedience to the Law, but by fleeing from the threats of the Law to the refuge of faith in the Promise given to Abraham. This is how they became children of Abraham and heirs with him of the same promise.

Since the basic element of righteousness is central to the doctrine of justification the Decalogue sets before us the nature of righteousness. God is holy, just and good and the Law which is also holy, just and good, reflects these attributes in God. Man is created in the image of God. Because he is related to God as a responsible and dependent creature, his moral being must be conformed in heart, mind, and will to the moral perfection of God. This is the nature of righteousness.

In the Decalogue the righteousness and justice of God are set forth. When the law was spiritually understood it awakened in the sinner a deep conviction of sin, an awareness of the great distance between his attempts to keep the law and God's absolute standard. That drove him back to the promises which were set forth in the divine ordinances of the Old Testament. The law therefore had no power to save him, but the law had a vital part to play in his journey to salvation. It revealed to him and to the whole world, the nature of righteousness and justice. Without the knowledge of that, salvation could never be found.

The doctrine of justification deals with the problem of sin, and the law reveals the nature of sin and is used by the Spirit of God to convince the sinner of his sinfulness.

The doctrine of justification also deals with the justice of God. It shows how a God of justice may pardon our sins, how God can be just and the justifier of the man who believes in Jesus. The law sets out the justice of God and establishes his position as Creator, King and Judge over the human race.

Justification also deals with the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to our account. The law shows the nature of this righteousness and sets out in detail those commandments that Christ obeyed in order to achieve perfect righteousness so that it might be imputed to us.

4.5 Evaluation of chapter 2.4

The era of the Law and that of the Prophets are clearly connected. Having given the Law, the Lord required that it be explained and applied to the people and for this purpose He raised up the prophets, until the great final Prophet would appear.

Types and symbols of the Coming One were a feature of the Law. It was the prophet's work to explain these truths in a way that could be understood by the common people and not just by the priests who administered the Law. God also required the prophets to set forth the Promise which had been made in the Protevangelium and which later had been more fully declared to Abraham. God commissioned them, because of the progressive nature of revelation, to proclaim the Messiah who would come. During this era, the revelation of the person and work of the coming Saviour became more definite and specific and the doctrine of justification became more fully expressed.

The Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53 is of great importance to the subject of justification. It deals with the basic elements of substitution and sacrifice. 'Another' becomes our substitute and by suffering obtains forgiveness; therefore the direct and specific mention of justification in this passage (53:11) gives this verse great importance among the writings of the prophets on this subject.

Substitution is a basic element in the doctrine of justification by faith as historically understood. Imputation and substitution are closely allied, both involving a transfer from one person to another. The substitution which is everywhere seen in the Old Testament sacrificial system develops into the doctrine of imputation seen in the New Testament especially in the writings of Paul in such passages as 2 Corinthians 5:19.

To summarise, we may say, that instead of the Levitical offerings for sin presented by the priests, the Servant of the Lord offers himself as the sacrifice for sin. The Levitical offerings pointed to the expiation of sins through the shedding of blood and to the appeasing of God's wrath indicated by the symbolism of the smoke ascending thus indicating a pleasing sacrifice to God. The Servant is described as the Righteous One who justifies many. The righteousness that Abraham received through faith in the promise, Isaiah now indicates that this same righteousness is provided by the Servant of the Lord. This shows the progressive nature of the revelation regarding justification. This is also seen in Jeremiah 23, where we see another transfer, the transfer of righteousness. This is not the first time in the history of revelation that the Messiah is described as being righteous or establishing righteousness, (e.g. Isaiah 53:11. "My righteous servant...") and in this passage he is called "a righteous branch" but this is the first evidence that he will become "*our righteousness.*" This is a notable point in the progress of revelation and the theme of "Messiah – our righteousness" is one that will recur again and again in the ongoing revelation of the doctrine. Indeed it is the seed thought expressed in older Protestant theology by the phrase "the imputation of Christ's righteousness". The point that it makes is that believers are counted righteous before God because he permits them to share Christ's status of acceptance before Him.

We now turn to the Psalms. In Psalm 32 there is the expression of great joy - to the Psalmist forgiveness is real and present. It is not simply a future hope but a present reality. It is also clear that in the Psalmist's experience there is such a status as the Lord not counting his sins against him. Paul asks whether David's blessing of forgiveness was pronounced on the circumcised or on the uncircumcised, but he answers by saying that "righteousness was credited to Abraham (Romans 4:11) before he was circumcised". Does this not suggest strongly that the "blessing" referred to in David's words from Psalm 32 is "the crediting of righteousness" to believers, and not simply the forgiveness of their sins?

Psalm 130 is literally a Song of Ascents. Upward progression is seen in each of the four stanzas as we make the transition through guilt, forgiveness, faith and assurance. "The depths" (v.1) is a term used elsewhere in the Psalms as a picture of near despair. (Ps. 69:1,14) The nature of the Psalmist's trouble emerges in verses 3 and 4. It is not illness or loneliness as in other Psalms, but guilt. However, despite the sorrow produced by guilt, there is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a reality. The Lord is the one longed for by the Psalmist. His metaphor of the watchmen shows the certainty of forgiveness, since morning always comes.

The Psalmist's faith was no doubt strengthened by the sacrificial system with all its symbols and signs, with the emphasis on substitution and atonement, and the revelations of a suffering Messiah who would bear the sins of the people. The revelation received warranted confidence that God was a forgiving God and that atonement having been made. Forgiveness was not only possible, but sure and certain to all in covenant with Yahweh, showing the unity of the doctrine in both testaments.

4.6 Evaluation of chapter 2.5

The kingdom, the King and entering the kingdom – these, and related themes occupy much of Matthew's Gospel. Added to that, there is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in the life and ministry of Jesus. The need of the people of Jesus day, both Pharisees and tax collectors, especially the need for righteousness, was one of Jesus prime concerns as depicted by Matthew.

Matthew shows that the rule of God was considered by the Jews in national terms and linked to the Promised Land, but John declared that the Coming One would change all that, and introduce the Kingdom of God. The privileged position of the Jews as the people of God could no longer be cited as a ground of acceptance for membership of the new kingdom of God. Both John and Jesus proclaimed to their own people the need for repentance from sin and the paramount importance of heart religion.

Jews of the first century were intensely nationalistic and there is abundant evidence in the New Testament that for most first century Jews, acceptance with God depended on works-righteousness. This is clearly demonstrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, which Jesus told in order to address this common problem.

Scribes and Pharisees were constantly boasting in their moral superiority. It is not Jewish ethnic privilege that we see here but self-righteous assurance in a moral superiority gained by works of the law as understood by the tradition of the elders. It is the tax collector who pleads nothing but God's mercy – it is he who is justified.

Self-righteousness of the legalistic kind can also be seen in Paul's reference to the mind-set of his compatriots in Romans 10:1-4 where he describes them as "seeking to establish their own righteousness, and not submitting to the righteousness of God."

Since the Pharisees who were the very best law keepers of the Jewish nation, and the strictest in their interpretation of the law, were unable to enter the kingdom, what hope was there for the rest of the Jewish race? Clearly another kind of perfection is in view. The whole ethos of the Sermon on the Mount helps us to see that the righteousness Jesus speaks of, is in a totally different category; it is not based on merit or human activity. By insisting on such a high standard, i.e. perfection, Jesus is showing that the mind-set of the Pharisees is working in a different direction and cannot possibly achieve this kind of standard. The righteousness needed to enter the kingdom must *exceed* that of the Scribes and Pharisees. What is demanded from the disciple of Jesus, nothing less than perfection. Is this perfection relative? Is it simply the obedient sincere life of the disciple? Does Jesus mean "perfect" (*teleios*) in the absolute sense? That certainly seems to be the meaning in Matthew 5:43-48.

It is clear that Jesus had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. (5:17) Rather, he came to fulfil them. The Law and the Prophets pointed to him, but the Law and the Prophets demanded righteousness. Until now the Law had only been broken, never kept, but this man never breaks it, he keeps it perfectly, he is the Righteous One, he is the eschatological fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. In his life, death and resurrection Jesus completed everything that was required to fulfil all righteousness; he was obedient to the Moral Law, keeping every commandment in both tables, The ceremonial and civil laws he also observed to the full. No man ever obeyed like this man. The climax of his obedience was reached when his blood ...“was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (26:28)

We have looked at what Matthew has to say about the need for righteousness. We have viewed this against the background of the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus. We have also looked at first century Judaism and mentioned the opposing theories. We have tried to establish the understanding of the Pharisees on the subject of Righteousness. We have concluded that the nature of the righteousness spoken of in Matthew is two-fold. While verses like Matthew 5:20 speaks of justifying righteousness,

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:6 and related verses speak of moral and social righteousness.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

However, our main focus has been on the Righteous King who as the Servant of the Lord fulfils all righteousness, and thus becomes our righteousness. Another step is reached in the progressive revelation of the righteousness of justification.

4.7 Evaluation of chapter 2.6

Luke and Acts contain eight out of the eleven occurrences of the expression “forgiveness of sins” in the New Testament. Since forgiveness is a basic element in the doctrine of Justification by Faith, it is necessary to study the occurrence of the term in these two books. We consider two occasions when Jesus explicitly declares someone’s sins to be forgiven. (Luke 5:18-24 and Luke 7:36-50)

In the first passage the central issue is the authority of Jesus; and especially the authority to forgive sins. The healing was in response to the scepticism of the Scribes and Pharisees but the crucial thing is the declaration of forgiveness. Jesus behaviour was revolutionary in first century Judaism. He is not just promising forgiveness in the future, or assuring that God will forgive, but he himself, there and then, is forgiving sins! This is further stressed by the phrase “the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins.” The Pharisees sense this and accuse him of blasphemy.

In Luke and Acts, the terms faith, repentance and conversion, all refer to a resolute change of direction away from sin and reliance upon self, and towards God. This involves dependence upon his power, to forgive sin and enable us to live a new life pleasing to him. We have looked at the two instances where Jesus actually

pronounces sinners forgiven, but there is a whole series of incidents and allusions where, though forgiveness is not actually pronounced, it is implied by the context. Eg:

The conversion of Zacchaeus. (Luke 19)

The calling of Levi. (Luke 5)

The three parables in Luke 15 (The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Son)

Jesus' declarations of forgiveness were not just a declaration that God forgives. They were declarations that God forgives in the Messianic context; that God's forgiveness is Christological. The truth of forgiveness is staked on Christ's unique person and work. He already has authority on earth to forgive sins.

Acts presents us with examples of the preaching of forgiveness, just as Jesus had commanded it after his resurrection. Right at the beginning of Acts, in Peter's Pentecost sermon, as he concludes, he preaches forgiveness. (Acts 2:38-39) The preaching of Peter contains many basic elements already present in the Gospel (of Luke): Baptism, as in John the Baptist's ministry is associated with repentance and forgiveness. What is new here is baptism 'in the name of Jesus Christ,' receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and the outstretching of the gospel promise to 'all who are far off.' John's baptism and Jesus baptism point to the same reality; the Messianic spirit and fire baptism. However, John's baptism points from the angle of promise while Jesus' baptism points from the angle of fulfilment. On that historic day, Peter was presenting to the people not simply an experience of power, but entry to the church, and the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit as the seal that sins were indeed forgiven.

Comparing the treatment of the subject of forgiveness of sins, in both Luke and Acts we come to the conclusion that it is the same forensic reality, that it is conditioned on repentance and faith in both books. However, in Acts it is clearly and demonstrably based on Christ's death and resurrection, and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

With regard to justification, of greater doctrinal significance however, is the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Reference has already been made to this passage in Chapter 2.5.1 The tax-collector acknowledges his sin by his words and deeds. His simple prayer, "*God be merciful to me, a sinner,*" is full of meaning. The verb the "*be merciful*" (*ilastheti*) is often used in the Greek Old Testament (e.g. Lev.4:35; 10:17; 16:30), and bears the meaning of propitiation, of mercy that turns away wrath. The tax-collector as a Jew would know the force of his own words. In desperation he was asking, "Lord, turn your anger away from me because of the sacrifice." It was this man, rather than the Pharisee who went home justified before God. Jesus declares him righteous. He was not made righteous, or shown to be righteous but declared righteous in a forensic sense. This is the same truth that Paul sets forth in Romans 4:5 where he states that "*God justifies the ungodly.*" Indeed, Paul's teaching about righteousness has its basis in Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God.

The verb "justify" repeatedly used by Paul in the epistles is also used in Luke's account of Paul's speech in Pisidian Antioch: (Acts 13:38,39) In this passage Paul links forgiveness to the crucified and risen Jesus. But of great significance is the phrase "*everyone who believes is justified.*" This is the only place outside of Paul's writings and the book of James where faith and justification are linked. This is

Luke's picture of Paul and it is the same picture that we find in Paul's own writings. In this passage, Luke is simply providing a reliable sketch of the Apostle's own teaching, coming from the Apostle's own mouth and in complete agreement with the Apostle's own writings.

4.8 Evaluation of chapter 2.7

Justification is basic to Paul's doctrine of salvation, and, theologically, Paul's writings contain the most highly developed expression of this truth in the New Testament. Paul gives first place in Romans to the 'good news' that God graciously justifies sinners through faith alone in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law.

Romans 1:16-17 contains Paul's thesis in the book of Romans: that the power of God is revealed through the gospel for all who have faith. In the remainder of the letter he argues the case for this thesis and defends it against objections. He begins in 1:18 – 3:20 by arguing that God is righteous and makes no difference between Jew and Gentile in the matters of sin, judgement and salvation. Both are justified in the same way, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and apart from works of the law. Here, we come face to face, for the first time, with this important phrase: "*the righteousness of God.*" (v16) Much discussion has taken place on this phrase throughout history. The righteousness of God has been understood in three main ways and each of these has a bearing on this passage:

Firstly it has been understood as a divine attribute:

Righteousness describes the character of God, just as wisdom and holiness do. He is the Judge of all the earth and he will do right. For example, in Romans 1:18-22

Secondly it has been understood as God's covenant faithfulness.

This is God's saving intervention on behalf of his people. The emphasis is on his divine activity; his righteousness and his salvation are often coupled in Hebrew poetry as in Psalm 89:2. (Recently emphasised by N.T. Wright.)

Thirdly, it has been understood as the gift of justification.

This is rendered 'a righteousness from God' by NIV in 1:17 and 3:21. It is a righteous status which God gives us and which God achieves through the sacrifice of the cross and reveals to us in the Gospel. He contrasts it with 'our own righteousness,' which we mistakenly try to establish as the Jews did in Romans 10:2, rather than submitting to God's righteousness.

Luther found in this text 'a righteousness given to faith' rather than a divine attribute. This passage was of great importance to Luther as he came to an understanding of righteousness as a gift of God. He concluded that Paul is speaking here of a 'passive righteousness', i.e., of a righteousness given to faith.

If 1:16-17 is the theme and thesis of Paul's letter to Romans, then 3:21-26 is the centre and heart of the book. We can scarcely over emphasise these verses. We agree with the assessment that these words may be

"possibly the most important single paragraph ever written."

In the chapters preceding this passage (1:18-3:20) Paul has described the sinful and lost condition of the entire human race. Jew and Gentile alike, stand guilty and inexcusable before God. And in the world, no hope of rescue can be found.

"*But now...*" (3:21) with the arrival of the Messiah and the completion of his saving work, in those very days when Paul lived on earth, a new day had dawned.

“But now, a righteousness from God has been revealed...”

It is a fresh revelation, centring on Christ and his cross, yet the Law and the Prophets have already testified to it.

The Greek word for justify (*dikaioo*) is of great importance in the writings of the New Testament. We must establish that it does not simply mean ‘forgive’. It means to declare righteous, usually in a court of law. A prisoner who is found guilty and is forgiven would not be called ‘justified’ in the ordinary sense of the word. He is justified if he is found not guilty. Forgiveness means to be found guilty, and then, not have the guilt reckoned to you but to be released from it. We should be careful that we do not assume that justification and forgiveness are identical.

In discussing the case of Abraham, (Romans 4) Paul is teaching that God makes no difference between Jew and Gentile in the matter of salvation. Notice Paul’s strategy here. He is showing that his teaching on justification is Scriptural, that is, that it agrees perfectly with the general teaching of the Old Testament. He wants the Jews to grasp that his gospel is no novelty but that it is in line with the revelation that the people of God have always received throughout their history. On the other hand, he also wants Gentiles to grasp the rich spiritual heritage which has become theirs by faith in Jesus. The references, therefore, to Abraham and David show that there is only one way of salvation in all Scripture. It is a mistake to suppose that in the Old Testament, believers were saved by works and in the New Testament, by faith.

Paul is here introducing the idea of imputation to show that Abraham was not justified by works. He is linking justification and imputation and he is placing the idea of imputing or crediting in the framework of wages and debts in a book keeping context. Faith is the means by which an external righteousness is received as credited to us by God, that is, not by *working* but by *trusting* him who justifies the ungodly.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we have one of the most powerful statements in the New Testament on justification, setting before us the fact that an external divine righteousness is imputed to believers. The parallel between the two halves of the verse is of crucial importance - between Christ’s being ‘made sin,’ and our ‘becoming righteous.’ Christ was ‘made sin’ for our sake; our sins were reckoned to Christ. Although he was sinless, he identified himself with our sins and suffered the penalty for our sins. Christ’s righteousness is reckoned to us, even though we remain in nature, sinners. There is no way of avoiding the logical conclusion that those who have faith are justified because Christ’s righteousness is imputed to them.

4.9 Evaluation of chapter 2.8

It has often been asserted that James and Paul are at cross-purposes on the believer’s justification. If this is so then the unity of New Testament Theology is called into question. Does James have the right to stand alongside Paul? For that matter, does Paul have the right to stand alongside James? Does this not mean that we have ‘a canon within a canon’? It is therefore imperative that we examine the teaching of James in order to come to a conclusion about these questions. For practical purposes the vocabulary of justification is confined to the pericope: 2:14-26.

James presents a striking contrast in the persons of Abraham and Rahab. Abraham is a major figure in Scripture while Rahab is scarcely mentioned. Abraham is the head of the Jewish race, Rahab a foreigner. He is highly respected; she is immoral. The contrast could not be more complete. Yet, what James intends to convey here, is not so much contrast as inclusiveness; that from Abraham, right down to Rahab, all believers without exception must give evidence by their works that their faith is genuine.

The passage ends in verse 26 by restating the main point: "*Faith without deeds is dead.*" This is an echo of verses 17 and 20. When James compares faith without works to the body without the spirit, he is making a general analogy. The spirit is the life principle that gives life to the body, without which the body dies. James is therefore suggesting that faith unaccompanied by works, ceases to exist. It becomes an empty statement, and cannot claim to be Biblical faith.

Evaluating the situation we conclude that Paul and James are writing with an understanding of works that is basically similar, that is, anything that is done in obedience to God. The difference is in the context in which they speak of works. Paul's context is the ground or basis of justification before God, therefore he denies any value in pre-conversion works in the matter of justification. James' context is the demonstration of the genuineness of justification, and therefore he demands post-conversion works as the evidence of justifying faith.

4.10 Evaluation of chapter 3.1 (Dogma-historical Perspectives)

In chapter 3.1 we survey the Doctrine of Justification in the Early Church and in the Middle Ages. We are not seeking to prove that all the Fathers taught the doctrine of justification in accordance with Scripture. We are seeking to establish that the doctrine may be traced in the writings of the Fathers even in the darkest times, and that true believers have always rested upon it. It can be shown that the doctrine of justification was not a novelty introduced for the first time by Luther and Calvin, but that it was believed and taught by some writers in every age. It is not true to say that this doctrine was unknown until the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Scholastic Theology attempted to explain the doctrine of the church by the philosophy of the Schools. Its prevailing philosophy was that of Aristotle who, not knowing Christianity, knew nothing of imputed righteousness. The application of his teaching in the church, at the end of the first millennium, led to the substitution of personal righteousness for imputed righteousness.

Everywhere in patristic writings the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, and of eternal life, by faith in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and exalted, is to be found. The early church was nourished by the Gospels and the Epistles and comprised those very churches to whom Paul addressed his reasoned doctrinal arguments. The doctrine of justification in particular was so clearly addressed in apostolic writings that those who followed the apostles had no reason to treat it as an undecided question. Indeed, its absence from first and second century debate is a silent testimony to its acceptance in the church in that period.

It is clear from the writings of Clement, Bernard, Anselm and others, that there were theologians and preachers who, although they themselves adopted teachings and practices that were not Biblical, continued to hold firmly to the Biblical teaching concerning how God puts us right with himself.

It is true that Augustine dealt a great blow to Pelagianism by stressing the absolute sovereignty of God, man's bondage in sin and God's grace to helpless sinners. He insisted that justification is the result of God's grace and not of man's works. However, he failed to clarify justification as Luther later did.

Augustine interpreted the verb "to justify" in his Latin Bible as "to make righteous". This led him to the view that when God justifies us he "makes" us inwardly righteous. This was a great mistake as it led to the doctrines of justification and sanctification becoming confused. In the mediaeval period justification took on this meaning ('to be made righteous') and it was regarded as involving inner transformation of the individual. This became, and continues to be, the position of the Roman Catholic Church.

However, in defence of Augustine it may be said that his attention was chiefly directed towards repudiating the errors of Pelagius. It is clear that he understood the grace of God and the work of Christ as biblically set forth and that he was the means of helping later Reformers to a Biblical understanding of these great doctrines. His errors in the area of justification were not so much theological as philological. His understanding of the basis and means of right standing with God was the same as that of Luther or Calvin. He taught the free grace of God in opposition to the free will of man, as the source and spring of the sinner's whole salvation, which comprised both the remission of his sins and the renovation of his nature.

We have seen from his writings that Anselm's views on the Atonement and Justification were thoroughly in line with those of the Reformers.

Bernard of Clairvaux clearly believed that God 'justifies the ungodly' and that this justification is received 'by faith alone'. No one can 'presume on a sufficiency for salvation' from his own wisdom, righteousness or holiness. 'Thy Passion is the last refuge, the alone remedy.'... 'That the satisfaction made by One should be imputed to all...' These, and other words, reveal a mind that is in agreement with the basic elements of justification as understood by the faithful throughout the ages.

Our examination of the writings of the Fathers proves that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith was not something invented by Luther, but that it was believed and taught by some of the greatest theologians before the era of the Reformation.

4.11 Evaluation of chapter 3.2

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the rise of humanism brought a new awareness of human individuality. In turn, this led to a new interest in how human beings as individuals could enter into a relationship with God. However, the prevalence of many great abuses in the Roman Church was the main factor that led to the opening up of general discussion and enquiry on the subject of the sinner's pardon and acceptance with God.

The doctrines emerging from Scholasticism were to result in the substitution of the inherent righteousness of man, for the imputed righteousness of Christ, as the basis of the sinner's acceptance before God. The doctrine of Merit was the foundation of the many abuses, such as the sale of Indulgences, that eventually led to the confrontation between Luther and the Church authorities and in due course to the re-discovery of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

The controversy has often been represented as merely a practical abuse, as though there were no serious difference in doctrine between the two parties. However, it was more than a practical abuse; it was the visible face of a whole system of false doctrine that undermined the Scriptural basis of salvation.

Concerning the nature of Justification, we have seen that the Church brought to the debate, at this time, an understanding of the subject that was far from Biblical. There was a confusion of the meanings of justification and sanctification. They used the term justification to speak of the whole of that great change which happens in the soul of the sinner at the time of his conversion, including the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of his nature. Luther did not arrive at a full understanding of justification immediately. In fact, his thinking on the doctrine evolved over a period. Melancthon and Calvin used the word 'justification' only to refer to the event of being declared righteous, which was also Luther's final position. They regarded the process of internal renewal i.e. 'sanctification' or 'regeneration,' as being theologically distinct. In their discussion on the nature of justification, the Reformers concluded that justification was a legal declaration made by God that believing sinners were righteous in his sight. They viewed it as a pronouncement concerning their right standing with God. They understood the verb 'to justify' to mean 'to declare righteous' and not 'to make righteous' as Augustine and the Schoolmen supposed. Calvin.

Concerning the nature of justifying righteousness, Luther's teaching on "the alien righteousness of Christ" set forth a righteousness that was outside of the sinner; a righteousness that was not internal but that was imputed rather than imparted. Those who opposed Luther and the Reformation argued, following Augustine's teaching, that sinners were justified on the basis of an internal righteousness, infused or implanted within their persons by God. This righteousness was itself given as an act of grace; it was not something merited. But, they argued, there had to be something within individuals that could allow God to justify them. But Luther dismissed the idea of an internal righteousness having any part in justification. Trent refused to give up the Augustinian idea of an internal righteousness as the basis of justification.

The Reformers insisted that the nature of justifying righteousness was not to be found in any inherent personal righteousness infused into the sinner, but in the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. They argued on Scriptural grounds, that we are justified by faith alone, (Galatians 3:15) simply because faith receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, trusting in his righteousness as the ground of acceptance. They recognised that historical faith exists, but they argued that there is a faith, distinguished from it in Scripture, which immediately secures the pardon of the sinner and his acceptance with God: a faith that involves the consent of mind, heart, and will, which actually receives Christ and all his benefits, looking only to his

righteousness as its ground and plea. It unites the sinner to Christ and makes him a partaker of his righteousness, once and for ever.

They never denied that this faith works by love, and produces all the fruits of the Spirit, but its justifying power, they attributed, not to its possession of love, but to its possession of the gift of Christ and his righteousness.

Concerning the assurance of salvation, the Reformers believed that salvation was grounded upon the faithfulness of God. One could rest assured in one's salvation. But this does not mean that the believer never experienced doubt.

Because the Reformers looked to the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, they had assurance that they were accepted with God. They were relying entirely on the grace of God in Christ. The re-discovery of the doctrine of 'Assurance of Grace and Salvation' began to be noticed in the lives, and deaths of believers. It was even noticed in 'wills' made by those preparing to die.

The same battles that raged in Europe, were raging in England, for the hearts and minds of the faithful. It is striking to see the degree of agreement on the doctrine of justification in all quarters. Examining the writings of two English reformers; William Tyndale and Thomas Latimer we discover unanimity with the continental Reformers.

Justification was the great fundamental distinguishing doctrine of the Reformation and was regarded in this way by all the Reformers. Their main objection to the Roman church was that she had corrupted the Scripture on this subject in a way that put the souls of men in danger. There was greater harmony among the Reformers on the subject of justification than on any other subject. In fact it would not be an overstatement to say, that the rescue and rediscovery of this doctrine was the most important service which, under God, the Reformers rendered to the church, since the subject bears immediately and directly upon men's relationship with God and their everlasting destiny.

4.12 Evaluation of chapter 3.3

Today many theologians argue that the Reformers made justification too pivotal in the definition of salvation and that the controversy with Rome gave the Reformed Church too narrow a view of the gospel. Recently there has been much re-interpretation of the Reformation debate on justification focusing on such questions as: Did the Reformation major in a minor? Was the great debate on justification all about a huge misunderstanding? Has there been sufficient development in the history of the doctrine of justification over the past 400 years to move away from the traditional Reformed position?

Historically, since the Council of Trent, a sharp difference in the doctrine of justification was seen by both sides to be at the centre of the conflict. The distance between both sides was perceived, *by both*, as a great gulf. This is how all the Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries saw it. In the Reformed confessions, there is remarkable harmony on justification.

Concerning the development of Catholic theology, after the Second World War, a new assessment of the Reformers was carried out by a number of Catholic

theologians. No longer were the Reformers seen as evil men but as sincerely trying to reform the church and listen to Scripture. The whole climate within the new Roman Catholic theology itself changed. Was Luther right or wrong when he appealed to the New Testament? Today, many Roman Catholic scholars like Kertlege and Kung admit that Paul uses the term 'to justify' in a declarative, forensic sense and that Luther's interpretation of Paul's doctrine of justification was correct.

A joint Commission of American Lutherans and Roman Catholics produced an important 24,000 word statement under the title *Justification by Faith* in 1983. But the most recent, and indeed, most important statement to date is "The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", an official doctrinal statement jointly authored by representatives of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation that was signed on 31st October 1999 as a joint confessional agreement.

In the declaration there has been an opening up of understanding between Lutherans and Catholics. However, it is not clear that the differences in emphasis set out in the document are simply differences in emphasis. Skilful language has been used to accommodate the differences, but it is clear that at a number of points, such as forensic justification, and the blurring of distinctions between justification and regeneration, material differences remain which cannot be explained in terms of differing emphases. However, there are clear signs of a Catholic willingness to re-examine traditional teaching in the light of Scripture and history and this is to be welcomed.

In the Reformed constituency, there have been some serious developments in the past 40 years in the doctrine of justification. Until then, it had long been taken for granted, at least since the Reformation, that the historic reformed view on justification was generally accepted. However, in recent times, this has been seriously challenged. Some modern scholars believe that all that have gone before them have, in various ways misread the New Testament concerning the whole issue of justification. They claim that neither the Protestant nor the Catholic understanding is fair to the Apostle Paul's teaching on the subject.

Among the revisionists is K. Stendahl, who wrote an article in the Harvard Theological Review in 1966 entitled 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West'. This was later incorporated in his book *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*. He held that the traditional understanding of Paul in general and of Romans in particular, ie. that their focus is on justification by faith, is wrong. In his view, this mistake is due to the western church's morbid conscience, and especially to the moral struggles of Augustine and Luther. It was his view that the church had read this back into Paul.

N.T. Wright is the most recent and the most prolific revisionist writer on justification. He has taught at Oxford and Cambridge universities and has published many books and papers on justification and related subjects. His interpretation of the Pauline texts is probably the strongest challenge to the traditional Protestant approach that has yet appeared. Since it comes from one who treats Scripture seriously and comes from the Evangelical and Reformed constituency, his views must be given serious consideration. He follows E.P.Sanders in his understanding of Palestinian Judaism. In the area of the law, Wright presents much that is helpful and accurate. It is true that

the law was meant to keep Israel apart. God intended that it should separate Israel from the rest of the nations. But it did not shut out the Gentiles completely in the way that Wright seems to imply. Not only do we find Gentiles joining God's covenant people in Old Testament times, such as Rahab and Ruth, but Gentiles were also converting to Judaism in the Inter-Testamental period. Josephus, in *Contra Apionem* warmly welcomes Gentiles wishing to join the house of Moses.

Wright and Dunn limit the phrase 'the works of the law' (NIV 'observing the law') to certain kinds of works such as food laws, circumcision, and the Sabbath. There is no justification for this narrowing of the meaning to those aspects of law that separate Jews and Gentiles. In the Early Church, the same view was advocated by Pelagius. 'Works' are good actions and 'works of the law' are simply what we might call 'good works' defined in Jewish terms. Paul's point is that no good works, not even the observing of the Mosaic Law can put a person right with God. He is insisting that no one can be justified by any kind of law work or human activity, because no one can perform perfect obedience. If the Jews, with the best law in the world cannot achieve justification through it, then no one can.

Representative of those who have in general, maintained the traditional Reformed position is A.E. McGrath who distinguishes between the Bible's use of justification and what it came to mean for the mediaeval church and the Council of Trent. In general, McGrath supports the traditional reformed position, but he moves away from it when he attempts to broaden the meaning of the term, describing justification as a transforming experience.

John Piper deals with the question: 'Are Christians merely forgiven, or does God credit them with the righteousness of Christ?' This is a central question today when there are many challenges to the historic understanding of justification. Piper carefully exegetes the biblical texts especially in Romans, Galatians and Corinthians, bearing on the subject showing that the righteousness imputed to us in justification is external and does not consist of our faith. He also shows clearly that Paul thinks of justification in terms of 'imputing' or 'crediting' in a book-keeping sense.

Revisionists deny that 'the righteousness of Christ' is a Pauline expression. But the apostle Paul does refer to Christ as 'our righteousness' in 1 Corinthians 1:30 and justification is described in Romans 4:1-13 and 5:17-19 as both the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness. To deny this truth leaves the door open to moralistic self-righteousness.

According to N.T. Wright we must resist the temptation to view justification as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Other doctrines such as the Trinity he suggests might be of greater importance. However, since the doctrine of justification by faith alone concerns the matter of our eternal salvation, if it is not clearly and definitively presented, how can there be any hope of salvation?

We are convinced, with Calvin, (1958:137) that justification:

"is the main hinge on which religion turns so that we devote the greater attention and care to it...If the purity of this doctrine is in any way impaired the church has received a deadly wound and is brought to the very brink of destruction."

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion re. Section 2 (Biblical Data)

We conclude that the doctrine of Justification by Faith is not explicitly taught in Genesis 3:15, yet this verse has a bearing on the subject. It stands at the beginning of the doctrine of Salvation in Scripture and is related to everything that follows. The basic elements are: Grace, Promise, The Representative Principle, Deliverance, Victory, (Salvation) and Suffering. These are related to the basic elements of justification. For hundreds of years this Scripture (Genesis 3:15) constituted “the Gospel”. It was the only light that was available to the first believers. We must therefore conclude that, in these words, in some manner, Christ was presented, and it was possible through these words for people to believe in Him.

Since the institution of Sacrifice brought to the attention of the worshipper certain central ideas in God’s revelation to man, such as substitution, imputation, and propitiation, we conclude that these basic elements in the doctrine of justification will yet be more fully developed in Scripture.

Faith was the principle that governed the heart of Abel. He offered with a consciousness of God’s will and God’s glory and in dependence on the promise of a Saviour (Genesis 3:15). We conclude that this faith was not a general belief in God but that it was in fact ‘justifying faith’. He had received the promise of the Saviour and he believed the Word of God given to his parents. In gratitude he offered to God that which God required and received assurance that he was accepted.

Abraham had done many righteous works especially in obedience to the call of God. It is evident that it was not for these works that God accepted him. God spoke to him giving him a promise - a Gospel promise. Abraham believed in the character of the God who had revealed Himself to him. The word he had received – that the blessing of the world would come through his seed - he accepted as the Word of God. He took God at His Word – he believed. The response of God was to credit righteousness to Abraham’s account and to accept him as perfectly righteous in his sight.

We conclude that believers were justified under the Law, not by obedience to the Law, but by fleeing from the threats of the Law to the refuge of faith in the Promise given to Abraham. This is how they became children of Abraham and heirs with him of the same promise.

It is evident that the offerings pointed to the expiation of sins through the shedding of blood and to the appeasing of God’s wrath indicated by the symbolism of the smoke ascending thus indicating a pleasing sacrifice to God. The Servant (Isaiah 53) is described as the Righteous One who justifies many. The righteousness that Abraham received through faith in the promise, Isaiah now indicates that this same righteousness is provided by the Servant of the Lord. This shows the progressive nature of the revelation regarding justification. In Jeremiah 23, we see another transfer, the transfer of righteousness. The Messiah is described as being righteous or establishing righteousness, as in Isaiah 53:11. “My righteous servant...” and in this passage he is called “a righteous branch”. He will become “*our righteousness.*” This

is a notable point in the progress of revelation and the theme of “Messiah – our righteousness” will recur again and again in the ongoing revelation of the doctrine. Indeed it is expressed in older Protestant theology by the phrase “the imputation of Christ’s righteousness”. We conclude that believers are counted righteous before God because he permits them to share Christ’s status of acceptance before Him.

Justification deals with the problem of sin, and the Law reveals the nature of sin and is used by the Spirit of God to convince the sinner of his sinfulness.

Justification also deals with the justice of God. It shows how a God of justice may pardon our sins, how God can be just and the justifier of the man who believes in Jesus. The Law sets out the justice of God and establishes his position as Creator, King and Judge over the human race.

Justification also deals with the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to our account. The Law shows the nature of this righteousness and sets out in detail those commandments that Christ obeyed in order to achieve perfect righteousness so that it might be imputed to us.

From Psalms 32 and 130 we conclude that the Psalmist observed the sacrificial system with all its symbols and signs, with the emphasis on substitution and atonement, and the revelations of a suffering Messiah who would bear the sins of the people. The revelation received warranted confidence that God was a forgiving God and that atonement having been made forgiveness was not only possible, but sure and certain to all in covenant with Yahweh, showing the unity of the doctrine in both testaments.

From our studies in Matthew we conclude that Jesus had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, rather, he came to fulfil them. The Law and the Prophets pointed to him, but the Law and the Prophets demanded righteousness. Until now the Law had only been broken, never kept, but this man never breaks it, he keeps it perfectly, he is the Righteous One, he is the eschatological fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. In his life, death and resurrection Jesus completed everything that was required to fulfil all righteousness; he was obedient to the Moral Law, keeping every commandment in both tables, The ceremonial and civil laws he also observed to the full, no man ever obeyed like this man. The climax of his obedience was reached when his blood ...“was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (26:28)

We have looked at what Matthew has to say about the need for righteousness. We have viewed this against the background of the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus. We have also looked at first century Judaism and mentioned the opposing theories. We have tried to establish the understanding of the Pharisees on the subject of Righteousness. We conclude that Jesus fulfils all righteousness, and thus becomes our righteousness. Another step is reached in the progressive revelation of the righteousness of justification.

Regarding the forgiveness of sins discussed in Luke and Acts we conclude that Jesus’ declarations of forgiveness were not just a declaration that God forgives. They were declarations that God forgives in the Messianic context; that God’s forgiveness is

Christological. The truth of forgiveness is staked on Christ's unique person and work. He already has authority on earth to forgive sins.

Comparing the treatment of the subject of forgiveness of sins, in both Luke and Acts we come to the conclusion that it is the same forensic reality; that it is conditioned on repentance and faith in both books. However, in Acts it is clearly and demonstrably based on Christ's death and resurrection, and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

As far as justification is concerned, of greater doctrinal significance however, is the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The tax collector acknowledges his sin by his words and deeds. His simple prayer, "*God be merciful to me, a sinner,*" is full of meaning. The verb the "*be merciful*" (*ilastheti*) is often used in the Greek Old Testament, and bears the meaning of propitiation, of mercy that turns away wrath. The tax collector as a Jew would know the force of his own words. In desperation he was asking, "Lord, turn your anger away from me because of the sacrifice." It was this man, rather than the Pharisee who went home justified before God. Jesus declares him righteous. He was not made righteous, or shown to be righteous but declared righteous in a forensic sense. This is the same truth that Paul sets forth in Romans 4:5 where he states that "*God justifies the ungodly.*" Indeed, Paul's teaching about righteousness has its basis in Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God. We conclude that the teaching of Luke and Paul is identical in this respect.

The verb "justify" which is repeatedly used by Paul in the epistles is also used in Luke's account of Paul's speech in Pisidian Antioch: (Acts 13:38,39) In this passage Paul links forgiveness to the crucified and risen Jesus. But of great significance is the phrase "*everyone who believes is justified.*" This is the only place outside of Paul's writings and the book of James where faith and justification are linked. This is Luke's picture of Paul and it is the same picture that we find in Paul's own writings. In this passage, we conclude that Luke is simply providing a reliable sketch of the Apostle's teaching in complete agreement with the Apostle's own writings.

Turning to the writings of Paul we conclude that justification is basic to Paul's doctrine of salvation, and, theologically, Paul's writings contain the most highly developed expression of this truth in the New Testament. Paul gives first place in Romans to the 'good news' that God graciously justifies sinners through faith alone in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law. Romans 1:16-17 contains Paul's thesis in the book of Romans: that the power of God is revealed through the gospel for all who have faith. In the remainder of the letter he argues the case for this thesis and defends it against objections. He begins in 1:18 -3:20 by arguing that God is righteous and makes no difference between Jew and Gentile in the matters of sin, judgement and salvation. Both are justified in the same way, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and apart from works of the law.

Of great importance in the writings of the New Testament is the Greek word for justify (*dikaioo*). We establish that it does not simply mean 'forgive'. We conclude that it means to declare righteous, usually in a court of law. A prisoner who is found guilty and is forgiven would not be called 'justified' in the ordinary sense of the word. He is justified if he is found not guilty. Forgiveness means to be found guilty, and then, not have the guilt reckoned to you but let go. We conclude that justification and forgiveness are not identical.

Regarding Romans 4&5 we conclude that Paul is showing that his teaching on justification is Scriptural, that is, that it agrees perfectly with the general teaching of the Old Testament. He wants the Jews to grasp that his gospel is no novelty but that it is in line with the revelation that the people of God have always received throughout their history. On the other hand, he also wants Gentiles to grasp the rich spiritual heritage which has become theirs by faith in Jesus. The references, therefore, to Abraham and David show that there is only one way of salvation in all Scripture.

Regarding James' references to justification, we conclude that Paul and James are writing with an understanding of works that is basically similar. They regard work as anything that is done in obedience to God. The difference is in the context in which they speak of works. Paul's context is the ground or basis of justification before God, therefore he denies any value in pre-conversion works in the matter of justification, but James' context is the demonstration of the genuineness of justification, therefore he demands post-conversion works as the evidence of justifying faith. We conclude that there is no basic conflict between Paul and James.

5.2 Conclusion re. Section 3 (Dogma-historical Perspectives)

The Gospels and the Epistles nourished the early church which was made up of those very churches to whom Paul addressed his reasoned doctrinal arguments. The doctrine of justification in particular was so clearly addressed in apostolic writings that those who followed the apostles had no reason to treat it as an undecided question. Indeed, its absence from first and second century debate is a silent testimony to its acceptance in the church in that period.

We conclude from the writings of Clement, Bernard, Anselm and others, that there were theologians and preachers who, although they themselves adopted teachings and practices that were not biblical, continued to hold firmly to the Biblical teaching on justification. Our examination of the writings of the Fathers proves that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith was not something invented by Luther, but that it was believed and taught by some of the greatest theologians before the era of the Reformation.

The Reformers argued that the nature of justifying righteousness was not to be found in any inherent personal righteousness infused into the sinner, but in the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. They argued on scriptural grounds, that we are justified by faith alone, simply because faith receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, trusting in his righteousness as the ground of acceptance. They recognised that historical faith exists, but they argued that there is a faith, distinguished from it in scripture, which immediately secures the pardon of the sinner and his acceptance with God: a faith that involves the consent of mind, heart, and will, which actually receives Christ and all his benefits, looking only to his righteousness as its ground and plea. It unites the sinner to Christ and makes him a partaker of his righteousness, once and for ever.

The Reformers never denied that this faith works by love, and produces all the fruits of the Spirit, but its justifying power, they attributed, not to its possession of love, but to its possession of the gift of Christ and his righteousness.

The Reformers believed that the assurance of salvation was grounded upon the faithfulness of God. One could rest assured in one's salvation. But this does not mean that the believer never experienced doubt. Because the Reformers looked to the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, they had assurance that they were accepted with God. They were relying entirely on the grace of God in Christ. The re-discovery of the doctrine of 'Assurance of Grace and Salvation' began to be noticed in the lives, and deaths of believers.

It is striking to see the degree of agreement on the doctrine of justification internationally. Examining the writings of two English reformers; William Tyndale and Thomas Latimer we discover unanimity with the continental Reformers.

Justification became the distinguishing doctrine of the Reformation and was regarded in this way by all the Reformers. Their main objection to the Roman church was that she had corrupted the scripture on this subject in a way that put the souls of men in danger. There was greater harmony among the Reformers on the subject of justification than on any other subject. We conclude that the rescue and rediscovery of this doctrine was the most important service which, under God, the Reformers rendered to the church, since the subject bears immediately and directly upon men's relationship with God and their everlasting destiny.

Our conclusions regarding Modern Trends are as follows:

Regarding "The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", an official doctrinal statement jointly authored by representatives of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation that was signed on 31st October 1999...

There has been an opening up of understanding between Lutherans and Catholics. However, it is not clear that the differences in emphasis on the doctrine of justification set out in the document are simply differences in emphasis. It is clear that at a number of points, such as forensic justification, and the blurring of distinctions between justification and regeneration, material differences remain which cannot be explained in terms of differing emphases. But there are clear signs of a Catholic willingness to re-examine traditional teaching in the light of Scripture and history and this is to be welcomed.

Reaching a conclusion on the views of N.T. Wright and other revisionist writers on justification has not been easy. His interpretation of the Pauline texts is probably the strongest challenge to the traditional Protestant approach that has yet appeared. Since it comes from one who treats Scripture seriously and comes from the Evangelical and Reformed constituency, his views must be given serious consideration.

He follows E.P. Sanders in his understanding of Palestinian Judaism. In the area of the law, Wright presents much that is helpful and accurate. It is true that the law was meant to keep Israel apart. God intended that it should separate Israel from the rest of the nations. But it did not shut out the Gentiles completely in the way that Wright seems to imply. Not only do we find Gentiles entering God's covenant people in Old Testament times, such as Rahab and Ruth, but Gentiles were also converting to Judaism in the Inter-Testamental period. Josephus, in *Contra Apionem* warmly welcomes Gentiles wishing to join the house of Moses.

Revisionists deny that 'the righteousness of Christ' is a Pauline expression. But the apostle Paul does refer to Christ as 'our righteousness' in 1 Corinthians 1:30 and justification is described in Romans 4:1-13 and 5:17-19 as both the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness. To deny this truth leaves the door open to moralistic self-righteousness.

The arguments for widening the meaning of justification to include regeneration and sanctification are unconvincing. They lead back to the confusion that Augustine's definition produced and are actually dangerous to gospel truth. We have no right to impose our own meanings on to the term in order to make it relevant. Biblical terms are not like pieces of plastic, that can be made to bend at will, to suit a particular need. The argument that a term like justification should be allowed to evolve in a similar way to the word 'atonement' is not sound. 'Justification', unlike the word 'atonement', has already had a long history of fierce debate in the church over its precise meaning. A biblical 'doctrine' of justification exists, not merely a biblical 'concept'.

N.T. Wright refuses to view justification as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Other doctrines such as the Trinity he suggests might be of greater importance. However, since the doctrine of justification by faith bears directly on the matter of our eternal salvation, if it is not clearly and definitively presented, how can there be any hope of salvation?

We conclude with Calvin, (1958:137) that justification:

"is the main hinge on which religion turns so that we devote the greater attention and care to it...If the purity of this doctrine is in any way impaired the church has received a deadly wound and is brought to the very brink of destruction."

It is the final conclusion of this study that the doctrine of justification by faith is one in Scripture, unchanging throughout. It is nevertheless progressively revealed from beginning to end of Scripture history. Yet the same basic elements are to be found in all parts of Scripture. This unified doctrine is reflected in the teaching of the Christian church throughout her history.

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