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0521615992 - The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry

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INTRODUCTION

Of the many problems connected with Paul's use of *δικαιόω* and its cognates, few, unfortunately, can be regarded as solved. This study is limited to one problem, namely how far the words are used purely relationally (whether the relation is understood forensically or not), and how far ethically. Two main questions are obvious. First, does *δικαιόω* mean 'declare righteous' or 'make righteous'? Second, does the noun *δικαιοσύνη* refer to a relationship, or a way of living, or both?

The heart of the present study is the contention that the verb 'justify' is used relationally, often with the forensic meaning 'acquit', but that the noun, and the adjective *δίκαιος*, have behavioural meanings, and that in Paul's thought Christians are both justified by faith (i.e. restored to fellowship, acquitted), and also righteous by faith (i.e. leading a new life in Christ). These two are not identical, yet they are complementary and inseparable. This view, which will be amplified and supported with evidence in what follows, is at odds with the usual Protestant understanding, and was certainly not foreseen when the study was begun. Nevertheless it appears to be demanded by the linguistic and exegetical data which will be presented.

THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

The quantity of literature on the subject is immense,¹ and here we attempt only to summarise the various positions which are held, without trying to give an adequate account of the total contribution to research made by the scholars concerned. Unfortunately there is little sign of an emerging consensus.

The Meaning of δικαιόω

Is the Christian made righteous by Christ, and if so what does 'righteous' mean? Or is he declared righteous, i.e. acquitted or

¹ See the bibliography in H. Küng, *Justification*, E.Tr. (London, 1966); the survey of nineteenth-century discussion in A. Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters*, E.Tr. (London, 1912), 10–19; also P. Stuhlmacher, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit bei Paulus* (Göttingen, 1965), 11–70, though he is not adequate for other than German Protestant literature.

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brought into a right relationship? The traditional Roman Catholic view is that of the Council of Trent, that justification is both an acquittal and a making righteous in the full ethical sense, thus embracing both relational and behavioural renewal. It means the sinner's forgiveness *and* his moral regeneration, i.e. his sanctification.¹ We may speak of the 'increase' of this justification because it is a process as well as an act.² Although expressed and defended in various ways, essentially this view is held by most Catholic biblical scholars.³ The stress may tend to be placed on the effective rather than the declaratory aspect, because the final declaration is still awaited:

Clearly, God considers just those whom he has rendered just, and implicitly declares them to be so. But he does not, strictly speaking, pronounce a judgment. The judgment is reserved for the day of the appearance before the judgment seat of Christ... Then it is that God will finally declare just those who are just, having remained faithful to the end.⁴

Meanwhile, justification is the communication of new life in Christ, the radical putting-away of the life of sin, and the inner transformation of the believer, understood to include God's forgiveness. It is forensic, but not merely forensic, and has to do with 'real' rather than 'imputed' righteousness.⁵ Some Protestant and Anglican scholars have maintained the same position, including E. J. Goodspeed who argues that the plain meaning of the Greek verb is 'make upright', and that because of the new being in Christ, the believer really is righteous. When God declares him so, the declaration fits the facts.⁶ It has been claimed

¹ Session vi, vii; 799 in H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum* (Freiburg, 1922).

² Session vi, Canon 24 (Denzinger, 834).

³ E.g. M. J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul: Épître aux Romains* (Paris, 1931), especially 119–33; F. Amiot, *The Key Concepts of St Paul*, E.Tr. (Freiburg, 1962), 120–5; O. Kuss, *Der Römerbrief* (Regensburg, 1957), 121–31.

⁴ Amiot, *Key Concepts*, 124.

⁵ Thus K. Kertelge, 'Rechtfertigung' bei Paulus (Münster, 1967), 115–20.

⁶ 'Some Greek Notes: III Justification', *JBL*, 73 (1954), 86–91; also *Problems of New Testament Translation* (Chicago, 1945), 143–6. He had many predecessors, e.g. M. R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1902), 123–8.

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that even Luther allowed for a more than declaratory justification.¹

R. Bultmann, followed by C. K. Barrett, holds that the verb does mean 'make righteous' because it regularly renders the Hebrew *hiph'il* and therefore must be causative. Yet he takes 'righteous' to mean simply 'in a right relationship' rather than 'ethically upright', and the resulting position is thus very similar to the usual Protestant one.² We shall have to enquire whether either verb or adjective can have the meaning suggested.

The main-line Catholic view rests upon a number of supports which are usually presented so as to be cumulative, and not alternative. First, though now rarely, *δικαίωω* is held to mean 'make righteous' in an ethical sense.³ Secondly, and more commonly, stress is laid on passages where the noun rather than the verb occurs, passages which do very probably refer to the new life of Christians, e.g. 1 Cor. 1. 30, 2 Cor. 5. 21, so that the verb is interpreted by the noun.⁴ We shall see that the Protestant tendency is to do the reverse. Thirdly, and somewhat inferentially, God's word in justification is understood to be a creative word: to say God declares someone righteous is to say that he makes him righteous.⁵ Rather similarly, K. Kertelge sees the declaration as first establishing a new relation, and consequently a new being – the latter being implied in the former.⁶ Fourthly, just as forgiveness is particularly connected with the Cross, so

¹ G. W. Bromiley, 'The Doctrine of Justification in Luther', *EQ*, 24 (1952), 91–100. On the debate about this, E. G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London, 1953), 177–83, 221, 254.

² R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols., London, 1952 and 1955), 1, 271ff; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Black's N.T. Commentaries (London, 1957), 75f.

³ E.g. Amiot, *Key Concepts*, 120–5, Goodspeed, 'Greek Notes', 86–91. The question is whether an *-όω* verb must be causative. However, analogies with other verbs are less important than usage in LXX etc. – not what *ought* to occur but what *does* occur. Cf. below, p. 48.

⁴ See L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of St Paul*, E.Tr. (2nd edn, New York and Edinburgh, 1959) in his stress on the communication of Christ's justice to men, Book 2, Ch. 2, especially on Rom. 5; also *The Christian and the Theology of St Paul*, E.Tr. (London, 1967), 392, where he regards the realistic meaning of *δικαιοσύνη* as governing *δικαιοῦν* in Rom. 3. 24.

⁵ Thus J. H. Newman, *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (4th edn, London, 1885), 78–84; Cerfaux, *The Christian*, 392, 422f.

⁶ 'Rechtfertigung', 115f, 120, 158f, 282.

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justification is particularly connected with Christ's resurrection, which means new life in every sense.¹ Fifthly, and most commonly, when one is justified one is therefore in Christ, and so a new creature. This is represented by baptism, which is closely linked with justification, and the whole baptism–union-with-Christ circle of ideas is used to show that more than status is involved.² Thus the believer's justice (or righteousness) and his justification are identical, and equivalent to sanctification.³

The relation of this justification to the Judgment is variously conceived. F. Amiot sees the sentence as pronounced only at the Judgment.⁴ Kertelge sees it as a verdict which the believer hears now, but which awaits its final confirmation at the Judgment, whereas S. Lyonnet suggests a complete dissociation of justification from judgment which have, he argues, nothing to do with one another.⁵

In general it may be objected against the usual Catholic exegesis that it confuses the verb and the noun, and that by transferring quite correct observations from noun passages to verb passages, it renders itself open to attack.⁶ On the other hand, traditional Protestant exegesis starts by emphasising that the verb can be only declaratory and that justification is therefore a matter of status only. We shall try to show that on linguistic grounds this is basically correct. There is nevertheless variety in how it is understood. Some take it forensically, to mean 'acquit' at the tribunal of God.⁷ Others see the forensic dress as subsidiary and relatively unimportant; what matters is that 'justify' means 'to restore to right relationship';⁸ similarly T. W.

¹ Cerfaux, *Christ*, 140–2.

² Cerfaux, *Christ*, 220–44; especially on baptism as modifying a strictly juridical approach, R. Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St Paul*, E.Tr. (Oxford, 1964), 122ff.

³ Cerfaux, *Christ*, 244, 311f; F. Prat, *The Theology of Saint Paul*, E.Tr. (London, 1926–7), I, 171f.

⁴ *Key Concepts*, 124.

⁵ Kertelge, 'Rechtifertigung', 158f; S. Lyonnet, 'Justification, Jugement, Rédemption, principalement dans l'épître aux Romains', *Recherches Bibliques*, v (1960), 166–84.

⁶ Thus Prat, *Saint Paul*, 168–81; Lagrange, *Romains*, 119–41.

⁷ E.g. L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London, 1955), especially 234, 259–63.

⁸ E.g. D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St Paul* (Oxford, 1964), 159ff; E. K. Lee, *A Study in Romans* (London, 1962), 90.

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Manson regards the vocabulary as more regal than legal, with the verb meaning ‘pronounce an amnesty’ rather than ‘acquit’ (juridically).¹ Some prefer to speak simply in soteriological terms: ‘justification’ is another word for salvation, normally understood relationally.² Commonly it is said that in the end justification amounts to free unmerited forgiveness, the acceptance of the unacceptable.³ These are not really alternatives, of course, but different ways of approaching the same fact that in justification Christ receives sinful men. There are also now some Roman Catholic scholars who express remarkably similar views, the most notable of whom is Hans Küng, who shows that on linguistic grounds the verb must be declaratory. The theologian may argue that justification is more than this, and be right in so arguing, but he must recognise that Paul does not include this ‘more’ in his use of the verb.⁴ Much earlier, E. Tobac had maintained the view that justification is declaratory, but subsequent to God’s gift of righteousness to those who are united to Christ, so that it is an acknowledgement of what exists. Being made righteous and being acknowledged righteous are logically distinct, but in practice simultaneous. This is not unlike the position of V. Taylor, who argues that God declares man righteous because man is righteous *in Christ*, though at the time of the declaration the righteousness is a matter of will and intention rather than achievement.⁵

A common criticism of the main-line Protestant view is that there is no road from it to ethics, that it represents a cul-de-sac.⁶ Equally commonly this criticism has been answered in terms

¹ *On Paul and John*, ed. M. Black (London, 1963), 54–6, 122.

² Thus C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans*, MNTC (London, 1932), 51f; N. H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London, 1944), 168–73.

³ E.g. H. Cremer, *Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhange ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh, 1899), 448; Barrett, *Romans*, 75f.

⁴ *Justification*, 200–4, though he also stresses the creativeness of God’s word.

⁵ E. Tobac, *Le Problème de la Justification dans St Paul* (2nd edn, Louvain, 1941), especially 192–209; V. Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (London, 1941), 1–8, 30–59. Much of Taylor’s argument rests on a rejection of ‘fictional’ justification, and on a view of forgiveness as less than full restoration to fellowship.

⁶ Thus A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, E.Tr. (London, 1931), 225f; H. J. Schoeps, *Paul*, E.Tr. (London, 1961), 196; J. Knox, *The Ethic of Jesus in the Teaching of the Church* (London, 1961), 76.

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reminiscent of the arguments used in Catholic exegesis for a 'real' rather than a 'juridical' or 'fictional' justification. This similarity must not obscure the fact that the arguments are used differently, for in the Catholic tradition they explicate the nature of justification, but in the Protestant tradition they are its complement (i.e. justification is not the whole of Paul's gospel, and these other things must be kept in mind). The following answers to the 'cul-de-sac' criticism are not alternatives, as many exegetes appeal to several of them.

First, some have argued that in Romans 1–5, Paul deals with God's righteousness as conferring a new status, and in 6–8 he deals with it as energising man and leading to a new life.¹ Somewhat similar is the nineteenth-century view that Paul has two doctrines of redemption, one that is juridical (justification) and one of a really new creation by the Spirit, with the first based largely on the Cross, the second largely on the resurrection.² The idea of two distinct soteriologies is now widely rejected,³ and we also find it unacceptable. Second, it is held that God's word is creative, that it effects what it declares, and that though justification itself is simply declaratory, it yet carries within itself consequences which are in the ethical realm.⁴ A like view is that forgiveness (justification) is by nature regenerative, and necessarily leads to a new life.⁵ Third, the importance and centrality of justification is minimised (this is perhaps a variation of the first argument). Sometimes the fact is appealed to that the teaching appears explicitly in only two letters, and sometimes the related fact (if it is a fact) that it appears mainly in the context of anti-Judaising polemic. However, while some have agreed

¹ See H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (4th edn, London, 1899), vii and passim, followed with hesitation by W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1902), 38f.

² H. Lüdemann, *Die Anthropologie des Apostels Paulus* (Kiel, 1872), 170–3; on the debate, see Schweitzer, *Interpreters*, 29ff, and E. E. Ellis, *Paul and his Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1961), 24. Lüdemann saw the first soteriology as basically Jewish, and the second as Hellenistic.

³ See especially W. Grundmann, 'Gesetz, Rechtfertigung und Mystik bei Paulus', *ZNW*, 32 (1933), 52–65; H. D. Wendland, *Die Mitte der paulinischen Botschaft* (Göttingen, 1935), 35ff.

⁴ E.g. J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London, 1965), 64.

⁵ E.g. R. N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (New York, 1964), 179.

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with A. Schweitzer that justification is ‘a subsidiary crater’, many others have pressed for its centrality in Paul.¹ Fourth, the inseparability of justification and sanctification has been stressed – not that they are identified or confused, but that to discuss the first without immediately mentioning the second is to make a serious distortion.² Fifth, the inseparability of the doctrines of justification and of the Spirit has been underlined, so that in speaking of the first, one needs to go on to mention walking by the Spirit.³ Lastly, and perhaps chiefly, justification is held to be inseparable from the being-in-Christ which demands and empowers a quite radically new way of living, and which is represented in baptism. This complement to justification is held to provide the way out of the cul-de-sac into Christian ethics, and explains why one sometimes hears the expression, ‘baptismal justification’.⁴

In view of the above, it is inaccurate to suggest that the proponents of the declaratory view of justification are unconcerned about its relation to ethics, any more than the proponents of the ‘real justification’ view are unconcerned about acquittal or forgiveness. The debate centres on the question of how much may properly be attached to the verb δικαιόω. One ought perhaps to add that in the usual Protestant view, the declaration of acquittal, though really belonging to the Last Judgment, is heard by the believer here and now as an anticipation of the final verdict, just as other eschatological realities are already realised or anticipated.⁵

The Meaning of δικαιοσύνη

As in the case of the verb, there are two main conceptions of the meaning of the noun. It is usually assumed without argument by

¹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 219–26, especially 225, followed by Schoeps, *Paul*, 196f, and W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1948), 221f; contra, Wendland, *Die Mitte*; E. von Dobschütz, ‘Die Rechtfertigung bei Paulus, eine Rechtfertigung des Paulus’, *ThStKr*, 85 (1912), 38–67; E. Jünger, *Paulus und Jesus* (2nd edn, Tübingen, 1964), 17–32.

² E.g. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill (London, 1961), III xiv 9. On the relation between the two, Küng, *Justification*, Excursus II.

³ Thus Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 332.

⁴ E.g. A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958), 235–43. Cf. also W. F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London, 1948), 55–61, 69; Wendland, *Die Mitte*, 46ff.

⁵ Cf. Barrett, *Romans*, 30, 75.

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Roman Catholic exegetes that it means 'justice' in the sense of uprightness, rather than strict distributive justice or even forensic justice in general. The word is part of ethical vocabulary, a 'common-sense' view that has not been without Protestant support.¹ The usual Protestant position however has been that righteousness as imputed in justification is real righteousness, which comes from God to man, but *for forensic purposes only*. Man is not righteous, but he is treated by God as if he were, because he stands clothed in the righteousness of Christ.² More commonly today, the language of imputation is avoided, partly because of the difficulties to which it has led, and partly because its use in Rom. 4 and Gal. 3 seems very much due to the exigencies of polemic. Instead, it is widely considered that 'righteousness' belongs to the language of relationships, and denotes a right relation to God which is not imputed by anyone but really exists. It is a real righteousness, with no 'as if' about it, but is purely relational.³ Because of this, the noun can be taken to mean 'acceptance' (of man, by God), or to mean 'forgiveness'.⁴

Thus righteousness from God and justification are the same thing. Both are to do with the granting of a status before God, an undeserved status which *in itself* is not concerned with ethics, but which has ethical consequences. The indicative of justification implies an ethical imperative, but this is subsequent, and the Christian is always *simul iustus et peccator*. Now the advantage of this interpretation is that any fictional view of justification is avoided: the sinner is declared righteous, but as 'righteous' is a relationship, not an ethical term, nothing untrue is declared. God may put whom he pleases into a right relationship with himself. Clearly, in these terms there is no difference between 'make' and 'declare' righteous, for it is simply a matter of bringing sinners into a new relationship.⁵

¹ Thus Cerfaux, *Christ*, 220–35; J. Drummond, 'On the Meaning of "Righteousness of God" in the Theology of St Paul' (I), *HJ*, 1 (1902), 83–95, cf. (II), 272–93.

² Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, II xvi 6.

³ Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 271f, 277; Whiteley, *St Paul*, 160, among many others.

⁴ So Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 235, 246, 249, 256; A. Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung dargestellt* (2nd edn, Bonn, 1882), II, 303–8.

⁵ Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 276.

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A. Richardson contends that the Christian's righteousness from God is entirely real, so that he stands before God as the righteous man he actually is, but *only eschatologically*. What is acquitted is presumably not the self that is, but the one that is to be. What matters is what he is to be, and therefore it is proper and no fiction when God acquits him.¹ The usual weakness of the 'imputation' approach, that it makes an un-Jewish separation of righteousness in God's sight, from righteousness in life and society,² is here avoided, but one cannot see that the texts support Richardson's solution.

Although it is often acknowledged that elsewhere δικαιοσύνη may have an ethical meaning,³ in 'justification' contexts a relational meaning is then widely accepted. If we ask what is the basis on which this non-ethical meaning has been given to it, two answers are found. First, it is said that the meaning in Paul has been influenced by the meaning of the cognate verb, which means that this 'relational' meaning is a peculiarly Pauline one.⁴ Second, it is argued that the ethical meaning is essentially Greek, and the relational meaning characteristically Hebraic, representative of the tradition to which Paul belongs.⁵ In any case, the result is a general tendency to interpret the noun by the verb, in exact opposition to the tendency of the Catholic tradition. We shall have to question whether either of these procedures is correct.

The Expression δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ

Especially because this expression is used in connection with justification in Romans (cf. 3. 21–6, and pp. 169f below), its correct interpretation is widely seen as the clue to the meaning

¹ *Theology*, 236ff. Richardson's view is distinct from that of Bultmann, who sees righteousness as forensic-eschatological in the sense that the verdict is partly now, partly in the future, cf. 'ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ ΘΕΟΥ', *JBL*, 83 (1964), 12–16.

² Cf. Kertelge's criticism of the separation of inner from outer in 'imputation': 'Rechtfertigung', 118f.

³ E.g. Ritschl, *Rechtfertigung*, II, 340; D. Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings* (Cambridge, 1967), 153.

⁴ E.g. W. A. Stevens, 'The Forensic Meaning of δικαιοσύνη', *AJT*, 1 (1897), 443–50, especially 445f.

⁵ E.g. Hill, *Greek Words*, 152.

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of justification. It is often treated as a formula, i.e. a set phrase with a stereotyped meaning and often or regularly used for that meaning – in effect a technical term. It is debated whether Paul adopted a formula from the Old Testament and late Judaism, and adapted it to his own purposes,¹ or whether he newly minted it himself.² Unfortunately, even if it is a formula, which may be doubted on the grounds that the instances of it do not clearly all bear the same meaning, and that the main meanings it conveys are more frequently conveyed in other words, there is disagreement on what it means.³ We shall have to revert to this question after our own investigation of the texts.

The traditional Protestant view (and Luther's) was that the term is an 'objective genitive' (an infelicitous use of the term). That is to say, the righteousness of God of which it speaks is indeed the righteousness God grants, but is granted by him because it is that which 'vor Gott gilt' (Luther's rendering in Rom. 1. 17, 3. 21, 25f). It is *iusitia aliena*, external to man, imputed.⁴ Since the middle of the nineteenth century, this view has found relatively little support among exegetes. In the latter part of last century, and the beginning of the present one,

¹ Thus A. Oepke, 'Δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ bei Paulus in neuer Beleuchtung', *ThLZ*, 78 (1953), 257–64; also E. Käsemann, 'God's Righteousness in Paul' (E.Tr. of 'Gottesgerechtigkeit bei Paulus', *ZThK*, 58 (1961), 367–78), *Journal for Theology and the Church*, 1 (1965), 100–10, especially 102f. All references will be from the English.

² So Bultmann, 'ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ ΘΕΟΥ', 16. The passages cited on both sides are: Deut. 33. 21; Sifre Deut. 33. 21; TDan 6. 10; 1 QS 11. 12; also Mt. 6. 33 and Jas 1. 20, but Bultmann considers the Pauline and late Judaistic meanings quite different.

³ Thus Oepke thinks it means both God's activity and a predicate conferred on man by God, the righteousness which 'vor Gott gilt', 'Δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ', 260, but Bultmann sees it strictly as God's gift, that of right standing, 'ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ ΘΕΟΥ', 13ff. Käsemann's very rich conception is that it is and remains God's own, and has the character of power, yet is also a gift to the believer, a gift which nevertheless is inseparable from the Giver, 'God's Righteousness,' 103 f. On the question of 'formula', we accept the dictum that 'A formula is only present when there is a clear tendency to express an idea by a set phrase', R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ*, Beiheft zur *ZNW* (Berlin, 1967), 6.

⁴ Oepke, 'Δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ', especially 263, sees it as a genitive of origin approaching an objective genitive. He made an unsuccessful attempt to distinguish different meanings or nuances in the expression by the presence or absence of the article.