



NORWEGIAN
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Does God Give Away His Own Righteousness?

An analysis of the expression δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in Pauline Theology through four texts:
Rom 3:21f; 10:3; 2 Cor 5:21; and Phil 3:9.

Lasse Thorvaldsen

Supervisor

Postdoctoral fellow Ole Jakob Filtvedt

*This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Cand. theol. degree at*

MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2015, autumn

AVH504: Spesialavhandling med metode (30 ECTS)
Profesjonsstudiet i teologi

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
1.1	The Main Problem, Limitations and the Aims of This Thesis	4
1.2	The Order of the Texts.....	5
1.3	Semantic Considerations.....	6
1.3.1	δικαιοσύνη	6
1.3.2	θεοῦ.....	7
1.3.3	Summary.....	9
2	2 Cor 5:21: Embodiment of God’s Righteousness or Status as Righteous Received?.....	10
2.1	Introduction.....	10
2.1.1	Syntax and Structure	10
2.2	The Embodiment of God’s Righteousness	11
2.2.1	Apostleship.....	12
2.2.2	Interchange in Christ	14
2.3	Status as Righteous	16
2.3.1	Sin-Offering.....	17
2.3.2	Reversal of Status	18
2.4	Preliminary Conclusion.....	19
3	Rom 3:21f: God’s Character, Covenant Faithfulness or Gift	20
3.1	Introduction.....	20
3.2	An attribute of God’s Character	21
3.2.1	“God Is Righteous”	21
3.2.2	God’s Covenant Faithfulness.....	24
3.3	A Righteous Status Given by God to Those in Christ.....	28
i.	Vv.21-25a.....	28
ii.	Vv.25b-26	30
3.4	Preliminary Conclusion.....	30
4	Rom 10:3 and Phil 3:9: The Righteousness <i>from</i> God.....	32

4.1	Introduction.....	32
4.1.1	Rom 10:3	32
4.1.2	Phil 3:9	32
4.1.3	Similarities	32
4.2	Phil 3:9: Whose Righteousness?.....	33
4.3	An Attribute of God’s Character.....	34
4.3.1	Rom 10:3	34
4.3.2	Phil 3:9	35
4.4	Status as Righteous before God	35
4.4.1	Rom 10:3	35
4.4.2	Phil 3:9	38
4.5	Preliminary Conclusion.....	39
5	Conclusions.....	40
6	Bibliography.....	41
6.1	Bibles, Translations, Commentaries and Dictionaries	41
6.2	Books and Articles	41

List of Abbreviations

B11	Bibelen: Den Hellige Skrift: Det gamle og Det nye testamentet (2011)
BDAG	Danker, F. W., W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3 rd ed. Chicago, 2000
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NIV	New International Version
NPP	New Perspective on Paul
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

1 Introduction

1.1 The Main Problem, Limitations and the Aims of This Thesis

“Does God give away his own righteousness?” This is the main problem of this thesis. The question touches many debates in Pauline and New Testament studies as well as within the field of systematic theology. There are tons of interesting questions that I cannot answer (at least not within the limits of a thesis like this). What I will try to do, is to examine a few Pauline texts that often have been interpreted as God giving away his own righteousness. This view is proposed and argued for in different ways throughout the history. The main claim of this view is that God gives away his own righteousness to humans, and that the result is their justification. But the last hundred years this view has been challenged by a new view, that grew out of a new theory that suggested that the word “δικαιοσύνη” should be interpreted relationally, as “keeping ones obligation”¹. Since then, the so-called *New Perspective on Paul* (NPP) (although the membership criteria for such a club is unclear and the group consists of scholars with very different positions on many topics) has gained much popularity within Pauline scholarship, and many scholars that are counted as its representatives has adopted the “new view” on “δικαιοσύνη” (as a relational term). N.T. Wright, who is one of the scholars most often identified with the NPP², is perhaps boldest in his rejection of the view that God gives away his own righteousness. He claims that the expression ‘*the righteousness of God*’ (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) primarily refers to “[God’s] faithfulness to his previous commitments, particularly of course, the covenant”³ (but he certainly does not deny that God declares sinners to be righteous – that is not what is “at stake” in this debate). Such an interpretation along with several other views on the righteousness of God will be further examined in this thesis. The aims of this thesis is to establish how ‘the righteousness of God’ relates to God (personal attribute, possession, etc.), and whether it is something that is *given* or not.

I will do this by examining the expression “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” as it is used in four Pauline texts, namely Rom 3:21f; 10:3; 2 Cor 5:21; and Phil 3:9. When I refer to “the expression δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ”, it includes not only that precise way of spelling it, but it also includes occurrences where the two words are rearranged or split by particles, prepositions or articles⁴. The four verses I have chosen,

¹ For a fuller treatment of the history of interpretation of the righteousness of God, I recommend “*The Righteousness of God*” (Irons 2015) and “*Iustitia Dei: a History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*” (McGrath 2005).

² Along with E. P. Sanders, Krister Stendahl and James D. G. Dunn, although this is a list based merely on my observations.

³ Wright 2013, 796.

⁴ Complete list over all ten occurrences of the expression in the Pauline Epistles: Rom 1:17 (δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ); 3:5 (θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην); 3:21 (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ); 3:22 (δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ); 3:25 (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ - the genitive “αὐτοῦ” refers to God); 3:26 (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ - the genitive “αὐτοῦ” refers to God);

covers six out of ten occurrences of the expression. These are six out of seven occurrences, where the expression “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” can be interpreted as a gift. The last verse containing an occurrence of the expression “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ”, Rom 1:17, reads that “...in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith” (NRSV). This verse does not give us many clues to whether the righteousness of God is a gift or not. It is revealed in the gospel, but how, it does not say, except that it is “through faith for faith”. Therefore, this occurrence of “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” will not be discussed in this thesis. The last three occurrences (Rom 3:5; 3:25; and 3:26) are impossible to interpret as a gift from God and will therefore not be discussed fully in the thesis, although the two occurrences Rom 3:25 and 26 will be discussed briefly because they occur in the same section as Rom 3:21f. I will not give full exegeses of the four texts, but focus on the expression “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ”, and mainly, whether it is something that is given or not. To do this, I will not simply see if it is possible to interpret them as given by God (I presume they can), but I will also assess alternative interpretations of the phrase so that I can compare the different possibilities, and see which interpretation that seems most plausible.

1.2 The Order of the Texts

The texts that we are going to discuss are Rom 3:21f; 10:3; 2 Cor 5:21; and Phil 3:9. Their chronological order is different than the canonical order (the order they appear in the New Testament). Probably, 2 Corinthians was written in 55⁵. Then within the year thereafter (56), while Paul is in Corinth, he wrote Romans⁶. The dating of Philippians is more disputed than the former two. There are sound arguments both for a dating from Ephesus in the early to mid-50's (before Romans and 2 Corinthians), and from Rome in the early 60's⁷ (after the other two). I will not conclude in this question, as it carries minimal significance to the arguments of this thesis.

We will begin with 2 Cor 5:21, since it was written before Romans. Then again, Philippians might be older than 2 Corinthians, but Phil 3:9 will be discussed last, in the same chapter as Rom 10:3 due to their similar uses of expressions, theses and anti-theses. I will let the text in Romans rule the placement of that chapter in the thesis, because, as we will see, it is possible that Phil 3:9 is not about God's own righteousness after all. That possibility will be discussed fully in that chapter. In the middle then, Rom 3:21f remains.

10:3 [x2] (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην; τῆ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ); 2 Cor 5:21 (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ); and Phil 3:9 (τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην).

⁵ Barnett 1997, 15

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The arguments for both, as well as for datings from Cesarea and Corinth are presented in Hawthorne 2004, xl-l. Hawthorne supports the Ephesian dating, while Gordon D. Fee, in his commentary, relies on the Roman dating, i.e. about 60-62 (Fee 1995).

Before we turn to the texts, we must make some semantic considerations.

1.3 Semantic Considerations

In this thesis, we are discussing one expression, namely “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ”. The reason why we have to turn to exegesis is mainly that the semantic range opens up for different interpretations. If we knew the one true meaning or a very narrow range of meanings of “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ”, this thesis would be unnecessary, since we then just could insert the meaning and render the meaning of the verses. That is not the case here. Presuming that words actually carry or evoke a range of meanings, and that they are not completely meaningless, we will in this section discuss what range of meanings “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” seems to carry, or which connotations it evokes, before we turn to the exegesis to see how those different meanings function in the texts.

The expression “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” consists of two parts, the main noun “δικαιοσύνη” and the noun “θεός”, in genitive, which indicate that “δικαιοσύνη” is subordinated to it.

1.3.1 δικαιοσύνη

The word “δικαιοσύνη” belongs to a group of words (ΔΙΚ-) that in English connotes many roots, but two stands out as the most popular choices in the English translations of the Bible: “just” (just, justify, justice, etc.) and “right” (righteous, righteousness, etc.). This often makes the words difficult to translate, as they are not completely interchangeable in English, while in Greek they are the same word. BDAG differentiate the two meanings in its article about “δικαιοσύνη”, by claiming that the meaning “justice”, focuses on “fairness”, while “righteousness” focuses on “redemptive action”. In this thesis, I will mainly render it “righteousness”, because this is how it most often is rendered in most English translations of the Bible within the texts that we will discuss.

But how should we understand the word when Paul uses it? We cannot be completely sure, as Paul often uses familiar words in new ways, but to get a basis for the coming exegesis, we should try to get a grip on how the word “δικαιοσύνη” would normally be understood by Paul and his contemporaries. To do this, we will turn to the Old Testament and Extra-Biblical sources.

1.3.1.1 Old Testament

To find the meaning of the word “righteousness” in the Old Testament, we will look at both the Greek (LXX) and the Hebrew (MT) texts, in case their uses should be different (e.g. that the Hebrew text use the word more ethically, while the Greek uses it in a more juridical sense).

In the MT, there are two words that are rendered “righteousness”, namely “שֶׁדֶק” (šedeq) and “יִשְׁרָאֵל” (šēdāqâ). These words are most often translated “δικαιοσύνη” in the LXX and oppositely, they are

also the two most frequent Hebrew words in the MT, where we in the LXX reads “δικαιοσύνη”⁸. In a survey of Charles Lee Irons on the two Hebrew and the Greek terms (all instances, regardless of connection to the word ‘God’) he claims the different usages to be distributed like this:

	Legal righteousness	Ethical righteousness	Correctness	Difficult to categorize
MT	123 (44.6%)	114 (41.3%)	26 (9.4%)	13 (4.7%)
LXX	112 (42.4%)	122 (46.2%)	14 (5.3%)	16 (6.1%)
<i>Combined</i>	<i>235 (43.5%)</i>	<i>236 (43.7%)</i>	<i>40 (7.4%)</i>	<i>29 (5.4%)</i>

This is a simplified version of Irons’ table, only presenting the main categories⁹. The differences between MT and LXX are small and are caused mainly of the Hebrew words being translated to different, yet similar expressions in the LXX (e.g. δίκαιος, δικαίως, etc.)¹⁰.

Based on this survey, we notice that “righteousness” in the Old Testament (both MT and LXX) most often refers to legal or ethical righteousness, and that the distribution between the two are pretty equal.

1.3.1.2 Extra-Biblical Literature

In the extra-biblical material, Irons claims that “δικαιοσύνη” is widely used as the noun corresponding to the adjective “δίκαιος” (it simply is “dikaios-ness”¹¹). He also concludes his survey of instances in the known extra-biblical literature from pre-500 BC until towards the end of the 2nd century BC, that “δικαιοσυνη” is used widely explained as a virtue concerning many different aspects of an upright behavior: exercising justice, keeping the law, holding commercial contracts, etc. About keeping contracts (as could support the mentioned view that “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” refers to God’s covenant faithfulness), Irons points out that keeping one’s obligations is always “δικαιοσύνη”, while “δικαιοσύνη” does not always mean “keeping one’s obligations”¹².

1.3.2 θεοῦ

The meaning of “θεός” is obviously “God” (YHWH), but how it relates to the δικαιοσύνη is uncertain.

I will suggest two main possibilities:

⁸ Irons 2015, 128–129 (tables 4–6).

⁹ Ibid., 130–131 (table 7).

¹⁰ Ibid., 131.

¹¹ Ibid., 104; 104n.90.

¹² Ibid., 104–107.

1.3.2.1 Subjective Genitive

First, it can mean that God is righteous (subjective genitive), referring to an attribute of his character (the way he is) or his behavior (the way he acts). God is righteous and acts in accordance to righteousness. This option could be split into two options (as e.g. Moo does¹³), i.e. “an attribute of God’s character” and “an attribute of God’s actions”. We will, however regard them as one, because if “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” describes an attribute of God’s character, it presumably is so that God acts righteously (according to his character), and if it denotes God’s righteous actions, it is presumably follows that he also has a righteous character. Furthermore, unless we get some clear clues from the texts, it would be difficult to distinguish these two sub-categories in the analysis.

It is under this category that the new view fits in. If God’s righteousness refers to God keeping his covenantal obligations, or if it in some other way is used in a relational sense, then it is describing his character or actions. There are also other views fitting in under this category, e.g. that God is and acts according to the objective standard called “righteousness”, as an English speaker probably intuitively would understand the phrase “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ”.

1.3.2.2 Genitive of Origin

The second category I suggest, is that God is the origin of the righteousness. That means that the righteousness is not referring to God himself. It is something apart from God, e.g. something that God has made or something God possesses.

Luther and the reformers’ view, that the righteousness of God is a righteousness that is imputed or reckoned to humans, justifying us before God, fits into this category. It is often called an “alien righteousness”, because it does not come from humans themselves, but from God.

These two categories both point to something that has to do with a righteousness that is associated with God. One pointing at God as the one being described by the word “righteousness” and the other pointing at God as the source (and eventually giver) of the righteousness. Their underlying claims, respectively that God *is righteous* and *acts righteously*; or that God *reckons humans to be righteous*, can be simultaneously true. But in one specific text, the righteousness of God, should probably refer to either to the former, the latter or some other category than those we have been able to identify in this section. In the texts studied in this thesis, it would therefore be surprising if the expression in one text meant more things. We will therefore assume that we need to choose only one of the interpretations. Still, the expression “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” might be used in different senses in the

¹³ Moo 1996, 70-71.

different texts (it could for example mean a status imputed in 2 Cor 5:21, but God's covenant faithfulness in Rom 3:22).

1.3.3 Summary

We have now seen which semantic range that would be most plausible when discussing the expression "δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ". We have presented two very distinct ways of interpreting the righteousness of God, which covers more or less all of the most widely held views on the topic¹⁴, namely

1. Subjective genitive: An attribute by God's character and actions. God is righteous and acts righteously.
2. A righteous status given by God to those in Christ.

These categories, or variants within them, will function as interpretational categories when we soon are going to approach the texts. If the first category fits a text better, we will most likely conclude that that chapter does not show that God giving away his own righteousness. But a conclusion that favors the second category will make us conclude that the respective chapter is a good argument in favor of saying that God does give away his own righteousness.

¹⁴ Those who are already familiar with the debate on God's righteousness will know that some of the different interpretations are named by specific Latin terms. I have avoided to use them throughout this thesis, but the first of the categories about to be presented, will at least include *iustitia distributiva* and *iustitia salutifera*, while the second corresponds with *iustitia aliena*.

2 2 Cor 5:21: Embodiment of God's Righteousness or Status as Righteous Received?

For our sake he made him to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (NRSV)

2.1 Introduction

It is common to regard 2 Corinthians mainly as an apologia for Paul's apostleship to the Corinthians. Paul found it necessary after hearing from Titus that somebody regarded him as a man of flesh and a failing apostle, not least by comparing him to some new "super-apostles" (2:17-3:2; 5:11-13; 10:12-12:13).

The instance of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, which we soon will analyze, is located in v.5:21. Barnett, in his commentary, claims this to be a part of the larger section 2:14-7:4 which he has given the title "Defense of the Ministry of the New Covenant"¹⁵. The text and its close literary context is about Paul defending his ministry, on which background he is an apostle, and what the apostle do. Verse 21 might seem somewhat loosely connected to its preceding and following verses, although that is probably caused by its cryptic syntax and structure. And because of this, we will start this chapter, with a short analysis of the syntax and structure of the verse.

2.1.1 Syntax and Structure

To tidy up the verse a little, we are going to structure it by splitting it into two clauses, each consisting of one verb, (i) ἐποίησεν (ποιέω) and (ii) γενώμεθα (γίνομαι), tied together with "ἵνα" ("so that").

- i. He *made* him to be sin he who knew no sin for us.
 - a. The *subject* (the one making the other 'sin') must refer to God (due to "τῷ θεῷ" in v.20), while
 - b. the *object* (the one who knew no sin, and that was made 'sin') must refer to Jesus.
 - c. Who the *prepositional expression* ('for us') refers to, we will return later in this discussion.
 - d. The objective predicative is ἁμαρτίαν, meaning 'sin' (or sometimes perhaps 'sin offering' to which we also will return later).
 - e. The verb ποιέω, is the common Greek word for "to do/make". It carries no connotations in itself to sacrifice or anything like that. It is here conjugated in aorist indicative, indicating a punctual (momentary or completed) action.

"... so that ..."

- ii. We *might become* the righteousness of God in him.
 - a. The subject here is 'we'. This seems to correspond with "for us" in the first part of the verse (i.c.).
 - b. The subject predicate (the righteousness of God) is the part which meaning we are trying to determine.
 - c. This part of the verse also contains a prepositional expression ("in him"). It could grammatically refer to either of the males in the first half of the verse ("Jesus" or "God") or the genitive in the second part ("God"). Paul often use the expression "in Christ", but never "in God", and we will therefore assume the former meaning.

¹⁵ Barnett 1997, 51.

- d. In this part of the verse, Paul uses the verb γίνομαι, which is used in a broad specter of ways, but mainly in the sense “to happen” (which is excluded here) or “to be/become” or nuances closely related to the latter. It is here conjugated in aorist conjunctive. That indicates that this is also referring to a punctual action, but to one that has not yet happened, but which *might* happen.

To summarize the structure: (i) God caused Jesus to become sin; “so that” (what follows is probably a consequence of what precedes); (ii) we might become the righteousness of God, in him. When we look at the conjugations of the verbs, we will see that we do not (yet) take an active part: God, by doing something in the past (making Jesus sin), makes something possible for *us*, namely “becoming *the righteousness of God* in him”. And: the event in the past was *for us*, and if we eventually become “the righteousness of God”, it will be *in him*.

Now we will turn to some different ways to interpret 2 Cor 5:21. The use of “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” here, differs considerably from the other three occurrences that we are going to analyze. Here, somebody (“we”) *become* the righteousness of God. That is odd. If we were to become something, we would expect something that one can become (an adjective, e.g. “righteous”; or something that could describe living creatures, e.g. “children of God”). One cannot become an abstract thing, like a “righteousness”; at least that sounds so odd that we should not think that this literal meaning was what Paul intended us to understand by it. We should therefore try to interpret it differently. If we tweak the two categories we used in the previous chapter (subjective genitive/an attribute of God’s character; and a righteous status given by God to those in Christ), we might suggest that we become respectively “the embodiment of God’s righteousness” or that we *receive* “the status as righteous before God”. Most interpretations of 2 Cor 5:21 does in fact fit into these categories, so we are going to use those to organize the discussion about the term “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” in this chapter.

2.2 The Embodiment of God’s Righteousness

This category is one of the ways to paraphrase “becoming the Righteousness of God”. It attempts to maintain that the righteousness of God is an attribute of God’s character, but it must be rendered metaphorically here, to fit the feature that it is something “we” might “become”. If we at the end of this chapter conclude that this category provides the best framework to interpret 2 Cor 5:21, it seems like the conclusion will be that God does not give away his own righteousness. Rather the sin-making of Jesus results in us *embodying* his righteousness. What this eventually means, we will explore further in the coming section.

There are two different arguments, both fitting under this heading. The first interpretation argues that it is the apostles that become the righteousness of God, meaning that they carry out their ministry by embodying the righteousness of God. The second interpretation to be discussed will be called “Interchange in Christ”, which is the name of an established concept for interpreting this and

other verses containing an apparent changing of conditions that happens between Jesus and the believers (e.g. Gal 3:13). On this verse, the result of what happened to Jesus, is that all believers might embody the gospel.

2.2.1 Apostleship

The section in 2 Corinthians that contains v.5:21 (2:14-6:13¹⁶) seems mainly to be an apologia of Paul's apostleship. It therefore seems a very strange, that towards the climax of the argument for Paul's authenticity as the apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul merges in a short, powerful verse about justification (as v.5:21 often has been taken to be). Is it possible to interpret the verse in accordance with the apostleship argument Paul is making?

N.T. Wright provides such an interpretation. His argument depends on the larger theme of the section. Therefore he first goes a little backwards in the letter, describing the attitude of Paul's apologia through the preceding chapters¹⁷: Paul has been challenged by some new apostles in Corinth and is asked to commend himself. So he does, in a paradoxical way, by admitting that he, as the rest of the apostles are insufficient for the task (2:14-17). Further, Wright writes that Paul then answers how he nevertheless is sufficient for the task in various ways, and gives examples on how Paul claims this sufficiency, that is, that he is not sufficient for the task by himself, but only by God's empowering and actions through him (e.g. 3:5f; 4:5f). The ministry resulting from such empowering is not what the Corinthians wanted or expected: it is what Paul and the apostles do, namely suffering all kinds of things as the message goes out, because they "always [are] carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in [their] bodies" (4:10). The apostles are embodying the gospel, being controlled by the love of the Messiah and living for him (5:14f). What the Corinthians allegedly was ashamed of in Paul, is the reason they should be proud of him.

With such preparation of the argument, it does seem strange that Paul should suddenly change the theme. Against this claim, one could agree that the main theme is the apostleship, but that v.21 is not the conclusion of any argument. Rather it is Paul reminding the Corinthians of the means of God's reconciliation (which is an important topic in the preceding verses), namely the sin-making of Jesus. Furthermore, Paul can use theological truths as part of other arguments. Verse 21 *could* be statement only loosely connected to Paul's main argument.

¹⁶ Barnett 1997, 16; Wright 2009, 159.

¹⁷ Wright 2009, 159–161 paraphrased through the rest of this paragraph.

Wright interprets v.21 according to an “AB”-pattern allegedly found in vv.15.18f¹⁸¹⁹:

	v.15	v.18	v.19	v.21
A	And he died for all	All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,	that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,	For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,
B	that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.	and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;	and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.	so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The similarities to v.21 are most obvious in vv.18 and 19, and are not so clear in v.15, although the pattern is pretty much the same. If it is so that Paul develops the same argument in all four verses, the basic meaning of each part must be: (A) God acted for reconciliation through Christ, (B) the mission entrusted to us is to carry out this reconciliation to the world. It could be that the B-part of v.15 is about the new life of all Christians. If it is so, we should also ask whether this could be the case of v.21 as well, as would be an argument favoring the one to be treated in the next section (2.2.2). If not, this structure could function as a good argument for interpreting “become the righteousness of God”, as to be an apostle. This leads us to a characteristic with this interpretation compared to the other interpretations that will be presented within this chapter: “we” in the last part of the verse (21b), is interpreted exclusively; that means, that it is only referring only to Paul (and probably also his co-apostles²⁰). Compared with the other first person plurals in the literary surroundings, such an interpretation seems probable, although it also seems clear that there are first person plurals referring to all believers at least a few times in the same literary surroundings (vv.18a; 21a).

¹⁸ Ibid., 161–166.

¹⁹ Wright uses his own translation paraphrasing in a way that highlights the similarities. I chose to follow the NRSV English translation when referring to his argument, which does not corrupt it, although it makes it slightly harder to see.

²⁰ For a treatment on the first person plural in Paul’s epistles, see Byrskog 1996, 230-250.

Although the structure above seems sound, and could provide help for one way to interpret v.21, one could easily rearrange it, for example by including 21B in 21A, indicating that the “righteousness-becoming” is a reference to the reconciliation, while the original 21A (the one from the previous structure) marks that it happened “through Christ”:

v.18	v.19	vv.21
A through Christ,	that is, in Christ	For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,
All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself	God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,	so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
B and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;	and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.	

Although this structure lacks something to fill 21B, if the parallel between 21A and 18A and 19A, also seems possible. I will not present this as an argument for how we should interpret v.21, but make a case of how Wright’s structure here, is not the only one that could make sense. Because of the cryptic wording of 21, there is difficult to tell what could be the criteria for making a parallel.

Despite our skepticism to Wright’s argument from structure that is presented so far in this section, Wright’s interpretation seems to explain Paul’s use of the verb “γίνομαι” well. If Paul meant that we might indeed *become* (manifestations of) God’s righteousness – living people embodying the righteousness of God, “γίνομαι” is exactly the verb we would expect. His interpretation also seems to find support in vv.1:18-22, which connects God’s faithfulness to the empowering of the apostles (more specifically Silvanus, Timothy and Paul). Wright’s conclusion therefore seems quite possible: the apostles embody the righteousness of God in their own lives²¹.

2.2.2 Interchange in Christ

The concept “Interchange in Christ”²², make the basis for the following interpretation, much cited in later scholarship. “Interchange in Christ” is an expression that is used to interpret several Pauline passages where Jesus becomes something “for us”, so that we may become the opposite “in him” (but as we shall see it is not simply a symmetric exchange). Hooker demonstrates it by analyzing 2

²¹ Wright 2009, 165.

²² This “concept” is credited to Morna Hooker by many scholars. It was presented in her article with the same name (Hooker 1971, 349-361), and along with a later article on 2 Cor 5:21 (Hooker 2008, 358-375), they make the basis for the interpretation that I am going to discuss in this section.

Cor 5:21 together with Gal 3:13, which bears many similarities to one another, and this example makes one see clearly the “core” of interchange-texts: “Christ became a curse in order that a blessing might come to others; he was made sin in order that we might become the righteousness of God²³”.

In 2 Cor 5:21, reconciliation is a major theme, and that makes it natural for Paul to talk about the interchange in terms of ‘sin’ and ‘righteousness’, since Christ is identified with what is opposed to God and causes the need for reconciliation: Therefore, *in him* (Christ), “we” are reconciled to God²⁴. Note that this happens ‘*in him*’: on the basis of the death and resurrection of Christ, the evil force has been annulled and transformed into the opposing, positive force: righteousness²⁵. This happens through two steps: (i) Christ identifies himself with us. And somehow (to which we shall return) the result is (ii) that we take part in the opposite reality *in him*.

Hooker draws in Rom 8, as a kind of proof text: “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:3f). Hooker points out that Christ shared fully in human experience and the result is that we are set free from bondage to the law, and that we too are now sons of God having received the spirit of the Son²⁶. This is again deeply connected to being conformed to the image of God’s Son – the second Adam, which is a theme that is widely found in the Pauline apostles²⁷.

The last decisive point, is how Christ’s identification with humankind, works for humans’ benefit. Hooker finds this in Phil 2-3. In Phil 2 the identification takes place, but there does not seem to be a counterpart showing how we benefit from it ‘*in him*’, as in the other texts. Hooker claims that this is what happens at the end of chapter 3 (vv.20f), bridged with the common words and not least the theme: “Our body of humiliation is to be fashioned anew by Christ who [...] humbled himself. [...] We are to be conformed to the body of his glory”, by “the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself” (3:21b)²⁸.

Hooker would agree with the previous argument (“Apostleship”) that Paul regards his own ministry as nothing less than conformity to the gospel, but she goes further, expanding the validity of such claims to all believers:

²³ Hooker 1971, 349.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 353.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 353.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 354.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 355.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 357.

"It is true that Paul seems to see his role as an apostle to be a channel of the "interchange" of experience that has come to him in Christ. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ, he has been able to pass on the consolation he has received to the Corinthians (1:3-7); experiencing the dying of Jesus, he has been enabled to bring life to them (4:8-12); his weakness has been the means of conveying Christ's power (13:3-4). But the process does not stop there! The Corinthians themselves are a "letter of Christ" (3:3), and the grace they experience extends to others (4:15). Those who have been made rich through Christ's poverty (8:9) are urged to share their wealth with others in ministering to the saints in Jerusalem (9:10-15). In an earlier letter, 1 Corinthians, Paul had already defended his understanding of his apostolic role and urged the Corinthians to imitate him (1 Cor 4:15; 11:1). The apostle's life is modeled on the pattern of the Gospel, but it is intended as a model for others"²⁹.

This is also the way we should understand 2 Cor 5:14-21, Hooker claims: Paul gives three summaries of the gospel (vv.14f, 18f, and 21), all containing interchanges, and the language he is using, he uses to draw out the particular relevance of the gospel for his own ministry (Hooker 2008, 374). Still they ought to be true for all believers: "Christ died for all so that all might live for him, and living for him means offering the message of reconciliation to others and serving as instruments of God's righteousness"³⁰.

Although the arguments presented for this interpretation are somewhat different from those for "Apostleship", they seem to be mutually supportive, only disagreeing on who shall embody the gospel (in this verse), but also here, the latter view starts with the apostle, and then deducing from relevant texts why it should also be relevant for all believers. It is not likely that N.T. Wright would disagree on these theological deductions, and so, we cannot show some clear disagreements between the views presented so far. The arguments seem to make sense of Paul's wording.

Now we are turning towards the next category, which is that the righteousness of God denotes a "status as righteous".

2.3 Status as Righteous

A popular interpretation of 2 Cor 5:21 is that Christ took our place, being made sin, and facing the punishment that follows, while we may clothe us in his righteousness being counted as sinless and reckoned a status as righteous before God.

How this is explained in our verse is not yet clear, but I will suggest two options. First, that the text is about Christ as a sin-offering, providing propitiation for all humanly sin and making it possible for

²⁹ Hooker 2008, 365.

³⁰ Ibid., 374.

humans to be reckoned as righteous before God. The second interpretation tries to establish righteousness as the opposite of condemnation.

2.3.1 Sin-Offering

Some have suggested that Christ was made a sin-offering. The word “ἁμαρτία” is sometimes used in this sense in the LXX (e.g. Lev 4:24), but “περί ἁμαρτία” is more common, and this is also used by Paul elsewhere (though only once, in Rom 8:3). Furthermore, the first of the two instances of “ἁμαρτία” does clearly not mean “sin-offering”, and it seems odd that Paul would use the same word with two different meanings that close to one another. Those two reasons have made some commentators conclude that it should not be taken in that sense. There are also scholars that arguing that it should be read as sin-offering, or at least that it *refers to* the sin-offering³¹. An argument supporting this is the correspondence between the antitheses “sinless/made sin” in the text, and the one of Jesus sinlessness and the cult’s insistence on clean and unblemished animals for sacrifice³².

If the assumption that “ἁμαρτία” here in the second instance means, or alludes to, “sin-offering” is right, we should see if we can get some help interpreting our verse on the basis of sin-offer theology in general or from the “servant song” of Isa 52:13-53:12 in particular, because of its similar imagery and especially because it also contains a human functioning as a sacrifice for sin.

Although Dunn says that there is no univocal theology of sin-offering neither in the Old Testament nor in Second Temple Judaism (as far as we know), he tries to trace Paul’s offering “logic” in his letters (admitting that it is a somewhat speculative task³³). Dunn’s attempt to find Paul’s theory of atoning sacrificed can be summarized as following³⁴:

- a) The sin offering was somehow intended to deal with sin (pass judgment upon it; removing it from the sinner).
- b) The offering embodied the sin and was identified with it (“the offerer’s sin was somehow identified with the animal and its life stood in for his”).
- c) The sacrifice dealt with the sin by the destruction (death) of the sacrifice.

Guthrie claims the result of the offering to be to deliver the reconciled from the consequences of sin³⁵. Martin states it like this: “The sinless Christ took our condemnation, that for us there might be condemnation no more”³⁶.

³¹ Dunn 1998, 217; Guthrie 2015, 313.

³² Ibid.

³³ Dunn 1998, 218

³⁴ For the following statements, Dunn 1998, 218-221.

³⁵ Guthrie 2015, 313-4.

³⁶ Martin 1986, 144.

Guthrie, as well as Barnett, think that Isa 53 lies behind Paul's wording in 2 Cor 5:21³⁷. Guthrie states that that passage expresses the ideas of identification, substitution, and transformational interchange (not to be confused with the interchange-theory from the previous section), which also lie at the heart of 2 Cor 5:21³⁸. There are many similarities between Isa 53 and 2 Cor 5:21. First, we notice how the servant in Isa 53, that was like a lamb ready to be slaughtered as an offering; that he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth (Isa 53:9, NRSV) corresponds with the "not knowing of sin" ("μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν"). Then, how that he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases (v.4); and that he was wounded, crushed, punished and bruised for our transgressions, iniquities and to make us whole and heal us (v.5), corresponds with the sin-making of Jesus being on "our behalf" ("ὕπὲρ ἡμῶν"). Then that what happened to the servant was in accordance with the will of God (vv.4.6.10), as God, in 2 Cor 5:21, is the subject of the sin-making of Jesus.

As we have seen, there are many similarities between the servant of Isa 53 and Jesus in 2 Cor 5:21, but can this help us to understand the other half of the verse? What is the consequences following the offering? Perhaps is what we find in 2 Cor 5:21 (the righteousness-becoming) a parallel to the following statement from Isa 53:11: "The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous" (NRSV).

These similarities, that seems intended by Paul, clearly indicates a change of status for "the many" (ethical or judicial or both). Still, this does not seem to make full sense of Paul's wording: with such a conclusion we should have expected Paul to have written "δίκαιοι" or "δικαιωθέντες" and not "δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ", where both the noun and its genitive distorts it from being read as "having been made righteous".

2.3.2 Reversal of Status

Even though the letter to this point has been revolving around Paul's ministry, Barnett uses the close literary context to argue for a soteriological and eschatological interpretation of this verse, referring to the new *now* – the *day of salvation* (6:2). Barnett state is like this:

The long-awaited "day" has dawned. The "former" times are concluded; they are "no longer" (5:14-17). The salvation of God "now" stands revealed in Christ, ahead of the coming ages when it was formerly expected that the blessings of God for his people would be manifested³⁹.

Barnett connects "becoming the righteousness of God" to "not reckoning their trespasses to them": "righteousness" is the opposite of "condemnation", so the becoming of righteousness of God in him

³⁷ Guthrie 2015, 314; Barnett 1997, 314n.67.

³⁸ Guthrie 2015, 314.

³⁹ Barnett 1997, 315.

points towards the justification of sin and reversal of condemnation⁴⁰. This anti-thesis is also found, and stated more clearly, earlier in the letter, in 3:9: The old ministry was a ministry of death and condemnation; the new is one of the Spirit and of justification (“δικαιοσύνη”, without the genitive θεοῦ) (3:7-9). Here, “δικαιοσύνη”, is used as the anti-thesis to condemnation (“κατάκρισις”). If this is also the sense of “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” in 5:21, the genitive, should be taken as *a genitive of origin*, since the full meaning of the noun is established without it.

Also supporting this interpretation is the occurrences of “in him” in the close literary context. In v.21 those in him, that is, in Christ, are those who might become the righteousness of God. In v.17 anyone *in him* is a new creation (which is from God who reconciled himself to us through Christ – v.18), and in v.19 it was *in Christ* that God “reconciled the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them”.

This interpretation naturally points to the conclusion that because of God’s sin-making of Jesus, we might experience a reversal of our sin, and might become righteous before God, which is equivalent to him reconciling us with himself, not counting our trespasses against us. This interpretation might explain what becoming the righteousness means, but it seems to either ignore the relevance of the first part of 2 Cor 5:21, about Jesus being made sin for our sake; or merely make it a marker of the “new age”.

2.4 Preliminary Conclusion

After an examination of four different interpretations of 2 Cor 5:21, we are still left with four possible interpretations of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in this verse, supporting both that it refers to God’s activity towards and in the world (‘apostleship’ and ‘interchange’); and that it refers to a status as righteous caused by God’s action (‘sin-offering’ and ‘reversal of status’). It seems difficult to disprove any of the options, but I would argue that the former two are marginally better, because they seem to make more sense of Paul’s wording (especially the verb “become”).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

3 Rom 3:21f: God's Character, Covenant Faithfulness or Gift

21 But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, [23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; 26 it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.]⁴¹ (NRSV)

3.1 Introduction

The Jews and the Gentiles in Rome suffered from a problem. Nobody was righteous before God. No surprise there was not a righteous gentile, but neither a Jew? That would probably be surprising and provoking to some, hearing Paul's letter. Paul makes clear that even the Jews fail standing righteous before God. They had the law, but simply to *have* it is not enough, if you are not able to keep it. "But now" something has changed. The righteousness of God has been disclosed "apart from law", and not only for the Jews, but for all who believe. All who have faith are justified by God's grace as a gift.

There can hardly be any doubt that this section of the letter to the Romans contains something close to a doctrine of justification, at least in a summarizing way. All who believe are justified by God's grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement). All who believe can become righteous, whether they never had the law, or if they had it, but were unable to keep it. This last distinction highlights a discussion: is Paul's main point that gentiles can be justified along with the Jews in the new multi-ethnic family of the church? Or is it that one can be justified at all? In this chapter both questions seems to be important. Surely Romans 1-4 is much about the common situation of Jews and gentiles. At the same time the righteousness of the Jews seems to be of great concern to Paul. We will return to this question in the section of "δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as covenant righteousness" (3.2.2).

As the headline of this chapter indicates, the main focus of this chapter is supposed to be vv.21f. That is because it is those instances of the expression "δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ" that seems possible to interpret as something that is given⁴². There are two reasons why I then went on quoting the whole section

⁴¹ Vv.23-26 are included since they continue explaining the righteousness of God, but, as the title of this chapter states, vv.21f will be the main verses. The reason for this choice will be explained in the introductory section.

⁴² E.g. B11: "Rom 3:21 Men nå er Guds rettferdighet, som loven og profetene vitner om, blitt åpenbart uavhengig av loven. 22 Dette er Guds rettferdighet som *gis* ved troen på Jesus Kristus til alle som tror."

3:21-26. First because vv.23-26 seems to be strongly connected to vv.21f, providing more information about the means and consequences of this righteousness. Then, because it contains two more occurrences of the righteousness of God (with the literary genitive ‘αὐτοῦ’ - his, but obviously referring to ‘God’ as well) and another adjective and two participle forms of the δικ-group. They may be helpful for the analysis, if Paul is using the expression consistently through the whole paragraph, but as we shall see, this is not necessarily the case. Nevertheless, we will in this chapter concentrate on the instances in vv.21f. In addition to being the instances in this section that can possibly show that the righteousness of God is something that God gives, the remaining two instances of the noun-construction (not the adjective and the participles) have verbs that indicates the more indirect action of this righteousness being disclosed (πεφανερωται) and attested (μαρτυρουμένη); shown and proved (ἔνδειξις). By saying that, I mean that they must not necessarily refer to the righteousness of God itself, but might merely point towards the *means* or the *results* of it.

Now, we will again turn to our categories, and see which of them provides the best interpretation of these verses. Whether “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” here should be taken to refer to an attribute of God’s character, or to a status that God gives, where the second category would prove the answer of our main question of this thesis to be “yes, God gives away his own righteousness”, while the first will make the answer “no, at least that cannot be proved in these verses”. We will begin with the first.

It might seem unfitting to discuss interpretations which is not about God giving away his own righteousness, but we will do it nevertheless, because if the best interpretation on the section does not imply that God gives away his righteousness, the reason to believe that he does, will be weakened, which will affect the conclusions of this thesis.

3.2 An attribute of God’s Character

There are at least two popular and different ways “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” has been interpreted as an attribute of God. The first approach represents the (allegedly) intuitive way of reading “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” as an attribute of God: that God is righteous and behaves in accordance with righteousness (as an objective standard). A different view is that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ denotes God’s covenant faithfulness. It too describes God’s character, but those who hold this view claim that the expression in this verse (and some of the other verses we are going to discuss later) refers more specifically to God’s *covenant* faithfulness. We will discuss these two options separately, starting with the traditional approach.

3.2.1 “God Is Righteous”

This category presupposes that God’s righteousness is an attribute of God’s character (and not something that God gives away). What then “happens” in this verse, is that God’s righteousness is

disclosed. Everything else is a description on the contents, means and/or circumstances for this disclosure. It is disclosed apart from the law, attested by the law and the prophets, it is in some way for those who believe. If it is not given to them (an option excluded in this section, but that will consider later), it either has to benefit them in some other way, or it has to be disclosed specifically for them. To find out, we must make clear how God's righteousness is disclosed.

The way God's righteousness is disclosed seems to be what Paul describes in vv.24-25a. That is the justification of all believers by the redemptive act of putting Christ Jesus forward as a "sacrifice of atonement". God is the active part of the redemption ("by his grace"; "[...] Christ Jesus, whom *God put forward* as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood"), the redemptive act was putting Jesus forward as a sacrifice, and the result was justification for all believers. The disclosure is two-folded: it certainly contains something that benefits all believers, namely justification; it also contains the means of the justification, which is the sacrifice of Jesus. It is also possible that what was disclosed, was disclosed for all that believe, in the sense "only the believers will understand that the crucifixion was a sacrifice (and not merely an execution) and which consequences it has". Still, we must whether it is the justification or the means of it or both, that disclose the righteousness of God.

It is difficult to see how the justification itself disclose God's righteousness. If we turn it the other way around: would God be unrighteous, if he did not justify sinners? No, that seems more unproblematic than if God in fact should justify the sinner (except, of course, for the sinner who have fallen short of the glory of God).

Is it the sacrifice of Jesus in this passage then, which disclose God's righteousness? That question seems impossible to solve within the inner logic of vv.21-25a. That "God put Jesus forward as a sacrifice, so that all who believe in him are justified" may work to justify God's justification of sinners (we will turn to that later), but this still does not show how God is righteous, unless somebody already was "accusing" God for being unrighteous in his justification of sinners. If God already was justifying sinners (or intended to do so), triggering accusations and doubts about his righteousness, a solution could be to propitiate for their unrighteousness, which a sacrifice for sin could accomplish. And if we go on to vv.25bf, it looks like this could be exactly the case.

In vv.25bf, Paul writes that God put Jesus forward as a sacrifice of atonement to show his righteousness ("δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ [=θεοῦ]"), and why he did so. It was because "in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed". Within the interpretation presented in this section, this must be taken as that God demonstrated that he acts according to righteousness *because* he had passed over sins committed before, in the time of his forbearance, which could lead one to think that God is not just, because he does not punish sins.

This seems to imply that because of God's restraint to punish sins in the past; his impartial justice had to be satisfied, because of God's justice and holiness. God did not have to answer to anybody, proving to be righteous, but, by doing this, he demonstrated himself to be righteous. God's wrath over unrighteousness was satisfied by the propitiation made by the sacrifice of Christ⁴³. Within the argument we are exploring in this section, God's righteousness here means that God acts according to his justice: the sin (also the sin in the past) had to be dealt with, and God's righteousness was satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ as *ἱλαστήριον*.

The word ἱλαστήριον in the LXX is most often corresponding to the Hebrew word *kappōret*, translated "mercy seat" in the NRSV. The mercy seat covered the Ark of the Covenant that was placed in the sanctuary inside the curtain (Lev 16:2). The references to its function and use are scarce, but in Lev 16, we read that on the Day of Atonement, Aaron was supposed to make offerings in front of the mercy seat and sprinkle some blood from the sacrificed bull on the front of it (Lev 16:14). Jesus is obviously not the mercy seat in such a physical sense, but he is too closely related to propitiation for sin. Moo suggests to interpret it "sacrifice of atonement"⁴⁴, which seems to fit well with the view that God is maintaining his righteous character by dealing with sin. *How* a sacrifice works to atone for sin cannot be treated within the scope of this thesis; we will simply suppose that somehow it can, and that this is a condition for this interpretational category to work.

The sins previously committed seems to mean the sins before the cross-event that initiates the "but now" of this passage. Those sins were not simply *unpunished* or *forgiven*, but their penalty was *postponed*⁴⁵. That penalty finally was made, demonstrated that God did not overlook them, but reacted to them, in accordance with his righteousness.

If we now look back to v.22 again, we find that the argument seems to have moved us away from the point that was supposed to be the focal point of this chapter. The "in Christ for all who believe"-part seems to emphasize the justification of the sinner, while the latter part seem to emphasize the integrity of God in justifying the sinner. The explanation could be that "δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ [=θεοῦ]" has a different meaning in the two last verses than in the two first of this section, but it does not have to be so. If the righteousness of God is disclosed by the means of Jesus being put forward as a sacrifice for atonement, it shows that God is good (but not necessarily righteous) by justifying the believer even though he or she is a sinner, but also that God is righteous, staying true to his own character, by dealing with the sin, not letting it go unpunished.

⁴³ *The Epistle to the Romans*, 237–238.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.

This argument seems to be consistent, explaining what the righteousness of God is, namely God's righteous character which "forces" him to deal with sin appropriately and working for redemption of his falling creation. Now we will examine the other popular view on God's righteousness as an attribute of God, namely his *covenant faithfulness*.

3.2.2 God's Covenant Faithfulness

This view shares many similarities with the previous section. What singles this interpretation out from the previous, is the claim that "δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ" refers specifically to God's covenant with Abraham. Such a view could be raised on the basis of the semantic meaning of the expression "δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ" or because its use in the text requires it. As we saw in the introductory chapter (in the introduction to the possible meanings of δικαιοσύνη, 1.3.1.2), the term can be used about keeping one's obligations, but that this is just one out of more possible meanings the expression could have. That means that we should demand clear arguments from the text to follow such a narrow interpretation compared to the previous, somewhat wider interpretation of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as an attribute of God's character.

To understand what such arguments could be, we will return to some more of the context to our section with focus on the ethnic diversity.

The first four chapters of Romans seem to deal with the common situation of Jews and Gentiles, which probably was seen as problematic by many Jews, as we can get a sense of e.g. in 2:25f, as Paul provokes them by claiming that the value of their circumcision is dependent on their law-keeping. We should remember that we do not have any secure knowledge about how much Paul knew about the circumstances in Rome. Perhaps had he heard a rumor about divisions between the Jews or Jewish Christians and the gentiles; the former group boasting about their special status or trying to convince the latter group to adapt their practices or something like that, but we cannot know for sure. Such explanation does seem tempting, not least due to the fact that the Jews were recently allowed back into Rome after a short period of exclusion (probably from 49-54⁴⁶). We should nevertheless not put too much confidence in such theories. It could also be a general concern of Paul, to make both Jews and gentiles aware on the right way to behave now that they know the gospel. They should do good and not judge one another (e.g. vv.2:1.10). Paul also seems to be concerned about the unity of all Christians, and argues they share a common fate: both Jews and Greeks are under the power of sin; none are righteous and all have fallen short of the glory of God (3:9f.23); but, for their common rescue – the righteousness of God are for all who believe (3:22). In chapter 4 Paul argues that since Abraham was without the law, the law cannot be decisive for the

⁴⁶ Moo 1996, 4-5.

benefits of God's righteousness. The covenant texts also says that all nations will be blessed through Abraham (Gen 18:18; 22:18), but it is uncertain whether this was important for shaping Paul's thoughts, as he does not mention or allude to this part of the covenant. There has been a lot of dispute over the relationship between Jews and gentiles, through the history of Israel, and also in the New Testament scholarship. Since this is not my major concern for this thesis, I will assume that both bringing the peoples together as one united family *and* the individual justification before God could be important aspects of his covenant faithfulness.

Before going back to the section 3:21-26, we must remember that this chapter is not about whether God is faithful to his covenant or not, but whether the expression δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ denotes this attribute of God specifically. N.T. Wright claims that this is the case in this text, arguing that the function of 3:22 is not to say only how God fulfilled his plan rescuing the whole kind from sin and death, but also how he accomplished this "Israel-shaped world-redeeming plan *through the faithfulness of the Messiah*"⁴⁷. To make it clearer, it is about God rescuing humankind, but the emphasize lies on how it is done, namely through the faithfulness of the Messiah. That it is through the Messiah is not a coincidence. That is how God did it without compromising the covenant, which said that Israel should be the means of this rescue plan. As in the previous section, this one also emphasizes God's integrity, but instead of the integrity that is jeopardized by justifying the sinner, it is the integrity of his promises to Israel. They were supposed to be those through whom blessings to the nations would be brought about. But in the first chapters of Romans, they are receivers alongside the nations (gentiles). This is because they failed to fulfill their function as a people. But God still fulfilled his plan, the covenant, through Israel, but more specifically, through Israel's Messiah⁴⁸.

Wright renders "διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ" as the "*faithfulness of Christ Jesus*", instead of "faith in Christ Jesus" (as nearly all translations and most commentators do). He does not think that this faithfulness (of Christ) is the same faith as when one say "saved by *faith*, not by works", but that it is his *faithfulness unto death*, and that that is a redeeming, dealing-with-sin death that makes it possible for sinners to be justified⁴⁹. Against this, it has been claimed that if it was so, we should expect Paul elsewhere to use "πίστις" with reference to Jesus' faithfulness or the verb "πιστεύω" with Jesus as subject. Rather we find that with respect to the verb, that when it is related to Jesus, Jesus is the object, typically with a preposition⁵⁰. And with respect to the adjective, it is twice connected to Jesus' own faith (2 Thess 3:3 and 2 Tim 2:13), but neither of them is about Jesus'

⁴⁷ Wright 2007, 203, emphasize his.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 203-204.

⁵⁰ Irons 2015, 330.

faithfulness unto death⁵¹. Additionally, the most common meaning of “πίστις” in the Pauline epistles and also in the whole NT (and LXX) is “faith” and not “faithfulness”. Wright’s rendering, therefore seems improbable, but although this rendering seems to fit best with a covenant faithfulness-reading of vv.21f, it is not necessary for such interpretation. Dunn represents a covenant faithfulness reading of this section, maintaining the objective rendering “faith in Jesus Christ”⁵². In fact, this distinction does not seem decisive for Wright’s interpretation either. He emphasizes God’s fulfilling of his covenant through the obedience of Christ. But, even if the emphasize on that obedience is lacking in the “διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ”-construction in v.22, it is still clearly present in the coming verses referring to the cross.

Another feature that is typical for those interpreting δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as God’s covenant faithfulness, is to show that the latter verses of the section (vv.25bf) is not about Paul demonstrating that God is not unrighteous in justifying the sinner. The link to the covenant is not strong, but the following argument will try to show that this interpretation also can explain these verses, without falling back into the more general interpretation of God’s righteousness as presented in the previous section. Some scholars arguing for the covenant faithfulness interpretation, render v.25b as “He did this to show his covenant faithfulness *through* the passing over (in his forbearance) of sins committed beforehand.” That was Wright’s rendering⁵³. Dunn translates similarly, though he uses the preposition ‘in’ instead of *through*⁵⁴. Compared to the NRSV, we note that Wright and Dunn (as well as Käsemann and Kümmel⁵⁵) translate the passing over of sins previously committed, as the means by which God showed his covenant faithfulness, instead of the reason why this demonstration was necessary. Theologically speaking, such an interpretation is not impossible. God has often demonstrated his covenant faithfulness by forgiveness of sins, freedom from slavery and restoration, despite the lack of faithfulness from his people. But, as several commentators have pointed out, such interpretation seems to require some “text-bending”.

There are especially two features that will help us determine whether this option is grammatically plausible. First, the word “πάρεσιν”, as we have already seen translated as “pass over”. The two different meanings implied for the two different interpretations are respectively “overlook” and “remit”. Secondly, we will examine the construction “διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν”. διὰ + accusative, normally

⁵¹ Ibid., 330-331.

⁵² Dunn 1988, 177-178.

⁵³ Wright 2004, 55.

⁵⁴ Dunn 1988, 163.

⁵⁵ Irons 2015, 281.

means “on account of”, but for the interpretation that we now examine, it must could be translated as “through” or “by the means of”. Such meanings are normally construed with διὰ + genitive.

I will now suggest two renderings to highlight the differences between the “traditional” and the “covenant-faithfulness” interpretations, where i = the general view from the previous section (“God is righteous”); ii = the “covenant-faithfulness” view, which we currently examine. The controversial features are marked with italics and upper numbers, where 1 = πάρεσις and 2 = διὰ + acc.:

- i. God demonstrated his righteousness, *because*¹ he had *overlooked*² sins committed beforehand.
- ii. God demonstrated his righteousness *through*¹ *remitting*² sins committed beforehand.

Let us first examine the word πάρεσις (πάρεσις). The word is a hapax legomenon in the Greek New Testament (NA28) and it does not occur in the LXX either. According to BDAG, the primary translation seems to be “deliberate disregard, *passing over, letting go unpunished*”, although the meaning “remitting” is also witnessed in the extra-biblical material. Similarly, in a survey of the same witnesses done by Irons, a clear majority of those bear a sense closer to “letting go” than to “forgive”, thus favoring the former interpretation⁵⁶.

Then we move on to the δια-construction. διὰ + acc., can bear several meanings. BDAG here has two main meanings. The first is “marker of extension through an area, *through*” (B1)⁵⁷. Although the word suggested in this translation fits, the definition indicates that this is a physical, and not an instrumental “through”, which then does not make sense of this sentence. The next main definition is “marker of something constituting cause” (B2), with four subcategories, where two could fit our case, namely: (B2a) “the reason why something happens, results, exists” (which fits the interpretation from the section above (“God is righteous”)); and (B2d) “instead of διὰ with genitive to denote the efficient cause we may have διὰ, *by*”. This fits the latter interpretation, but the occurrences witnessed for the latter is few and none are Pauline, making this option less likely than the above.

In sum, we must regard these evidences for a “covenant-faithfulness” interpretation, as implausible, following a dismissal of the second interpretation (ii) above, which we have discussed in this section. That does of course not mean that God is unfaithful to his covenant, but it is unlikely that that could be the interpretation of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (or αὐτοῦ) in this paragraph. But, if this meaning was

⁵⁶ Ibid., 282-286.

⁵⁷ This and the following references in parentheses within this paragraph refer to definitions in BDAG (pp.225-6).

strongly established before turning to this text, as a way of saying “God’s covenant faithfulness”, it would be possible to read this passage accordingly.

3.3 A Righteous Status Given by God to Those in Christ

Could it be that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ here refers to an ethical or judicial righteousness that is *from God*, imputed or reckoned to the believer? This alternate is suggested by many scholars and it even seems to have had an impact on some modern translations of the Bible⁵⁸. In what follows, we will examine this interpretation. Within such an interpretational line there are many disagreements and differences about whether this status given is ethical or judicial, or whether it is imputed, imparted, infused, reckoned or something else. We will not go into any of those, because all of them belong to the category “gift from God”. We will simply see if it is a righteousness separate from God, that is, a righteousness that does not describe God (neither character nor actions), but something which God might give to the believer.

Such an interpretation seems like a fitting rendering for vv.21-25a: Justification is the work of God and a gift from God, through Jesus, to all who believes. However, such a rendering is not so easily applied to vv.25bf. How can “(in his forbearance) overlooking sins committed in the past” be a *reason* why God demonstrated that he gives the status ‘righteous’ to those who believe in Jesus, by putting Jesus forward as a sacrifice of atonement? Some, then, suggests that the expression is used in two different senses in this section (vv.21-26), namely referring to (i) the justifying act of God and (ii) the integrity of God⁵⁹. We will therefore first examine the passages separately, and then will then return to whether such a division is plausible.

i. Vv.21-25a

There are especially two features in this section that could strengthen the view on the righteousness of God as a gift from God to the believer. That is the participle “δικαιούμενοι” in such close literary connection to δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ; then the *way* the righteousness of God is made available (“apart from the law” and “through faith in Jesus Christ”⁶⁰), which brought us some distortion at the end of the discussion above on God’s righteousness meaning that “God is righteous”. There we concluded that it was not impossible to interpret as an integrated part of God’s righteous character, but soon we will see if it is more likely to refer to the righteousness of God as a gift.

⁵⁸ NIV: “This righteousness is given [...] to all who believe”; B11: “Dette er Guds rettfærdighet som gis [...] til alle som tror”

⁵⁹ Moo 1996, 219.

⁶⁰ Assuming that this is the best rendering of “διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” (as discussed above), but not solely dependent of that.

3.3.1.1 δικαιούμενοι

God's righteousness as a status reckoned to the believer might find support in the participial phrase "they are now justified by his grace as a gift" ("δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι"). Two δικ- words are used, first to describe something connected to God, and then in the very same sentence as a participle describing a status as righteous as a gift by his grace. One can argue that the participle indicates that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in this context, does not point towards an attribute of God, but a status that is applied to humans (since the participle definitely points towards humans being justified): "Humans who receive the righteousness of God by faith are therefore justified or declared righteous"⁶¹.

3.3.1.2 Apart from the Law through Faith in Jesus Christ

The way Paul makes it clear that the righteousness of God is revealed "apart from the law", "freely by God's grace", "to all who believe", could be Paul's way of arguing that the righteousness of God is given as a gift. One cannot become righteous by the works of the law. It is true that it is so, but what Paul means could also be merely that the Jews and gentiles stand in the same position in relation to the righteousness of God, if we here take "the law" as referring to the Jewish identity markers (typically circumcision, Sabbath-keeping and food-laws). That would exclude the gentiles: the righteousness of God is not through Jewish identity markers, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

Many commentators claim that Rom 3,21f is a recapitulation of the thesis statement of Rom 1:17, and that this passage should be interpreted in a manner consistent to that⁶². In Rom 1:17 Paul quotes Hab 2:4: "The righteous (δίκαιος) shall live by faith". Here, "the righteous" definitely points towards the status of the one that has faith. Soon to come in the letter, Paul is going to use the case of Abraham, where he twice (vv.4:3.22) cites from Gen 15:6: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness (δικαιοσύνην)". This text also point towards the status reckoned to one with faith. These two quotes used by Paul in the same part of the letter, use two different expressions to denote the same status as righteous. In both cases the status as righteous is credited on the basis of *faith* (Rom 1:17/Hab 2:4: "ἐκ πίστεως", noun; Rom 4:3.22/Gen 15:6: "Ἐπίστευσεν", verb), which is a theme highly present in 3:21-26. Paul uses Old Testament material to prove that righteousness is based on faith, and that it always was so. Vv. 21-25a seems to serve the same purpose in the argument, though without Old Testament citations.

⁶¹ Irons 2015, 323.

⁶² Ibid.

The two examples quoted in 1:17 and 4:3/22 could also be what Paul means by saying that the righteousness of God is attested by the law and the prophets (3:21). These two texts are not about God's character or actions, but humans' status before God⁶³.

Both the tight connection between having faith and receiving a status as righteous, and the fact that Paul (by citing two Old Testament verses) uses both δικαιοσύνη and δίκαιος to denote a status as righteous, are strong arguments for saying that the "righteousness" in "God's righteousness" is a status that might be declared on the believers, leaving the genitive to be of origin.

ii. Vv.25b-26

So far the arguments for this interpretation seem compelling, but now we face a problem: it does not fit the last verses of the whole section (vv.21-26). In these one and a half verses, "his righteousness" must point towards the way God is righteous: God can maintain his righteous character ("his righteousness" in vv.25bf) even while he acts to justify sinful people ("God's righteousness" in vv.21f) because Christ, in his propitiatory sacrifice, provides full satisfaction of the demands of God's impartial, invariable justice⁶⁴.

This does not invalidate the interpretation provided in this section for vv.21-25a. One word (or expression) *can* mean two different things in the same context, although if possible and without sufficient reasons, we should rather assume the same meaning if possible.

3.4 Preliminary Conclusion

As we have seen, there are at least two different interpretations that seem plausible. First, that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ refers to an attribute of God, seems to work perfectly if we take it to mean that God demonstrated his righteousness by putting Jesus forward as propitiation to satisfy his wrath over the sins committed in the past. This fits all four instances of the expression through the section. Its interpretation for vv.25-26 also seems to be a necessary presumption to interpret the expression in vv.21f as a status given as a gift, which is the second plausible interpretation of the section. This interpretation seems a little less consistent, by only fitting in vv.21-25a, requiring a change of the meaning of the expression "righteousness of God" in the last verses. Since such clear change of meaning is not necessary for the "attribute"-interpretation, that is preferable.

There are no internal evidences in this section that suggest that it should be taken as "God's covenant faithfulness". On the contrary, most of the features used to suggest such an interpretation, all seem to be speculative.

⁶³ Ibid., 324.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 325; Moo 1996, 242.

Is God giving away his own righteousness? If we could isolate v.22, the interpretation that gives the answer 'yes' (God's righteousness as a gift) to the question would be about as good as one suggesting 'no' (God's righteousness is his righteous character – God is righteous). But when we look at the larger section, the latter works better to explain all four occurrences of the expression. We can from this chapter not boldly conclude that God does not give away his own righteousness, it is indeed very plausible. Nevertheless, the best argument does not suggest such a conclusion.

4 Rom 10:3 and Phil 3:9: The Righteousness *from* God

Rom 10:3: *For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. (NRSV)*

Phil 3:9: *8 [...] I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. (NRSV)*

4.1 Introduction

It might seem strange to examine these two texts together in one chapter. The reason why we are going to do that, which is briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, will be more fully explained soon. But first, we are going to take a brief look at each of the texts in their respective contexts.

4.1.1 Rom 10:3

This verse is placed within the passage of the letter to the Romans, which is about ethnic Israel (vv.9:30-10:13) and their unbelief in the gospel. The passage states that the gentiles have attained the righteousness of faith, while the Israel who strived for the righteousness based on the law did not attain it, because it was not based on faith but works (vv.9:30-32). Then Paul prays that they may be saved, and he attests that they have a zeal for God, but not an enlightened one. They have been ignorant of the righteousness of God and tried to establish their own righteousness, and the result of this is that they have not submitted to God's righteousness.

4.1.2 Phil 3:9

Phil 3:9 is a part of a defense against the "dogs" and "evil workers" of Philippi (v.3:2), which seems to be Judaizers or Jews, arguing that Christians also should get circumcised⁶⁵. Paul claims that "we" (the Christians) are the circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God, boast in Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh (v.3). He then claim that if anybody could have a reason to be confident in the flesh, it would be him (vv.4-6). But all these reasons to be confident in his flesh, Paul now regards as garbage, in order that he may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of his own, but one that comes through faith in Jesus, the righteousness *from* (ἐκ) God based on faith.

4.1.3 Similarities

The similarities between the two texts lies mainly in the different "kinds" of righteousness mentioned (righteousness from the law; from faith; my own righteousness; and the righteousness

⁶⁵ Thurston 2005, 112.

from/of God). The one that Israel strived for, and the one that Paul thought he had, when he was a Pharisee. That is the righteousness that comes from the law, which they/he tried to establish on their/his own, but which is not the right righteousness. The right righteousness, the righteousness that has to do with God, is the one that the gentiles attained, and which Paul hope to be found having.

Before turning back to our categories, we will discuss whether the righteousness *from* God in Phil 3:9 refers to God's own righteousness, and how the conclusion to this question (eventually) influence the discussion of Rom 10:3.

4.2 Phil 3:9: Whose Righteousness?

In the two previous chapters, we have been discussing whether God gives away his own righteousness or not from texts that contains the expression "the righteousness of God" (or "God's righteousness"). That is also the expression that is used twice in Rom 10:3. But, in Phil 3:9 we also have a preposition, "from" ("ἐκ"). That could mean that the righteousness is not necessarily the one "of God", but a righteousness *from* God ("τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην"). I have not found any scholars that claim this instance of the expression to be something other than the righteousness that comes *from* God (which means God as the *giver, source* or *origin* of the righteousness). The remaining question we then have to discuss to be able to conclude whether this verse is about God giving away his own righteousness or not, is whether this righteousness is God's own.

N.T. Wright argues that while "δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ" refers to the covenant faithfulness of God (as an attribute to God's character) – God's own righteousness, "τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην" refers to a righteousness that God gives, but which is not God's own⁶⁶. He argues for this by comparing it to the opposite statement in the same verse: does "δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου" refer to the status that the law *possess*? No, it refers to the status some thought they could attain from keeping the law; the status which keeping the law *gives*⁶⁷.

Wright's argument explains how "the righteousness from God" in Phil 3:9 does not need to mean the same thing here as in the other instances where it occurs without the preposition, but it cannot exclude it either. Oppositely, one could claim that the righteousness in Phil 3:9 is God's own; or that neither the righteousness in Phil 3:9 nor in the other texts discussed is God's own in a possessive way, but that they all is given by God (that is to say that Phil 3:9 is the clearest model for what happens in the texts). To find out how Phil 3:9 relates to God's own righteousness, and then, whether Phil 3:9 can be used to answer the main problem, we will compare the two texts we are

⁶⁶ Wright 2009, 150.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

discussing in this chapter. If we can show that Paul's usage of the two expressions are the same in both texts, it would strongly suggest that it indeed is the same righteousness, despite the preposition in Phil 3:9.

As already mentioned is the most obvious parallel between the texts their use of different kinds of righteousness. If we include the literary context of Rom 10:3 (9:30-10:6), both texts contains the concepts "the righteousness of/from God", "my/their own righteousness", "the righteousness of faith" (Rom 9:30; 10:6) and "the righteousness of the law" (Rom 9:31; 10:5). Except from the second concept ("my/their own righteousness") the two texts share the same language and the same anti-theses (my/their righteousness against God's righteousness; and the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of the law)⁶⁸. "My" and "their" righteousness are also probably referring to the same kind of righteousness, as "my" is used by Paul speaking of himself as one that could boast in the flesh (according to his old standards) and "their" of Israel, which also counted on the works of the law. The changing point in Paul's life was (knowing) Christ (Phil 3:7f), and his new righteous status comes from faith in Christ (v.3:9). For Israel, Christ has become a stumbling stone (Rom 9:33), which seems to cause them condemnation (v.10:1). What they need to do to attain righteousness is faith in Christ (v.9:32a.33b; 10:4).

These strong similarities should make us strongly consider interpreting these two texts the same way, unless the arguments for interpreting Rom 10:3 as an attribute of God's character is to be preferred, since that is nothing that Paul could be found having ("ἔχων"). We will now go on, examine the how the different categories from the introductory chapter fits in these texts.

4.3 An Attribute of God's Character

4.3.1 Rom 10:3

In Romans 10:3 the expression "righteousness of God" occurs twice. The NRSV translation renders the first as "the righteousness that comes from God", and the second as "God's righteousness", which Israel has not submitted to. The preposition in the first occurrence is inserted in the translation. A more concordant translation would be that "they did not know the righteousness of God" (NIV). This rendering makes it possible to interpret the expression as an attribute of God's character (which "a righteousness *from* God" does not).

In the previous chapter, we split the chapter "An Attribute of God's Character" into two. First, we treated God acting according to the norm "righteousness", showing that God indeed demands satisfaction for sins. Then, we showed a relational interpretation, claiming that God is faithful to his covenant. It seems difficult to apply the first sub-category from the last chapter on Rom 9:30-10:13.

⁶⁸ Irons 2015, 335.

It seems that if this verse should be interpreted as an attribute of God's character, it has to be in the latter way. More specifically, we should then interpret the righteousness of God, as God carrying out his divine plan.

The meaning of this part of the verse is then that Israel is being ignorant (ἀγνοοῦντες) of the fact that God is just and/or faithful to his plan (in which the covenant has a major significance). This seems improbable if we understand it as cognitive ignorance, in the sense that Jews, according to Paul, did not know that God should be recognized as having a just character and as being faithful to the covenant. Of course, the Jews held this to be true! Perhaps should it rather be understood as Israel not being aware of the consequences of God's righteousness, namely that their right relationship to God is defined by faith (and faithfulness) and not by their own works? Or perhaps, as N.T. Wright suggests, was Israel mistake to imagine that the purpose of God was not "the single purpose through Israel for the world", but "a single purpose for Israel apart from the world"⁶⁹. They forgot God's wider purposes with the covenant and claimed on to the law and thereby their exclusivity. If this is the case, the second occurrence of the expression ("τῆ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ") in the last part of the verse, fits as an expansion to the first part of the verse: Israel does not submit themselves fittingly to God's plan (his righteous way of acting in the world). Or as Dunn puts it: "...irony of ironies, by seeking to establish righteousness as something peculiarly theirs they were actually putting themselves outside God's righteousness, resisting rather than receiving the saving grace of God"⁷⁰. This does not merely mean that Israel have failed to fulfill their part of God's plan through the covenant, but also that their covenant membership and part in the salvific purposes of God is at stake (as Paul fears in vv.1f).

4.3.2 Phil 3:9

As already indicated in section 4.2, there is no way that this category will fit Phil 3:9. Paul cannot neither be found *having* God's righteous character, plan for the world or covenant faithfulness. That means (as is also already been mentioned) that this interpretation contains a rejection of identifying the themes of Rom 10:3 and Phil 3:9. But as the arguments for such an interpretation is strong, the consequence might be the rejection of this interpretational category for Rom 10:3.

4.4 Status as Righteous before God

4.4.1 Rom 10:3

What about the classic protestant interpretation that the righteousness of God is a status reckoned to the believer as a gift, making justification possible (and maybe even secure)? Does it fit in Rom

⁶⁹ Wright 2009, 243.

⁷⁰ Dunn 1988, *Romans 9-16*, 596.

10:3? At least it does on the literary level: Israel did not know that the forensic status as righteous is given as a gift, based on faith (or faithfulness). Therefore, they tried to establish it on their own, trying to keep the law. The result is that they have not received the gift and they failed to attain the righteousness of God, the one that justifies.

The forensic aspect of the text seems to be present. Perhaps most explicitly in v.1, where Paul writes that he desires that Israel will be saved. This fact is important arguing for the forensic aspect of righteousness. That is because if the problem is one's individual status before God, the solution needs to be a restored status or verdict as righteous. But it does not exclude the former category (attribute of God). As we have seen are there also soteriological consequences tied to Israel's covenant status.

One objection to this interpretation is based on the word "ὑποτάσσω", which in the above translation (NRSV) is rendered as "submit to" ("[Israel] have not submitted to God's righteousness"). The translation is possible. One can translate "ὑποτάσσω" with "submit to", and for us that sounds something like "accept", which would fit this interpretation. But more commonly, the word means "subordinate", which in English connotes a stronger sense of "being put under another's authority" (Christians under God, wives under their husbands, servants under their masters). We should not be surprised if Paul's wording was filled with great seriousness (as it is), but still: If the righteousness of God is a status as righteous before God, Paul's wording seems rather strange. He could urge Israel to "ὑποτάσσεσθε" to God or God's plan, but hardly to a status.

Moo avoids this problem in an interpretation similar to the one we are discussing. He states that the righteousness of God has two sides: on the one side, God's activity of "declaring right" and on the other the status of being right with God that people receive when they respond in faith to that activity⁷¹. With this interpretation, there is still a status as righteous received from God, but he also lets the expression express consequences in the present: "the righteousness of God is an active force to which one must humbly and obediently subordinate oneself"⁷².

Another argument that might be in favor of this interpretation is the same as one of the arguments in the chapter about Rom 3:21f: the focus on the importance of "faith" and that the righteousness of God is "apart from works" (see section 3.3.1.2). The same theme is clearly present throughout this whole section (vv.9:30-32; 10:3f; and the whole section 5-13). As also objected in section 3.3.1.2, this could perhaps also be an argument of the above interpretation; that the righteousness of God has something to do with God's plan. In that case, "works of the law" must be taken corporately to Israel

⁷¹ Moo 1996, 633.

⁷² Ibid.

trying to keep God's righteousness for itself, excluding non-Jews ("their own" = "Israel's own"), while for the argument to fit the "humans' status as righteous"-interpretation of this section, it must be taken as the individual Jew's self-righteousness. To state it clearer, the two options of how to interpret "their own righteousness", which they tried to establish, are (in the opposite order of how they just were presented):

- i. Individual/self-righteousness⁷³. The individual Jew's attempt to establish his/her own righteousness before God, through keeping the law (which is not working, because God's righteousness can only be attained through faith in Jesus).
- ii. Corporate/national righteousness. Israel's emphasizing of the works of the law as a national identity marker, excluding all non-Jews from it (but really causing their own exclusion from it).

The first option supports the interpretation of this section ("status as righteous before God") since the "problem" in that case is the individual Jew's status before God. The latter supports the interpretation of the previous section (attribute of God's character), since the "problem" with Israel's national righteousness, is that they fail to do play their part in God's plan (the covenant). Moo argues for the first, using four arguments. First (1), he emphasizes that the immediate contrast to "their own righteousness" is "the righteousness of God". Since God's righteousness is not simply possessive, but also has a nuance of source, this "favors an individualizing rather than a corporate interpretation", he claims⁷⁴. Second (2), "their own righteousness" stands in continuity with OT references to "one's own" righteousness, for example (and specially significant), that Israel should remember that it was not because of their own righteousness, but because of the Lord's gracious choice of Israel to be his own possession, that they were to inherit the promised land⁷⁵. Then (3) he argues that "their own righteousness" as "self-righteousness" suits the context best, since the parallel references to righteousness in 9:31-32a and 10:5 have roughly the same meaning. And finally (4), he makes a reference to Phil 3:9, which is the only other time Paul contrasts "God's righteousness" and a righteousness of "one's own", and states that there the former is qualified as "based on faith" and the latter as "based on the law", which again suggests that "Paul thinks of "one's own" righteousness as a righteousness tied to human effort rather than a righteousness confined to Israel"⁷⁶.

But none of the arguments are convincing, as I will show in the same order as they were presented in the previous paragraph. (1) It is right that the contrast to "their own righteousness", is "the

⁷³ This distinction is made on the basis of Moo's presentation (Moo 1996, 634).

⁷⁴ Moo 1996, 634.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 635.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

righteousness of God”, but he does not make clear why he thinks that the latter is possessive or “has a nuance of source” and neither why this favors the individualizing interpretation. (2) It is very odd to use God’s election of Israel as the opposite of “their own righteousness”, as an argument in favor of interpreting “their own righteousness” individually. The point is the exact opposite! In Deut 9:4-6, “my righteousness” (NRSV) although grammatically having a singular form, must point to Israel as a nation. It is not because of their corporate righteousness that they might inherit the land, but because of their wickedness, and in order to fulfill the promise to Israel’s ancestors (v.5). In v.6 it is also said explicit that the speech in Deut 9 is directed at the (stubborn) people. This argument could hardly point stronger in the corporate direction! (3) Then, the parallel to vv.9:31-32a and v.10:5. It is not clear how the former verses (9:31-32a) is an argument for the individual interpretation, as they address Israel who strived for the righteousness based on the law. Surely, this could refer to the individual law-keeping. But it could also refer to the corporate upholding of the law as an identity marker. Verse 10:5 has a clearer individual sense, referring to “the person” who does “this things” (the commandments of the law), in singular. This is how the individual is not supposed to strive for righteousness (while the right way of doing it is described in the following verses, concluding that having faith in the gospel is what makes one attain the righteousness that comes by faith). Moo is right that v.10:5 is about “their righteousness” as an individual righteousness. But that verse is the introduction to the solution. The problem could have been the excluding corporate righteousness, while the solution could be the rejection of this (that is that one lives by keeping the law) and putting faith in God’s plan and in Jesus. Moo’s final argument (4) is the parallel to Paul in Phil 3:6-9, which we already have discussed. But also here we find that Paul’s former blamelessness to righteousness under the law, is primarily the things that marked him out as a Jew. His problem could have been his pride of his “Jewishness” and his persecution of the church, who actually had the right kind of faith. Furthermore, we see that the same change in Paul’s own life, is what he claims to be the solution in the already mentioned section 10:5-13.

4.4.2 Phil 3:9

In Phil 3:9, the “righteousness from God” is something Paul wants to be found having (ἔχων). There are no other verses in the Bible about having a righteousness, that could help us understand this verse. Neither a righteousness from God nor any other righteousness. But with the participle “having”, we would expect the “ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην” to be a status as justified and eventually saved. This is also clearly supported by Paul’s hopes for the future (e.g. the resurrection from the death (v.11). As we have already discussed (section 4.2), this is not necessarily God’s own righteousness. We found that it probably could be identified with the occurrences in Rom 10:3, but after the discussion in the previous section (4.4.1, especially the arguments 3 and 4), we have found

that although the parallels are clear, they nevertheless do not seem to be about the same kind of righteousness.

4.5 Preliminary Conclusion

In this chapter we have found that the “ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην” in Phil 3:9 refers to a status as righteous before God, which is reckoned (or *given*) to the believer (in this case, Paul) by God by faith in Jesus. The question here, is whether this righteousness is God’s own, which the verse does not say explicitly. The parallels to Rom 10:3, that is about God’s own righteousness, could strengthen the theory that the righteousness in Phil 3:9 indeed is God’s own (God as source, author, giver, etc.), if not the arguments from Rom 10:3 clearly contradicts the righteousness of God as a status *from* God. But in Rom 10:3 that was what we found.

The best interpretation of Rom 10:3, seems to be that Israel were ignorant of God’s purposes for the world, holding on to their exclusivity as God’s people. The result of their ignorance was that they did not submit to the true will of God. Their intentions were good, but since their zeal was not enlightened it could not help them. The righteousness of God is therefore here to be understood as God’s plan (or “saving purposes”) in the world. Although being logically and literarily possible, it does not seem plausible to interpret “the righteousness of God” in this chapter as the individual status given by God to justify humans.

5 Conclusions

Does God give away his own righteousness? None of the four texts that we have examined over three chapters in this thesis, can deny it. The answer “yes” is possible, both in the literary contexts and in the theological “equations”.

Phil 3:9 clearly suggests that the righteousness that justifies is given by God. However, we cannot be sure that this verse is about God’s own righteousness, and we can therefore not use this verse to conclude the thesis.

The occurrence of “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” in 2 Cor 5:21, is the most difficult to interpret. Here, none of the arguments stands out as more convincing than the others, and the cryptic content of the verse also makes it difficult to reject any of the options.

In the four occurrences of “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” in the letter to the Romans (3:21; 3:22; and 10:3 [2x]), the most plausible interpretation seems to be that the righteousness of God describes God’s character and saving actions through the covenant. The interpretation suggesting that “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” always is about God’s covenant faithfulness, seems too narrow, although it is difficult to separate God’s covenant faithfulness from his character and actions in the world. In Rom 3:21f, the interpretation held by those who claim that “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” always refers to God’s covenant faithfulness, is improbable. But the best interpretation in that case: that God justifies sinners while keeping his integrity intact by punishing and making sacrifice for sin, could still be said to be according to the covenant, e.g. by claiming that the punishment of sin is a covenantal necessity with references to the promises of blessings and curses in Deut 28-30, where the theme is the renewal of the covenant.

We should be careful to make too bold statements about the righteousness of God, based on this thesis, since it cannot clearly reject one of the options, but I think we have seen that the best arguments show that God does not give away his own righteousness. This conclusion is strengthened by showing that “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” in the texts discussed in this thesis, as well as the remaining occurrences in the New Testament carries the same meaning. It is thereby not an expression that Paul ascribes different meanings to as it suits him.

That “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” refers to God’s character, does *not* mean that humans are *not* saved freely as a gift by an alien righteousness being reckoned to them. That seems to be what Phil 3:9 says. But it does say that this is probably not what the expression “δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” – God’s *own* righteousness, is about. God’s own righteousness describes how God is righteous in his being and in his acting in the world.

6 Bibliography

6.1 Bibles, Translations, Commentaries and Dictionaries

Bibelen: Den hellige skrift: Det gamle og Det nye testamentet (B11). Det Norske bibelselskap. Oslo: Bibelselskapet, 2011.

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph 2nd Edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.

Danker, F. W., W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago, 2000

The Holy Bible: New International Version (NIV). Zonderwan, 2011.

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989.

Novum Testamentum Graece. Edited by Eberhard and Erwin Nestle, Barbara and Kurt Aland et al. 28th Edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

Septuaginta: id est, Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes. Edited by Alfred Rahlfs. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935.

6.2 Books and Articles

Barnett, Paul. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.

Byrskog, Samuel. *Co-Senders, Co-Authors and Paul's Use of the First Person Plural*. Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche, Vol.87, Nr.3. 1996, 230-250.

Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary 38A. Dallas, Tex: Word Books Publisher, 1988.

- *Romans 9-16*. Word Biblical Commentary 38B. Dallas, Tex: Word Books Publisher, 1988.

- *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1998.

Fee, Gordon D. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.

Guthrie, George H. *2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015.

- Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Philippians*. Revised and expanded by Ralph P. Martin. Word Biblical Commentary 43. Colombia: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2004.
- Hooker, Morna D. *Interchange in Christ*. The Journal of Theological Studies, ns 22 no 2 (1971): 349-361.
- . *On Becoming the Righteousness of God*. Novum Testamentum 50, no 4 (2008), 358-375.
- Irons, Charles Lee. *The Righteousness of God*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015.
- Martin, Ralph P. *2 Corinthians*. Word Biblical Commentary 38A. Dallas, Tex: Word Books Publisher, 1986.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Thurston, Bonnie B. *Philippians and Philemon*. Sacra Pagina series vol.10. Minneapolis, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2005.
- Wright, Nicholas T. *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.
- . *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.
- . *Paul for Everyone: Romans: Pt. 1: Chapters 1-8*. London: SPCK Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.