

“The Alleged Legalism in Paul’s Doctrine of Justification”
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Comparisons between the teaching of Paul and the teaching of Jesus are the fashion of the day. A purely historical and a practical motive combine to lend interest to these comparisons. Prompted by whichever motive, the problem sought to be solved by them is the continuity or non-continuity of the religious impulse which shaped the origin of Christianity. The historian asks: Were two distinct forces introduced, the one by Jesus, the other by Paul? Or must we say that, on the whole, Paul’s work lay in the line of the further carrying out of the principle introduced by Christ? If the former, can we determine the exact relation of difference or perhaps even heterogeneity in which the two stood to each other? Can we trace the interaction between them in their subsequent development, the degree in which each contributed toward the final result, and the mission which in virtue of this final result Christianity has since then accomplished in the world? If the latter, can we point out the unity of fundamental principle in the variety of doctrinal formulation? Can we draw the lines which run from the center posited by Jesus to the several points of the wide circumference along which we observe the versatile and comprehensive religious genius of Paul moving? To the practical mind, on the other hand, this same problem of continuity, or lack of continuity, appears of decisive importance for the attitude to be assumed toward the modern attempt to supplant the theology of the Reformation, so largely based on Paul, by a less elaborate, less speculative, more congenial, because supposedly more humanitarian type of religious thought. As Paul is usually identified with the traditional theology, so Jesus has come to stand in many minds for the milder, more simple, form of Christianity toward which the tide has been setting for some time and seems to be setting ever increasingly. The watchword, “Back to Christ,” implies the charge, whether consciously realized or not, that Paul has deflected the original impulse imparted by Jesus to Christianity, by bringing to bear upon it another force of decidedly lower character. If such a view could be historically justified, it would furnish the best conceivable defense of the modern desire to shake off the theological trammels of the past. If it cannot be justified, if it can be shown that the theology of Paul is the legitimate offspring of the teaching of Jesus, then an equally strong apology for the type of religion inherited from the Reformation will have been furnished. Paul being the true heir and successor of Jesus, all those who profess to be historic Christians must feel in some sense bound to Paul, as they desire to be loyal to Christ.

Naturally the problem becomes most accentuated where it touches the center of Paul’s teaching. This, we may still insist, is the doctrine of justification. Recent attempts to dislodge it from this position, and to make the mystical aspect of the believer’s relation to Christ, as mediated by the Spirit, entirely coordinated with it—so that each of the two covers the entire range of religious experience, and becomes in reality a duplicate of the other in a different sphere—we cannot recognize as correct from the apostle’s own point of view.¹ In our opinion Paul consciously and consistently subordinated the mystical aspect of the relation to Christ to the forensic one. Paul’s mind was to such an extent forensically oriented that he regarded the entire complex of subjective spiritual changes that take place in the believer and of subjective spiritual blessings enjoyed by the believer as the direct outcome of the forensic work of Christ applied in justification. The mystical is based on the forensic, not the forensic on the mystical.

Nor will it do to deprive the doctrine of justification of its central place in the apostle’s teaching by

explaining its prominence from either apologetic or missionary motives. The former explanation—the apologetic—is defended by Bruce, who with a sort of partiality for what, in the many-sided equipment of the apostle, he feels to be most akin to his own temperament, interprets Paul as the ideal apologete, and intimates that, had not the apostle been forced to it by the exigencies of the Judaistic controversy, he would never have made so much as he does in his epistles of the forensic side of man's relation to God. The implication of such a position would seem to be that, as the apologete distributes the emphasis not according to the inherent and eternal values of things but according to the requirements of a passing situation, so we have no right to say that in Paul's own consciousness justification was the great dominating religious concern.² The latter explanation—the missionary—is presented by Paul Wernle, whose treatise, *Der Christ und die Sünde bei Paulus*, created no little stir in Germany some years ago. According to this writer Paul never intended his doctrine of justification to apply to the Christian life in its further progress. The true Pauline gospel is that justification disposes of the sins of the pre-Christian past and enables the convert to begin with a clean record. After this record has begun, salvation is no longer made dependent on the forgiving grace of God but on holiness of life such as will enable the Christian to stand blameless in the judgment day. Wernle finds the main proof for this position in the fact that Paul nowhere consoles the readers of his epistles, when they have fallen into sin, with the free pardon of justification, but either requires their excommunication from the church or their instantaneous conversion. It was Paul's own personal experience and his theoretical conviction with regard to others, that the Christian can and ought to be sinless. With the stubborn facts of the actual state of affairs in his churches he had not reconciled this theory.³ To both Bruce and Wernle it ought to be sufficient answer to quote Romans 5:1-11 and 8:31-39. The fervor of religious emotion which these passages and others like them breathe is, *toto genere*, different from the heat engendered by controversial debate. Neither are missionary formulas of provisional and relative validity adapted to kindle it. It proves that, where Paul rose to the most intense and comprehensive appreciation of what Christianity stands for, he did not leave behind him the consciousness of justification. On the contrary, it is from this consciousness that he draws the power to wing himself to the sublimest heights of religious enthusiasm.

If, then, justification forms the core of the Pauline gospel, to it ought to be applied the main test which will determine the fact and the degree of the harmony or disharmony of this gospel with that of Jesus. A judgment reached on this point will in all likelihood be typical of the judgment one would reach by instituting the comparison at any other point of the system. Because interpreters are aware of this, it is common with them to conduct the exposition of the apostle's doctrine of justification with a side glance at the teaching of Jesus. One of the most current forms in which the result of such a comparison expresses itself is as follows. There is similarity and dissimilarity between the two. The similarity lies in the conception of the religious ideal to which both attain. The religious ideal to Paul as well as to Jesus is a relation of sonship to God, a state in which everything is determined by the principle of love and not by the Judaistic principle of give and take, of forensic retribution. So far as the Christian life after justification itself is concerned, the apostle consistently carries out his supreme principle of absolute freedom from the law as the means of securing eternal life. Between God and the Christian there is no commercial exchange, but only the interchange of love and filial obedience. This lies entirely in the line of what Jesus taught concerning the fatherhood of God and the sonship of man: it may even claim to be a more complete and more explicit application of it, since in Jesus' mind no clearly defined view seems to have existed as to the bearing of this principle on the question of the observance of the Jewish law. In other words, the

anti-legalism of Jesus was naive and positive; that of Paul was self-conscious, antithetical as well as positive. But Jesus, it is believed, stands infinitely above Paul in the manner in which He reaches this sublime conception of the religious ideal. To Him it was simply the natural, normal relation of man to God, into which even sin could bring no fundamental disturbance. God is Father not only, but in all religious transactions deals with man in the sole capacity of Father. Even into the removal of the barrier which sin has raised between man and God no other attribute enters but that of fatherly love. No atonement, no justification are required: these are not even possible from Jesus' standpoint because they would belie the fatherhood of God; simple forgiveness is the only thing necessary. Consequently here the road of access to the religious ideal and the ideal religious state itself are perfectly harmonious, the conception of God which determines both being one and the same. It is different with Paul. In his conception of Christianity the road which leads to the ideal and the ideal itself are in irreconcilable conflict. Through his doctrine of justification the apostle reintroduces into his system the fundamental error of Judaism, the error that God deals with man on the basis of law and commercial exchange, instead of on the basis of love and fatherhood. For in justification God acts, so far as its forensic side is concerned, not on the principle of love, but in the capacity of a judge who sternly exacts from man what is due to the law. The fact that the point at which the satisfaction of the debt is insisted upon is transferred from the sinner to Christ is a mere formal difference, which in no wise affects the religious principle involved, nor the plane on which the transaction moves. Thus we are confronted with the singular phenomenon that the apostle readmits into the very foundation of his own system an error which with great energy he had pursued into every corner of the Jewish religious mind and endeavored to expel. He recognizes in the entrance into the Christian life that for which, once within, he has no further use. Or, as Pfleiderer has strikingly expressed it, he overcomes the Jewish legalism by means of its own presuppositions, and for doing so pays the penalty of making his doctrine a compromise between the prophetic and Pharisaic theory, so that its value as a positive expression of the Christian consciousness must appear highly problematical, inasmuch as it is too seriously weighted with the associations of the Jewish legal religion ever to become an adequate formula for the religion of the grace of God and the sonship of man.⁴ The apostle had still too much of the Jew in him to rise to the sublime simplicity of Jesus, who swept away at one stroke the basis of legalism and could after that well afford to leave the superstructure for the moment unassailed. Paul cleared away the superstructure, but has re-embedded the greater part of the basis in the foundation of his own theology.

The charge brought against the apostle is a serious one. As we have already seen, the doctrine of justification cannot be relegated to a subordinate place in the Pauline teaching. If error attaches to it, it must needs be a *vitium originis* which will corrupt the system in all its ramifications. It is not the purpose of the present paper to reconcile Paul with Jesus. Where a comparison between two historic bodies of religious truth is made, for the correctness of the conclusion everything depends on the correctness with which each of the two has been interpreted for itself. In order to test the validity of the above comparison, we should, therefore, have to ask, first of all, whether the interpretation of Jesus which enters into it can be considered correct and adequate. Did Jesus actually recognize no other relationship of God to man than that of fatherhood, and no other principle of treatment of man by God than that of paternal love? A great deal has been said and might again be said to the contrary, some of which would perhaps make the distance between Paul and Jesus in the matter of the relative importance assigned to the divine righteousness and the divine love appear less formidable than it is often represented. But, as has been said, we do not here intend to raise this large problem.

All we are concerned with for the moment is the charge of *internal contradiction within the limits of the Pauline system itself*. The doctrine of justification is said to be inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the apostle's own theology.

Before we inquire into the justice of this charge, an important distinction ought to be drawn. We take for granted that the criticism the charge implies is not a dogmatic or philosophical criticism, but a biblico-theological criticism, i.e., that it relates to an inconsistency within the range of Paul's own doctrinal thinking. He need not have been aware of the contradiction itself, but he must have consciously realized each of the two positions which are asserted to be irreconcilable. Not about a contradiction between what he ought to have inferred from any one of his principles and what he did infer from any other we can debate; but exclusively about an alleged disharmony between what he did infer from certain premises in two actual cases. The necessity for drawing and strictly observing this distinction will at once become apparent, if we formulate it with concrete application to the problem in hand. If it be contended that the mere recognition of the principle of love as foremost in the nature of God and in His soteriological procedure must of necessity exclude the absolute validity of the principle of righteousness as manifested in the insistence upon satisfaction, and that Paul, therefore, when giving such prominence to the divine love as he actually does, was no longer in a position to frame a doctrine of vicarious atonement or forensic justification without involving himself in a palpable contradiction—then it is plain that we are confronted with a philosophical or dogmatic criticism. The question raised in this case will not be what view did Paul himself hold as to the possible coexistence or mutual exclusiveness of absolute love and absolute righteousness, but simply to what length do we feel bound to go from our philosophical or dogmatic standpoint in making the element of divine love, when once it is emphatically affirmed, supersede all other elements in the nature of God and in the work of salvation? It were idle to charge Paul with self-contradiction on such terms. The contradiction really lies between a philosophical or dogmatic theory built by us on a Pauline principle and a theory built by Paul on another principle. But the case will be different if it can be shown that Paul himself in certain connections carries the supremacy of the attribute of love in God so far as consciously to override the absolute validity of the principle of righteousness; and then, in other connections, for temperamental reasons, because the old Judaism in him reasserted itself, rehabilitates this latter principle, in a way which negatives the principle of love. If Paul himself in the progress of his thinking reached the conclusion that God is so supremely and so exclusively love that every forensic relationship between Him and man is derogatory to His character and consequently irreligious, and nevertheless in his doctrines of atonement and justification makes everything revolve around a forensic relationship—in that case and in that case only, a biblico-theological contradiction will have been made out and the charge of relapse into the legalistic error of Judaism substantiated.

The apostle's polemic against the Jewish legalism proceeds along two distinct lines of attack. In the first place, it is rejected because utterly impracticable and futile, because it has never led and can never lead to the end for which the Jewish mind pursues it. In the second place, not satisfied with this practical dismissal of it, Paul condemns it on the fundamental ground of its irreligious character and tendency. Our consideration of the former of these two points can be brief. According to Romans 8: 3 there is an *ἀδυνατον του νομου*, an inability of the law to effect what must be accomplished if the religious ideal is to be realized. Galatians 3:21 implies that the law which has been given cannot make alive. In this whole chapter the representation is, throughout, that the law method of justification is

ineffective because it curses instead of blessing. In 2 Corinthians 3:6 likewise it is said that the law, because it is *γραμμά*, i.e., an external instrument without power to project itself into the heart of man, fails to impart life as the Spirit does. These are commonplaces of the Pauline theology. But it is plain that judgments of this class imply nothing derogatory to the law method of securing eternal life in the abstract. The disability under which the legal system labors is not inherent in the system itself, but arises wholly from the fact that men attempt to put it in operation in a state of sin. What under normal conditions would be not only effectual but perhaps desirable or preferable to any other method may, under abnormal conditions, become so absolutely useless as to evoke scorn from one who has made practical acquaintance with its futility in a painful experience. We can actually feel the scorn and contempt which in his heart the apostle poured upon the worthlessness of the efforts to keep the law in which Judaism was squandering its religious energy. It is but natural that under such circumstances his words are not always carefully qualified, that, while speaking about the manner in which the system *de facto* operates, he should sometimes appear to condemn the objective principle of it in the abstract. It can be easily shown, however, that this is never his intention. In the first passage cited above Paul affirms in so many words that the *ἀδυνατον του νομου* is due to the *σαρξ*, i.e., to the sinful condition of human nature. The law in itself has no religious defect; it is neither weaker nor stronger than by reason of its nature one could expect it to be; within the category of law it is perfectly normal, spiritual and good (cf. Rom. 7:12, 14); only, it addresses itself to a mind which is sinful and cannot react upon its stimulus, so that the result is “weakness” in the sense of inefficacy. The same is implied where Paul speaks of the law as bringing man under the curse. This again is an effect due entirely to the collision of the law and sin. In 2 Corinthians 3:6 the figure of the *γραμμά* comprises the two elements of the inefficacy and the condemnatory function of the law; for, because it is *γραμμά*, the law is affirmed not merely to fail of giving life but also to kill positively; the *γραμμά* therefore, is in opposition to the spirit a “letter” in the sense of something external, and in addition to this, a “letter” in the sense of a writ of condemnation. Inasmuch as condemnation presupposes sin, no reflection is cast on the law itself or the forensic relationship between God and man regulated by it. On the contrary, the very conception of the curse of the law enforced by God involves the full recognition and maintenance on the apostle’s part of the forensic relation of accountability and inevitable liability to punishment in case of sin, as the broad fundamental plane on which God and man religiously meet. Ritschl has in vain tried to prove that Paul conceives of the curse of the law as detached or detachable from God.⁵ And if it is God’s curse, then the mere fact of Paul’s insistence on it stamps the whole scheme of man’s treatment by God on the forensic basis with the apostle’s approval. For it should not be overlooked, that the right of God to curse in case of transgression of the law is, from Paul’s point of view, after all but the reverse side of His prerogative to bless and reward with the gift of eternal life where the law is obeyed.⁶ The apostle’s doctrine of sin and the curse, therefore, is sufficient to prove his staunch adherence to the principle in question, as a primary principle of divine procedure. When he speaks contemptuously of the law method as a thing that is weak, that is no more than a letter that can but curse, these very expressions of contempt are based on the axiom that the legal relationship of man to God must have effect. It would be too little to say that the criticism of Jewish legalism involved in them is consistent with a high regard for the forensic principle in the abstract; in reality, it is the direct outcome of the latter. Because Paul is supremely concerned about the absolute necessity of meeting in some real way the legal demands of God, he pours contempt on the futile efforts of Judaism in this direction.

More careful consideration is required by the second point. The apostle does not confine himself to

the rejection of the law scheme on the ground of its ethical impracticability, but carries the polemic into the specifically religious sphere by affirming that the Judaistic principle is unworthy of God and of the ideal relation that should exist between God and man. Here, it must be granted, the trend of his argument might seem to favor the modern assertion that in his best moments, when he most thoroughly disengaged himself from all Jewish prepossessions, the apostle actually proceeded to an unqualified negation of the forensic idea as applicable between man and God. In such a passage as Romans 3:27, "Where then is glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? Of works? Nay: but by a law of faith," we seem to hear the religious idealist who associates reward as such with an impious spirit, and identifies religious disinterestedness with the essence of piety. In Romans 4:2-5 also, the argument drawn from the case of Abraham reads as if the mere suggestion of anything having been earned by works, so as to give man a real ground for glorying over against God, were sufficient to brand the system under which this might be accomplished as irreligious in the apostle's judgment. To this may be added Romans 10:3, where the Judaistic attitude is characterized as a species of irreligious self-assertion which refuses to subject itself to the righteousness of God. Nevertheless, we believe that even here, the statements of the apostle, more closely examined, do not bear out the modern contention. Their meaning is not that the scheme of works of itself must produce or invite such irreligious self-assertion against God where no sin is previously given, but simply that where it is applied by sinful human nature it cannot help fostering the type of sin indicated, so that, altogether apart from the question of practicableness, the plan of grace and faith is alone adapted to the actual condition of human nature, is indeed the only plan which effectually safeguards the interests of true religion. It is true Paul nowhere formulates this in the abstract, as we have here attempted to formulate it; but the simple reason for this is that he was naturally led to deal with it in the concrete, since the Jews alone had had the opportunity of putting the system into practice. What Paul therefore condemns is the irreligious character of the legal system in its Judaistic form. But he certainly was not of the opinion that the system was solely responsible for the Jewish sins of vainglory and meretricious exploitation of God. These were typical Jewish faults, but legalism had not produced them, certainly not produced them out of a previously faultless Jewish character. The most that can be said is that, in the apostle's view, an interaction between these peculiar sinful tendencies and the legalistic conception of religion had taken place, so that the latter had stimulated the former, and the former more and more vitiated the latter. The Judaistic dependence on works was objectionable not merely because it rested on a great untruth, but even more because it subverted the normal relation between God and man. It meant something quite different from the mere general principle that good moral conduct is rewarded and evil conduct punished, and consequently the desire for reward and the fear of punishment are allowed to enter as motives in shaping conduct. In reality it amounted to this: that the Judaistic spirit made itself the end and God the means, gave to itself the glory and to God the part of subserving the interests of this human glory by His moral government; that it led the creature to regard itself as the active and God as the merely passive factor in the determination of eternal destiny; perhaps also that it conceived of God as by nature bound to reward man. It is this profoundly sinful, specifically Jewish *καυχασθαι*, against which the religious spirit of Paul rises in protest, and which makes him so uncompromising in his repudiation of the legal system. Inspired by such motives, it becomes to him the absolute antithesis to the very idea of religion. Wishing to contrast the gospel of grace with this specific embodiment of the forensic principle, he is willing to stake the entire comparison on the one point, which of the two schemes offers a more effectual safeguard against the cultivation of such detestable pride? "Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? Of works? Nay: but by a law of faith. We reckon

therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom. 3:27, 28). With this in mind he reasons that Abraham cannot have had to glory toward God, not merely because the Scripture bears witness to the contrary, but also because it would have made God the debtor of a boastful man. Similarly in Romans 10:3 it is the inveterate Jewish pride which will not subject itself to the divine grace, because the latter collides with the love of self, to which Paul ascribes the historic failure of Judaism to attain the true ideal of righteousness. In view of all this it would not be wrong to say that the cause of the *irreligiousness* of the system of legalism was, in Paul’s view precisely the same as the cause of its impracticableness, viz., the σαρκξ. If the αδυνατου of the law be due to the flesh, no less is its tendency to foster ασεβεια due to the flesh. It is not impossible that the apostle’s entire doctrine of the σαρκξ, in its ethical conception, has a much closer connection with the typical Jewish sins of pride and selfish isolation from God than with the Hellenistic dualism from which it is usually derived. The term σαρκξ is certainly used with a semi-ethical flavor as descriptive of the Jewish pride of race and glory in self and confidence in creature attainments. This was the form in which sin had first and most prominently come under Paul’s observation, and from this to the generalization that all sin is at bottom selfish isolation from and selfish opposition of the creature to the Creator, and therefore σαρκξ in the most general sense, is not too bold a flight of thought to ascribe to the apostle.

But, be this as it may, we are certainly justified in concluding that the irreligious operation of the forensic principle in Judaism is attributed by Paul to extraneous causes, and has nothing to do, in his view, with the merit or demerit of the principle itself. Just as little as in the case of the futility of the system does the apostle base his judgment about its irreligious character and tendency on the theological premise that God is exclusively a Father determined in His actions toward man by the rule of love, and that therefore the conception of man’s earning anything by works is inherently unworthy of God. On the contrary, both conclusions rest on a strictly empirical ground, viz., the present sinful condition of human nature. In the entire range of his polemic against the Jewish legalism, therefore, Paul has asserted nothing which can in the least prejudice his right to uphold the forensic principle of the divine righteousness in its twofold function of rewarding obedience and punishing disobedience, as a supreme and inalienable attribute of the divine nature, something which God cannot deny without denying Himself. Paul’s position did not compel him to assert that the endeavor of sinless man to attain to eternal life by works must be productive of an irreligious spirit. The desire for the goal of supreme blessedness can enter as a motive inspiring the pursuit of righteousness without becoming the sole motive and without religiously debasing man, provided man be normal and perfect from a religious point of view. And on the part of God the exercise of the function of righteousness involved in this is entirely consistent with a simultaneous exercise of the attribute of love. A forensic treatment of man and a loving treatment of man are not to Paul in any sense mutually exclusive in God. Whether the apostle had explicitly formulated in his mind the conception of the covenant of works or not, it is certain that his strictures on Jewish legalism cannot in the least have interfered with the development of his thought in the direction of such a doctrine.

But not only has Paul ascribed to the intrusion of sinful motives the disabilities under which the forensic system, when at present applied to man, labors; he has also positively upheld the method of gaining eternal life by works as retaining its validity in the abstract, and has spoken of it in terms which affirm its religious dignity. In the second chapter of the epistle to the Romans this is set forth at considerable length. God will recompense obedience to the law with eternal life (vss. 7, 10); the

doers of the law shall be justified (vs. 13); if the uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the law, his uncircumcision shall be reckoned for circumcision, i.e., he shall be treated as entitled to all the privileges of the people of God (vs. 26); the circumcision of the heart, i.e., the inward doing of the law, has praise of God (vs. 29). It has been asserted that this whole representation is intended by the apostle to be purely dialectic, in other words, that he employs it not *e mente sua*, but as an *argumentum ad hominem*, placing himself upon the standpoint of the Jewish Christian or Gentile Christian reader, in order to show that even from their own standpoint something more and something different was required for justification than what they actually rendered.⁷ Others have thought that in this opening part of the epistle, and in the following chapters, we have to do with successive layers, representing the standpoints successively occupied by Paul himself, in chronological order.⁸ The latter view lacks clearness, since it is difficult to see how the apostle could formulate a theory, long since abandoned, in terms which apparently speak of it as still valid, without a single word to indicate that at the time of writing the theory in question no longer expressed his actual conviction. But the former view also is, to say the least, one-sided. It seems plain to us that all the statements made by the apostle in the context we are dealing with, can be naturally explained only by admitting that at least two, perhaps three, assumptions underlie them. One of these undoubtedly is the assumption that the Jewish theory can be recognized and made to render dialectic service for the purpose of refuting the Jewish practice. But inasmuch as Paul nowhere says that he recognizes this theory against his own better conviction, but on the contrary speaks of it with a degree of pathos, we are constrained to believe that besides its dialectic value it also possessed to his mind a certain hypothetical value within the limits of his own system—that, discounting the objectionable spirit with which, on their part, it was applied, he found himself at one with the Jews in the recognition of its formal principle. While using the principle as a weapon, Paul is none the less thoroughly in earnest about it; the propositions laid down receive his own assent. If a man were able to satisfy the conditions imposed, he would receive the reward promised. Only, this hypothetical possibility does not *de facto* exist: no man is able to yield the required obedience. Still this does not in the least detract from the supreme importance which the apostle ideally and theologically attaches to it, as a basal principle of God's treatment of His moral creatures. Considered from the point of view of subjective soteriology its value might be nil, and yet, theologically considered, it might be of eternal validity and become productive in a new direction of the most far-reaching consequences. Possibly, as a third consideration, there may have lain in the background of the apostle's mind when he wrote this chapter the thought that, even under the economy of the gospel, the force of the principle of judgment according to works and of reward and punishment is not entirely suspended with reference to the individual believer; though, of course, it can here no longer appear as an independent principle, but only in subordination to the supreme principle of grace. Some of the expressions used seem to point in this direction. But at any rate it is certain that a positive significance is ascribed by the apostle to the law of recompense; that he explicitly recognizes the principle which conditions eternal life on the keeping of the law as a truly divine principle, before which he bows in reverence, because it has the approval of his religious mind as well as of his moral conscience.

From the foregoing it appears that, in order to do justice to Paul, we shall have to distinguish carefully between two kinds of forensic religion: the Judaistic one which he abhorred and rejected, and his own with reference to which he observes, not an attitude of tolerance, as might be expected if it were simply a lingering of the leaven of Judaism, but an attitude of enthusiastic avowal, such as reveals a positive interest of the most spontaneous character. Of these two only the former can be justly

characterized as legalism, since this term, by its use to describe the Judaistic position, has acquired distinctively unfavorable associations. The apostle is conscious of the difference between the two, a fact which also plainly excludes his having carried it over as an unconscious inheritance from his own Jewish past. There is a widely current representation which simply takes for granted that the conversion of Paul affected in no wise his conception of the ideal of righteousness itself; that this ideal and the motives giving it value in his mind were the same before and after his acceptance of Christianity; and that what differentiated his later from his former position concerned only the manner in which the ideal was to be realized, his method in this respect having been auto-soteric before the conversion, hetero-soteric after it. Such a view of his conversion inevitably becomes misleading in one of two directions. Either it results in ascribing to the pre-Christian Paul the same profoundly religious motives in the pursuit of righteousness by which we know him to have been actuated in his later Christian period, in which case the Pharisee Paul becomes to such an extent idealized as to leave hardly any room for a deep-going conversion; or it results in ascribing to the Christianized Paul a substantial remnant of the Pharisaically oriented and Pharisaically inspired law worship, in which case the conversion also loses the radical, revolutionary character commonly attributed to it. Both of these views lie on the line of naturalism: the former, in so far as it makes the conversion only the emerging into conscious supremacy of purer forces and higher ideals, which had long struggled in Paul's soul with the lower elements of Judaism; the latter, in so far as it assumes that in the center of the Pauline consciousness the power of legalism was never in principle overcome, that under the disguise of the apostle's newly created Christianity in reality only a metamorphosis of the old Judaism confronts us. In our opinion it is a mistake to believe that the spiritual upheaval attendant upon the event of Damascus changed only Paul's conception as to the attainment of righteousness, while leaving his ideal of righteousness itself intrinsically untouched. It is not necessary to go to the extreme of denying that Paul was, before his conversion, in any sense different from the ordinary Jewish zealot for the law, or that the difference which existed predisposed him in any way for his subsequent acceptance of Christianity. Most probably in one point he had actually attained to a more adequate conception of what righteousness was than his fellow Pharisees. On the one hand, we learn that he had advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of his own age among his countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers (Gal. 1:14). On the other hand, we know how he had learned to realize that what the law demands is not merely the outward work, but also the inward obedience of the heart (Rom. 7:7), and in this he may have differed from many of the Pharisees.⁹ Undoubtedly this experimental knowledge of inability to keep the law, based on a true conception of the inwardness of the law, may be considered to have been a preparation for the acceptance of some other method of realizing righteousness. But it by no means follows from this that Paul's ideal of righteousness needed no further revision than it had received in this way. What has been mentioned does not yet touch the heart of the question of righteousness. The perception of the spirituality of the law's demands may have been a great discovery, but a greater discovery remained to be made. Paul had yet to learn that the entire spirit in which he strove to fulfill the law, both inwardly and outwardly, the fundamental motive which inspired his pursuit of righteousness, was radically wrong because issuing from the flesh, the sinful determination of human nature which makes self instead of God supreme. There is no evidence that Paul made this discovery before the grace of God supernaturally illumined him at his conversion. On the contrary, he himself declares that he had to die unto the law before he could begin to live unto God, and this death unto the law was identical with his crucifixion together with Christ, i.e., was a specifically Christian experience, not something learned by him in his Jewish period (Gal. 2:19, 20). To say, as Prof.

McGiffert does, that, though a Pharisee, Paul was yet a man after Christ's own heart, and that the condemnation which Jesus passed upon the Pharisees as a class could not have been pronounced upon the Pharisee Paul, is, to say the least, extremely misleading.¹⁰ What Jesus condemned in the Pharisees was not externalism or hypocrisy alone, but also the seeking of righteousness for man's sake rather than for God's. Indeed, the latter was, in his view, the fundamental fault in the Pharisaic character. So far as we can observe, Paul shared this sin with his fellow Pharisees, and clearly realized that in his conversion the pivot of his religious consciousness had been suddenly wrenched from this to the diametrically opposite position of a God-centered desire for righteousness. Now, this being so, it follows that the apostle must have clearly realized the fundamental difference existing between the Judaistic type of legalism and his own interpretation and application of the forensic principle. In external appearance, indeed, the two were much alike, but, if ever, then here the external appearance was deceptive. What the two had in common was nothing more than their formal structure; in essence they lay as widely apart as the cult of self and true disinterested religion. That the two have been so easily confounded by modern writers is not entirely due, however, to the formal resemblance just pointed out. It is due even more to the habit of overlooking the positive religious interest evinced by Paul in strenuously upholding the forensic scheme. Paradox though it may sound, yet we believe it to be strictly true, that the motive underlying the apostle's championship of grace is at bottom identical with the motive underlying his forensic bent. The two coincide in this, that each is ultimately intended to give free play in the human consciousness to the revelation of what is a fundamental aspect in the character of God. God is righteousness and grace, and the supreme religious interest is that these two attributes shall be embodied and glorified in the experience of man. In its last analysis the forensic trend of thought is in Paul but one of the twin forms in which he gives expression to the supremacy of God in the sphere of religion. Righteousness is to the apostle that ideal sublimate of human conduct through which it serves its highest purpose of revealing the glory of the ethical character of God. The law of recompense exists for God's sake. Its classical expression this has found in the words of Galatians 6:7, to the effect that, because God is not mocked, a man shall reap whatsoever he has sown. The principle of retribution finds its ultimate explanation in the interest God has in the apportionment of moral recompense, so that its failure would attack God in His sovereign dignity. From this theocentric motive we can also understand why Paul continues to throw so much emphasis upon the necessity of the accomplishment of the good work which the moral law demands. The apostle would hardly have assented to the notion that the good will is all that is required, that the external embodiment of the will in conduct is of secondary importance. It was not by an anthropocentric idealism, but by a theocentric realism, that he was controlled in his thought. Precisely because human righteousness subserves the revelation of God's glory, its external embodiment is essential to its complete realization. It is by patience in "well-doing," καθ' υπομνην έργου αγαθου, that eternal life can *ex hypothesi* be obtained. Glory, honor, and peace are for everyone who "works" good, τω κατεργαζομενω το αγαθον (Rom. 2:7, 10).

Now it is this supreme thirst for the manifestation of the righteousness of God as an essential attribute of His nature, and not a semiconscious revival of Judaistic legalism, that underlies the Pauline doctrine of justification. Even though the sinner is to be treated on the principle of free love, yet the moral glory of God must be upheld through a forensic transaction in which it shall appear that the δικαιομα του νομου both positively and negatively has been fully satisfied. Of course, Paul made much of justification because he was thoroughly alive to the tremendous fact of sin. Sin had to be disposed of before a normal religious relation between God and man could be restored. Still

it is a mistake to think this exhausts the religious significance of the doctrine from Paul's own point of view. The apostle's interest in the question was a broader and more fundamental one. Had there been no sin in the world, even then he would not have been able to conceive of an ideal religious relation between God and man, without a solid substructure of a forensic nature rendering the whole religious process subordinate to the revealed moral excellence of God. It is to the credit of Reformed theology that it has appreciated this deeper motive of the Pauline doctrine and has given it formal recognition in its conception of the covenant of works. It was enabled to do this because it took its stand theocentrically in the supremacy of the glory of God. While equally strenuous as the Lutheran theology in upholding the soteriological importance of justification, it has gone beyond this in vindicating the purely religious significance of the principle involved, guided in doing this, even more than by exegetical tact, by that keen sense of the ultimate trend of the apostle's thought which is but the result of the congeniality of its standpoint with his own. From the premises of the Reformed theology and its interpretation of Paul's forensic scheme, the most adequate interpretation in our view it has thus far received, the charge of a crypto-Judaistic element in the doctrine of justification, is entirely unwarranted.

In conclusion, it may be observed that the transfer of the fulfillment of the law from the sinner to Christ at one and the same time safeguards the interests of the divine righteousness and absolutely prevents the intrusion of those sinful motives which, as we have seen, rendered the plan of works impracticable and irreligious in the apostle's estimation. The earthly life of Christ offers the only instance of the working of the scheme under normal conditions, outside of the original state of rectitude. Christ by His perfect obedience was just before God, and on the ground of His being just received eternal life. But in Christ's earthly life Paul undoubtedly found the ideal of religion realized. When Christ obeyed, He cannot have been ignorant in Paul's view of the final glory awaiting Him as the prize of His obedience. The objective causal connection expressed in Romans 5:18, 19 and Philippians 2:9 must have found its subjective reflex in the Savior's consciousness. But the thought of this in no wise detracted from the purity and disinterestedness of His attitude toward God. If the vision of His future glory strengthened Him in His suffering and humiliation, it did not for that reason interfere with the other powerful theocentric and altruistic motives by which His obedience was ultimately inspired. It did not lead Him or even tempt Him to that irreligious self-assertion, to that glorying before God in His own attainments, which the apostle recognized as the deepest sin of Judaistic legalism. What He rendered to God was the highest spiritual type of *λογικη λατρευια*. The same principle, thus rendered secure in the Savior by His sinlessness, is rendered secure in respect to the sinner by the demand of faith. For, according to Romans 4:20, the innermost essence of faith is that it gives glory to God. And from God's point of view the treatment of Christ on the principle of law obedience did in no wise interfere with the full outflowing of the divine love toward Christ. God, while acting in the capacity of a judge, at the same time continued to be for Christ and to deal with Christ as a loving Father. The famous passage in Philippians 2 contains an incidental expression of this fact. Paul here uses the verb *εχαρισατο* to describe the bestowal by God upon Christ of the name above every name. *εχαρισατο* means that God bestowed it as a gracious gift, not, of course, in the specific sense of the word "grace," implying that there was any unworthiness in Christ which God had to overlook, but in the more general sense implying that this was an act in which the graciousness, the kindness of God manifested itself. Righteousness and love, therefore, as coordinated principles of the divine procedure, do not exclude each other. If the former cannot be deduced from the latter, and insofar the two must forever remain separated in our conception, as

they were in Paul's conception, nevertheless nothing lay further from the apostle's thought than to make them antithetical in point of religious value. The interest of religion, just as little as psychology, demands that the one be swallowed up by the other.

It is to be feared that the modern antipathy to Paul's conception of justification, as it finds expression in the charge of Judaism, as well as the neglect into which this doctrine has fallen in the sphere of experimental religion, are but little due to a desire to keep the Protestant doctrine of grace free from every admixture of legalism. The very fact that it is not so much the grace but rather the love of God which is pitted against His righteousness betrays the true motive of the antagonism. This fact means, first of all, that there is a weakening of the sense of sin. The modern religious subject thirsts for love as such, not in the first place for forgiving, justifying grace. But this in itself is but a symptom of the general abandonment of the theocentric attitude in the present-day religious consciousness. Love is magnified because at bottom God is conceived of as existing for the sake of man. In a religion thus oriented there can be no legitimate place, of course, for a purely forensic justification such as Paul teaches. But it is foolish for that reason to charge the apostle with contradicting himself. His religious consciousness differed from the modern one in that it revolved around the center, not of man, but of God. The most consistently Pauline theology is that which cultivates not the divine love alone, but seeks supremely the divine glory and thus teaches men to thirst alike for the divine righteousness and the divine love. A theology doing this will not feel the need of apologizing for, but will glory in, the forensic character of the apostle's doctrine of justification.

(Footnotes)

¹ Cf. Titius, *Der Paulinismus unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Seligkeit*, pp. 21, 270; Holtzmann, *N.T. Theologie*, 2: 117.

² *St. Paul's Conception of Christianity*, p. 47.

³ For an answer to Wernle, cf. Gottschick, *Paulinismus und Reformation*, in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1897, pp. 398f.

⁴ *Das Urchristenthum*, Zweite Auflage, 1:260. Cf. also Titius, *Der Paulinismus*, pp. 44, 45; Wernle, *Die Anfänge unserer Religion*, pp. 187-189: "Whoever looks at Paul's doctrine of justification, free from all Protestant prejudice, cannot fail to pronounce it one of his most unfortunate creations."

⁵ Cf. *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, second edition, pp. 246-256, and Vos, *Bible Student*, 1902, pp. 55-56.

⁶ The above statement is not intended to deny that a distinction may be drawn between the two directions in which the forensic principle works, as to the necessity with which the principle is set in operation by God. Dogmatically it is a much-disputed question whether the function of rewarding the good is as essential to the righteousness of God as the opposite function of punishing the evil. Paul coordinates the two without intimating a distinction (Rom. 2:9, 10). Nevertheless it is possible to assume that he believed the latter necessary, the former a matter of choice. Romans 4:4 does not disprove this, for here the obligatory character of the reward belongs to it in contrast with the gift of grace *when no work precedes*. A "reward of debt" in contrast with "grace" may yet be "a reward of favor," if the position of the creature toward God be considered. Perhaps Paul found fault with the Jewish principle among other reasons for this, that he conceived of the reward as absolutely and in every relation "a reward of debt."

⁷ Ritschl, *Rechtfertigung u. Versöhnung*, second edition, 2:316-318.

⁸ Titius, *Der Paulinismus*, p. 156.

⁹ This on the view that in Romans 7 up to the 14th verse Paul gives a description of his own experience before his conversion, in which he had already become painfully aware of the impossibility of internally keeping the law. I may notice here that of late the reference of the passage to the regenerate consciousness has again been advocated by some writers. Cf. Feine, *Das gesetzesfreie Evangelium des Paulus*, pp. 132-168, who

finds in verses 7-13 the experience of Adam as the typical representative of humanity interpreted from the Christian standpoint, and in verses 14-25 the experience of the Christian Paul. If this exegesis as to verses 7-14 were correct, we would obtain in verses 9, 10 an explicit affirmation of the religious normality of life under the principle of works in a sinless state. Paul would then here affirm that the first Adam “lived” before the commandment, i.e., the prohibition to eat from the tree, came, and that even the commandment was εἰς ζωὴν in its ideal intention. The discussion of the merits of this proposed exegesis, however, would lead us too far afield for our present limits.

¹⁰ *The Apostolic Age*, p. 122.