

Righteousness of God: Ability to Live Christian Holiness

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide insight to what extent our conceptualization of the dikaiosyne theou shapes our way of understanding ourselves as Christians being the Body of Christ and living holy lives. Strongly influenced by the epistle to the Romans, we perceive holiness as being in right relation to God and righteousness being a practical consequence of this relationship. Holiness as the inner nature of God brings fruits of His righteousness, which is God's saving activity. However, in the light of Christ and his sacrificial death and resurrection, relational, and eschatological perspectives of the dikaiosyne theou concept become crucial.

This concept stands at the heart of Paul's gospel and anticipates several layers of meaning, primarily God's redeeming and saving activity, but also covenantal faithfulness and restorative justice brought by God and made available for all. Wider perspective is provided through the faithfulness of Jesus and his obedience to the Father in fulfilling salvific purposes. For us, it means a transformational and relational way of living in an eschatological perspective.

Christian ethics are deeply grounded in the concept of dikaiosyne theou, and Christian conduct represents its practical and necessary expression. People living in genuine Christian community are marked by the righteousness of God expressed as agape and progressively transformed by the presence and involvement of his Holy Spirit. Such people involve themselves in a continu-

ous process of discovering new opportunities to affirm God's righteousness. Thus, the Christian community of faith needs to be inclusive in its nature.

Key words: dikaiosyne theou, righteousness of God, salvation, holiness, eschatological perspective, agape, Christian community

Introduction

It is a worthy task to investigate what the term the “righteousness of God” actually means, particularly to us as Christians, since the conceptualization of this term profoundly shapes our whole Christian worldview.¹ Christians should be able to think through how they manage to live this concept, because our understanding of what God is and how he relates to us and others is the very foundation of our identity and the final purpose of our life. It is a worthy task even to the extent of discovering whether we are able to be delivered and reconciled by/with/to our Savior and whether we can live faithfully “in the Spirit,”² being continuously inspired by the prospects that lie ahead of our discipleship and our *cruciformity* (Gorman 2007).

When a Christian hears the claim God is righteous, how does he or she react? Are we able to think only about ourselves as barely escaping punishment by a hair's breadth and being saved by somebody else's suffering? Or do we tend just to stand still, fascinated by *mysterium tremendum* (Otto 2004), the numinous Creator God? Are we surprised to discover him as “Our Father in heaven” who is worthy to be hallowed by his name,³ and who besides being eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent, is first of all caring, forgiving, and gracious (Maddox 1994, 53)? Or maybe, we just like to dream about his “kingdom come,” his “will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” without making any functional link with us and our practical circumstances. Or rather, do we just keep enjoying “our daily bread,” happy we are able to stay out of the “time of trial” (at least to some extent) and to “forgive” our debtors and neighbors by tolerating them peacefully although they are different and have other ideas, life-styles, culture, mentality, or

- 1 This article was developed from the MA essay submitted to the Nazarene Theological College in Manchester UK in April 2018 within the Christian Holiness in Pauline Perspective course lead by Revd Svetlana Khobnya.
- 2 The concept as it is used in Romans 8.
- 3 Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 NRSV). Selected words from the prayer are being used here and subsequently, directly or paraphrased, in order to illustrate how they are deeply integrated in our mundane life, but also to emphasize the possibility of *automatic* faith characterized by rituality, repetitiveness, and automatism of thoughts and feelings.

character? All these perspectives spring specifically from how we conceptualize the righteousness of God.

The purpose of this article is thus to discern to what extent our understanding of the *dikaiosyne theou* (Righteousness of God) affects us in being the Body of Christ and living consecrated lives of Christian holiness.⁴ And this will be done by considering the usage, meanings, and interpretations of the term *dikaio-syne theou* in the letters of Paul, particularly in the Epistle to the Romans. In this context, it is important for us to discern following: 1. Paul explains the righteousness of God by relating it closely with faith (Romans 1:17) and participation in the faith of Jesus (Romans 3:22); 2. by explaining where this concept stands in relation to “the law and prophets” (Romans 3:21); 3. by emphasizing the fact of humans being justified before God (Romans 3:23-26); 4. by providing an elaborated historical perspective of God being righteous and faithful (Romans 9 – 11); and finally 5. by delivering practical guidelines on how to apply this concept meaningfully in the Christian life.

Terminology

The basic meaning of the biblical term *righteousness* and its cognates derives from the Hebrew word *tsdq* (*tsedheq*, *tsedhaqah*, *tsaddiq*) usually translated in the LXX as *dikaiosynē*, denoting a right standing and a consequent right behavior, primarily within a community, and not so much the abstract idea of justice or virtue (Wright, 1988). English translates this unique semantic term by using two separate roots: *right* and *just*,⁵ although these ideas in Hebrew and Greek belong together, linguistically and theologically.

Nicholas T. Wright recognizes two instances of the OT concept, upon which the NT idea of *dikaiosyne theou*, is based: 1. Law/court setting and 2. Covenantal

- 4 The holiness of God is the basic biblical foundation and the main assumption of the salvific destiny of humans: human salvation is possible only because God is holy. God in the Bible reveals himself as holy and God’s holiness is the immediate context of God’s call to God’s people (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 19:2) to enter into relationship and be transformed by God, and consequently to be holy and able to live holy lives. The Hebrew word *qadshosh* denoting ‘holiness’ and ‘holy’ (corresponds to Greek word group *hagios* in LXX/NT and the Latin *sanctus*) also means withdrawal, otherness, and separation. It signifies that God is wholly other, distinct and separate. Although God’s holiness means moral purity, perfection, and the inability to act against justice, God chooses to dwell in the midst of His creation, brings redemption for all through Jesus Christ, and calls for participation in God’s salvific purposes. **Holiness is regularly derived and dependent upon proximity and an intimate relationship to the holy God.**
- 5 However, this is not the case within i.e. Slavic group of languages, although the linguistic discernment between the two different concepts certainly exists.

setting. Within the law/court setting, righteousness is the forensic status that results from a favorable finding of the court. After carefully hearing the case, a judge finds in favor of one party and pronounces justification for the person's acquittal. That person thus becomes "just" and/or "righteous," not as evidence of his or her moral character, but as a statement of the particular status before the court. Ideally, this status would equate to character.⁶ Within the covenantal setting, righteousness is "measured" by the level of the relational status of commitment to the covenant God made with his people. The concept of covenantal faithfulness, which also includes obedience, thus creates criteria by which God and his people are being perceived through salvific history. In this context, righteousness is more about an inner mind-set resulting in an appropriate outward manifestation. Wright claims the combination of these two settings creates a developed covenantal theology which underlays Judaism at the time of Jesus and Paul.

Another Hebrew term important in understanding the wider scope of the righteousness of God and how it influences the sphere of humanity is *qdsh*, usually translated in LXX as *hagios*. This term denotes the OT concept of holiness coherently derived and dependent upon the proximity and quality of the relationship to the holy God.⁷ God, being essentially holy, reflects his inner holiness outwardly by acting in the way of righteousness. We see that God's righteousness overflows from the divine sphere into the human sphere, whereby shaping human beings and their relationships according to the very essence of God, His holiness. We could agree with William M. Greathouse (2008a, 58) that holiness is the inner nature of God, and righteousness is God's saving activity which brings about the holiness of God in us and around us.

Occurrence of the Term and Spectrum of Meanings

In the introductory part of his commentary on Romans, Greathouse affirms, "The righteousness of God is the key concept of the Epistle to Romans – God's righteousness manifest in the death of Messiah, whom he put forward as an atoning sacrifice, to be received by faith – the eschatological (end time) salvation that irrupted into history with the death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit" (Greathouse 2008a, 28). It seems in Paul's letter to the Romans we

6 Yet this crucial shift initiates transformation of the character toward moral righteousness, but not necessarily. Gordon D. Fee (1984, 878) claims that righteousness as the behaviour is the product of the Spirit empowering and as a consequence brings ethical life. As a conclusion, the Torah makes one religious, but the Spirit makes one righteous (which is the exact purpose of the Torah).

7 Primarily springing up from the Leviticus 19:2 and Exodus 19:6.

are dealing with God's righteousness in its final consummation. Still, Richard B. Hays warns that reading and interpreting Scripture for Paul is a pastoral, community-forming, and identity shaping activity: "We would not want to forget that Paul is more of a poetic preacher than a historian or systematic theologian. ... His language primarily has a poetic and metaphorical character" (Hays 2005, XV-XVI). Like Paul, we are to read the Bible as people of the new covenant and the new creation, since as Wright notes, "we are living somewhere between the end of the Book of Acts and the closing scene of the Book of Revelation" (Wright 2007, 278).

The letter to the Romans has come to represent the principal part of the New Testament for many, particularly for people like Augustine, Luther, John Wesley, and Karl Barth, who were powerfully influenced by this precious piece of text in revolutionizing European theological thought and initializing evangelical revivals in their particular contexts (Greathouse 2008a, 21-22). In the crucial strategic moment of his mission, Paul wrote this fine ambassadorial and *parenetic* letter⁸ and the philosophical *diatribe*,⁹ in order to make a statement about what the gospel really is: "Paul judged it appropriate to devote the main body of the letter to a systemic exposition of the gospel as he understood and proclaimed it" (Bruce 1977, 325). His concept of God's righteousness, expressed through his faithful covenantal promise to Abraham's descendants and thus dedicated with all His resourceful might to reconcile the whole of humanity back to Him through Jesus, comes from a rich and dynamic background of Pharisaism, apocalyptic Judaism, and Hellenism. But Paul is also already irretrievably marked by the event of the risen Christ and the universal gift of the Holy Spirit. Not being personally acquainted with his audience and not having urgent issues to deal with (as compared i.e. to Galatians) Paul, in Romans, uses the opportunity to be more systematic and elaborate in articulating his concept of "what does it look like when God decides to become king among humans" (Wright 2017). The presentation of the same gospel, which Paul earlier described in Galatians, is now more orderly and detailed. His scope is comprehensive and universal, from Eden to Eschaton, and all-inclusive, first for Jews, and then for Gentiles.

The term righteousness of God (*dikaioyne theou*) is used ten times within the New Testament, eight of these occurrences are in the Epistle to the Romans, and only five times in Romans 3. Richard N. Longenecker reminds us that like many genitive constructions, the phrase is ambiguous and can be understood as subjective or objective (Longenecker 2011, 354). The term *dikaioyne* itself was regularly used in the 4th century B.C. by Plato and Aristotle in a legal context, in

8 *Parenetic* – hortatory, encouraging, persuasive style in addressing reader(s) or listener(s)

9 *Diatribe* – a speech or piece of writing that severely criticizes something or someone

the observance of the law and the fulfilment of duty, while early Christianity moved more toward the concept of judicial justice and retributive punishment (Latin, *Iustitia Dei*). Augustine (4-5th century A.D.) used the term in the *subjective* sense (as an attribute of God) but also in the *objective* (as an attribute of repentant sinners), so during the Medieval ages (5-15th century A.D.) two main interpretations of the term were used: 1. Nature of God and God's actions in dealing with humanity (the subjective sense); and 2. God's salvific activity in human history (the objective sense). As Luther (15-16th century A.D.) discovered the crucial importance of "justification by faith," he started to emphasize the communicative or objective sense of the term justice/righteousness of God (Longenecker, 2016), and the echo of his thoughts still resonates powerfully within communities of evangelical Christian heritage. Roman Catholics understand *dikaiosyne theou* more in an ethical sense as an acquittal from past sins, while Protestants have more of a sense of it being imputed to faithful believers. At the beginning of the 20th century, the conjunction of *dikaiosyne theou* with the concept of "salvation" gained fresh insight by taking into account both attributive (subjective) and communicative (objective) perspectives.

The Epistle to the Romans as a "Defense of the Righteousness of God"

Paul claims that the righteousness of God manifests itself in the death of the Messiah. This horrific, scandalous, and at first glance a completely illogical act of ultimate cruelty can be understood in one way only: Jesus is put forward as an atoning sacrifice and was resurrected! It is easier for us if we keep in mind that he was not an innocent, ignorant victim of a raging God, but the obedient Son dedicated to do the will of his Father. As Greathouse recognizes, the light of eschatological salvation irrupted into history with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and this divine saving activity of reconciliation has transformative power that affects all humanity and the whole creation (Greathouse 2008a, 28). The Creator finally un-veiled himself in an utterly compassionate way.

In order to better understand the concept of God's righteousness, a deeper account of a few other fundamental aspects of Paul's theology in Romans has to be taken into account. The corporate nature of "man" and the dual sense of *adam*, as the generic and individual term, makes Adam the first human but also represents all of humankind. Adam disobeyed his Creator, thus causing humankind to become depraved and sinful. He is clearly opposed to the last Adam – Jesus, who makes things right through his ultimate obedience, by sanctifying humankind back to the right relationship with the Father. In Romans 5, Paul wants us to appreciate the nature of this great imbalance that exists between Adam and Jesus

(Grieb 2002, 65),¹⁰ which reflects the huge disproportion that exists between Sin and Grace, Life and Death, living “in flesh” and being “in Christ.”

Paul’s understanding of the term *hamartia* (sin), as a personified power tyrannizing all until the end or until baptism into the death of Christ, provides us with more focused lenses in seeing the whole spectrum of consequences arising from violating God’s commands which affects not only our relationship to God but also our relationship to others and ultimately dissolves our identity. The same applies to the Pauline ideas of *sarx* (Hebrew, *basar*), as humanity in all its weakness, and *pneuma* (Hebrew, *ruach*), as the empowering presence of God that transforms sinners into saints. Finally, having the concept of the “law” (*nomos*) in our minds, the law which reckons sin and thus makes it more visible, the law which was fulfilled by Christ on the cross, and the “works of the law” that can nullify the salvation of unbelievers, makes us able to wrestle with the text of Romans in a more meaningful way (compare to Greathouse 2008a, 29-30).

Righteousness of God Revealed (Romans 1:16-17)

Romans 1:16-17 is usually perceived as “the theses of the letter” (Greathouse 2008a, 57), an introduction to the body of the letter which facilitates the move to the flow of Paul’s arguments. God’s holiness and God’s righteousness are both key concepts to a right interpretation. God himself is righteous, as well as those people who are in the right relation to God and God’s law. So, the righteousness of God being revealed is twofold (Bruce 1985, 74). Greathouse finds it crucial that the 8th century B.C. prophets created new content for both, by closely associating them together: the “righteousness of God” became equal to the “salvation of God” (Greathouse 2008a, 58). Emphasis was moved toward the mighty actions of God and the Pauline doctrine of salvation takes this move seriously. Greathouse even claims that the actual emphasis of the passage is “salvation” itself as a complex, dynamic, eschatological process fueled by the believer’s faith, hope, anticipatory enjoyment, and according to Käsemann (quoted in Greathouse 2008a, 63), by being responsible toward God’s demand for righteousness. It seems important here to have in mind what Frederick F. Bruce notices that for Paul and many other Jews, the terms “life” and “salvation” (*hayye*) were practically synonyms (Bruce, 1985, 76).

Paul insists that the gospel he preaches is the message of God’s righteousness (also in Romans 3:5, 21, 22, 25), which is the power of God for the salvation of

10 Katherine A. Grieb on the dispute between Barth and Bultmann on how to read Romans 5:12-21

everyone who believes (Greathouse 2008a, 32). His message claims universal importance and relevance, first for Jews and then for others, including all of creation, since “all” are hopelessly enslaved by sin (Greathouse 2008a, 58). Kent Brower agrees that the concept of God’s righteousness stands at the very heart of Paul’s gospel, by being in line with, the so-called, New Perspective¹¹ on Paul and Paul’s thought which “offers much more fruit than some of the older readings” (Brower 2010, 6). He is very helpful in recognizing seven main layers of this complex, multifaceted idea that strongly influences our way of thinking about ourselves as people of God: 1. Righteousness of God is the redeeming and saving activity of God; 2. Righteousness of God anticipates the context of God’s faithfulness, particularly covenantal faithfulness; 3. God is a righteous judge who brings restorative justice¹² and judges in His sovereign love over the whole created order; 4. Righteousness of God is clearly expressed in the faithfulness of Jesus and Jesus being an obedient Son Who fulfils the salvific purposes (including the whole Torah); 5. Righteousness of God concerns the whole world, and it was never only about Israel; 6. Righteousness of God always assumes (powerful) transformation; and 7. Righteousness of God provides functional framework for a dynamic, relational way of being (Brower 2010, 6-13).

Karl Barth is instructive in this context, by pointing to the specific character of Paul’s “shamelessness.” Although Paul is ready to visit the impressive center of the whole Gentile world, “his confidence rests solely upon the power of the Gospel” (Barth quoted in Greathouse 2008a, 60). Albeit Paul’s message could sound scandalous, shameful, or foolish; he is still confident as a human, as a Christian, and as a scholar because he knows God’s power (*dynamis*) is at work.

When Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17, he is drawing from the multiple meanings of *dikaiosyne theou*, as God revealed it (Grieb 2002, 24-25). He bears in mind the righteous Creator of the entire creation, the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, God being an impartial judge who puts things right (especially for the oppressed, poor, and humble), as well as God’s saving faithfulness whose restorative perspective reaches the end of the time.

Paul’s expression *ek pisteos eis pistin* (lit. “from faith to faith” [KJV, NASB]; NRSV “through faith for faith”; NIV “by faith from first to last”; GNT “through faith from beginning to end”) certainly adds new flavor to the *dikaiosyne theou* concept, as well as to the term “revealed” (Greek, *apokalyptetai*). Different aut-

11 The “New Perspective on Paul” represents a significant shift since the 1960s in the way some scholars, especially Protestant scholars, i.e. E. P. Sanders, interpret the writings of the Apostle Paul.

12 A system of criminal justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large.

hors read here the meanings of: missionary expansion of the gospel, contagion of faith, progressive transformation affecting communities of faith, calls for humans to respond, and faith as *sola fide* Protestant formula (Greathouse 2008a, 63-66).

Righteousness of God Realized Through Active Faith (Romans 3:21-26)

The old concept of God's righteousness, the one we witness in 2 Chronicles 15:2,¹³ where the Spirit of God speaks about the transactional concept of God participating in the destiny of his people, is being replaced now by the righteousness of the new covenant. Eschatological righteousness breaks into history: "As sinners we stand guilty before the Judge of the universe, but we find He also stands beside us as our Advocate, intent on finding a way to do justice while extending mercy" (Greathouse 2008a, 118-119). But at what cost (!?) – Greathouse raises the question. Although hopelessly lost and with nothing to offer, we still find ourselves before the altar of God, where we meet God in Jesus Christ who is willing to act as a Priest and a Sacrifice on our behalf. Here we meet the very same OT God, who has always been gracious, *nyini de*¹⁴ we are able to clearly see how far He is willing to go in order to save us. For Paul, it is critical to emphasize that the event of Jesus Christ which reveals *dikaosyne theou*, was already attested "by the Law and the Prophets" (Romans 3:21), meaning the Holy Scriptures as a whole.

He is also eager to make this inextricable link of faith in Jesus Christ between the divine initiative and a consequent human response (Romans 3:22). The universal scope of sin makes clear the need for *dikaosyne theou*. The universality of salvation by faith, affirmed earlier in Romans 1:17, is now explained in Romans 3:22-23. But we still have to bear in mind that "although God extends His grace freely, it cost Him dearly" (Greathouse 2008a, 124). This gives us a notion of responsibility and makes us sensitive about the dynamics of sanctification and salvation and makes us have faith that justifies, *pistis Jesou Christou* (the faith of Jesus Christ). So we do not only believe in Christ, but our faith actually becomes (the same as) his faith. We discover our faith growing in the midst of travails and together with Dietrich Bonhoeffer we realize "only by living completely in the world one learns to have faith" (Bonhoeffer quoted in Barton 2003, 363). Redemption (*apolytroseos*) by/through Jesus Christ is presented almost as an economic transaction (Romans 3:24-25), since the specific kind of purchase (*lytron*)

13 "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you, while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will abandon you." 2 Chronicles 15:2 NRSV

14 Greek formula "but now" which provides sharp, but appropriate contrast between two concepts of righteousness.

has been performed, although it seems Paul is not that much concerned with a purchase itself, as with a result that comes out of it: freedom and deliverance from the enslavement to sin and death. Thus, the priority for Paul (and should be the same for us) is not “how” it happened but “what” happened and “why.” In that context it seems inappropriate to raise the same “how” question over and over again.¹⁵ Interestingly the terminology of “forgiveness” does not appear in Romans 3:21-26 (Greathouse 2008a, 127). The language is more about sinners proactively identifying with Christ’s death, accepting God’s judgement and dying to their sins, and as a consequence entering the process of being dynamically transformed (sanctified) into faithful believers who willingly and responsibly receive God’s life and salvation. The concept of passively receiving thus becomes eclipsed by the pro-active and intentional involvement of all parties.

God had passed over sins previously committed in order to prove Himself righteous and ready to justify ones who have faith of/in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26), but we should not keep thinking about God as one who generously forgives, overlooks, or disregards sin, because this would seriously oppose God’s essence of being holy and righteous. James D. G. Dunn claims that the OT sacrificial system was merely postponing the solution for the problem of sin and sinning (Dunn 1988,173), and the death and resurrection of Christ was a necessity in ultimately dealing with this universal problem of humanity. Now we can see the righteousness of God in its full perspective and brightness, as God’s love, grace, and faithfulness meeting together on the cross and everything being set right.

In this context, Bruce masterfully quotes the Roman poet Horace: “Do not bring a god on to the stage, unless the problem deserves to be solved by one” (Horace, *Ars Poetica* quoted in Bruce 1985, 96). Problem solved, indeed. By faith, we are able to make effectively our own what Christ has procured for us. Our problem has been solved by the grace of God, who presented Christ as the solution (Bruce 1985, 95-96). *Hilasterion*¹⁶ of Romans 3:25 has been thus brought out from “the sacred seclusion of the most holy place” and exposed openly before everyone (Bruce 1985, 101-102). Moreover, it provides redemption which has retrospective and prospective efficacy.

15 I.e. overemphasizing the crucifix.

16 Sacrifice (place) of atonement (NRSV, NIV) refers to the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (see Lev. 16:15,16) which was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim on the annual day of atonement; hence the lid of expiation, the propitiatory an expiatory sacrifice a expiatory victim <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/hilasterion.html>

Righteousness of God in History (Romans 9 – 11)

Paul begins this part of the epistle with an expression of “great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (Romans 9:2 NRSV). By many modern readers, the text of Romans 9 – 11 has been considered *parenthesis* within the epistle and along the course of the Paul’s argument (Bruce 1985, 171). Bruce even thinks Paul could skip this and proceed straight from 8:39 to 12:1 and we would not be able to recognize something is missing. Turning from the powerful insight in circumstances that surround Christians in their new reality, which culminate in God’s purpose as depicted in 8:37-39, to the practical “I appeal to you therefore” of 12:1, would seem so natural, but not for Paul. By opening his wounded soul, he turns to the problem of his own people and wrestles greatly with justifying the concept of *dikaiosyne theou*, this time within the context of the specific issue of his own nation. He certainly enjoyed his ministry and rejoiced in his own salvation and salvation of others, but he was also heavily burdened by the destiny of his own people. Bruce encourages us to think more closely about why that elected nation, “which had been specially prepared by God for this time of fulfilment, the nation which could glory in so many unique privileges of divine grace (including above all the Messianic hope), the nation into which the Messiah had been born” (Bruce 1985, 173) failed to recognize the actual Messiah, while Gentiles were able to eagerly embrace the gospel entirely. Greathouse asks further how this fits with the appropriateness of God’s first choice and his original purpose of blessing the whole world through Israel. He boldly affirms that the fundamental problem here seems not to be Israel’s unbelief but the apparent failure of the gospel (Greathouse 2008b, 43).

In Romans 9-11, Paul’s purpose seems to address this particular problem by providing proof that God’s word did not fail (as explicitly stated in Romans 9:6 NRSV). In Wright’s apocalyptic rereading of Romans, we see the Messiah as the one and only faithful Israelite in whom Israel’s God has after all been faithful to his covenantal promises and purposes to rescue the world through faithful Israel (Wright 2015, 203). An expressive Midrashic interweaving of the OT quotations, where more than 30% of the Romans 9-11 text is the actual OT text, and 40% of these OT quotations are taken from the book of Isaiah (Dunn quoted in Greathouse 2008b, 42), makes us think that all of Paul’s theology clings to this very thin thread.

Bruce and Greathouse agree on the methodology Paul used here in order to establish his argument.¹⁷ Paul starts with insisting on God being sovereign in His choice to create eschatological people (Romans 9:6-29). Further, he deals with

17 Compare Bruce 1985, 74 and Greathouse 2008b, 44.

the issue of the duality of the human response and the existence of two conflicting concepts of *dikaiosyne theou*, the one of divine origin vs. the one applied to humans, particularly the Jews. In this way, he vindicates God from the charge of injustice (Romans 9:30-10:21). After attributing the role of Israel's remnant as God's token for others (Romans 11:1-16) and after explaining the effect of Israel rejecting the gospel and finally accepting it (Romans 11:17-32), Paul offers a spectacular account of the new community of faith, one inclusive of all. His vision is appropriately finished by a glorious doxology (Romans 11:33-36), which provides a meaningful conclusion after presenting evidence of God's righteousness.

The Concept of *Dikaiosyne Theou* in Other Letters of Paul

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul is principally concerned with the misconception the Gentile Christians were wrestling with in relation to Mosaic Law. Paul contextualizes the role of the law in light of revelation provided through Christ. In Galatians 3, he deals with the problem of believers who were obedient to the Law of Moses for the purpose of getting something that was promised to be available through faith in Jesus Christ. Believers were obviously confused in their eagerness of what to believe, so Paul conveniently draws the example of Abraham's faith "reckoned to him as righteousness" by God (Galatians 3:6 NRSV) in order to show how meaningless it is to equate the relevance of human law with God's righteousness.

In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul uses the very same concept of righteousness as in Galatians. The righteousness bursts forth from God into the sphere of humanity together with other divine assets as wisdom, holiness, redemption, and creates the capacity to transform humans into people of God. The undeserved divinely available gift that no human can boast about. Paul draws a simple logical conclusion that the only one believers can boast in/about is the Lord Himself. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, he even opens the prospect for us to actually become the righteousness of God, as a result of what Jesus has done for humanity.

In Ephesians 4:24, the same concept of righteousness is used in a very Pauline way, by emphasizing righteousness and holiness side by side as principal attributes of God. The term "harvest of righteousness"¹⁸ used in Philippians 1:11 has its immediate cause in Jesus and certainly points in the right direction: "the glory and praise of God." In Philippians 3:9, Paul again argues that the very source of righteousness cannot "come from the law, but [only] through faith in Christ."

18 Harvest of righteousness NRSV, fruit of righteousness NIV and ESV, truly good qualities GNT

In his pastoral letters to Timothy, Paul uses the concept of *dikaiosyne theou* in a manner of exhortation. He encourages the young leader to pursue and exercise God's righteousness consistently in his Christian life and service. Paul claims this would be a clear sign Timothy belongs to God and is a man of God (1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

How to Affirm/Apply/Implement the Righteousness of God?

In Psalm 103, David boldly sings about his immediate, personal responsibility to a forgiving, healing, redeeming God, who crowns him "with steadfast love and mercy," and as a consequence, David's "youth is renewed like the eagle's." We can easily relate to this enthralled sense of David's way of holiness, but what does it mean for us to live a life of holiness (that comes from God) which is undoubtedly shaped by *dikaiosyne theou*? Paul in Romans has a rather clear idea about this new kind of ethics, which comes directly from the life and thought of Jesus and which was equally scandalous and publicly inconvenient in the 1st century A.D. as it is today.

Paul is convinced that Christian ethics is grounded in the righteousness of God and that Christian conduct represents its practical and necessary expression. Transformation that is taking place in the life of a new (and old) Christian is therefore not an optional next step that can be taken or not (Greathouse 2008b, 124). The "natural" course of the new reality pro-actively permeates the sphere of humans. Greathouse is rightly convinced that Paul's ethics anticipates an eschatological perspective and arises from the apocalyptic conviction that, after the events of death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God invades the present. Thus, practical consequences of these events in us represent not "virtues," but "the fruit[s] of the Spirit."

Through the last chapters of Romans, Paul provides us with an insight into what God's righteousness looks like in the realm of this new kind of humanity. In this context, Katherine A. Grieb justifiably points out that the word "therefore" in Romans 12:1 is the most important *oun* in the whole epistle (Grieb 2002, 117). From the very beginning, Paul boldly suggests the corporate nature of Christian consecration and transformation. By his appeal to present their bodies as living sacrifices and with spiritual (or rational, reasonable) worship (Romans 12:1), Paul aims to re-trigger a specific set of emotions connected with the OT sentiment of sacrificial rituals by providing a strong sense of communal safety and assurance of being accepted by God and participating in divine holiness. By making a direct relation between the old sentiment and the terminology of transformation and renewal (Romans 12:2), Paul provides this necessary new perspective in order to succeed in discerning the will of God. He summons the community "to activate

its capacity to discern and do the will of God” (Greathouse 2008b, 141) and the fruits of this capacity “naturally sweeten” the secular dimension, too. But, as David Peterson notes, Paul knows the danger of being conformed to the pattern of this world. He is aware of the power stored within social groups, cultural norms, institutions, and traditions in molding patterns of individual behavior (Peterson 1995, 127). Still, he is careful and wise enough not to neglect the importance of (sober and modest) involvement of diverse individuals (Romans 12:3-8), being brought into life-giving and meaningful Christian unity. As Bruce brilliantly observes, the same happens in nature: diversity and not uniformity marks the handiwork of God (Bruce 1985, 214).

Agape represents a distinguishing mark of people living in Christian community and being renewed and progressively transformed by the presence and involvement of the Holy Spirit. “To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote wellbeing” (Oord and Lodahl 2005, 73). Love makes communities flourish. Romans 12:9-17 provides specific indicators of that kind of love – sincere, genuine, un-hypocritical¹⁹ love. The code of Christian conduct is anchored in holiness, and as Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl propose, love functions as the core of holiness by being comprehensive, dynamic, creative, practical, and pro-active in its very essence. Love is also clearly reflected in the public sphere of Christian life and Paul is certainly aware of that. He is eager to make it clear, especially in relation to the attitude of Roman Christians toward public governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7). He readily exhorts them to use all benefits that the role of public authorities anticipates. While maintaining a delicate balance between the realities of the present and coming ages, it seems that Paul’s major concern is to preserve “order in the face of the threat of anarchy” (Greathouse 2008b, 173-174). In order to make the logic of his argument more persuasive, Paul makes a functional connection between the NT and the OT by claiming that *agape* accomplishes fulfilment of the Mosaic Law (Romans 13:8-10). By creating a specific sense of urgency (Romans 13:11-14), Paul’s appeal to the eschatological accountability of Christians affirms this same crucial orientation toward the purposes of ultimate salvation.

This same attitude has been further elaborated by Paul through Romans 14-15 by pleading for mutual acceptance. The fellowship of faith should be able to reflect Christ himself by the spirit of acceptance and hospitality extended to everybody. The focus of this text is appropriately turning back to *kyrios*,²⁰ making the apostle’s plea of holding back from judging others or making them stumble

19 Derived from ‘*he agape anypocritos*’ of Romans 12:9 but also 2 Corinthians 6:6 (Greathouse 2008b, 156).

20 The noun *kyrios* appears nine time in this part of the text.

(Romans 14), as well as honoring others before ourselves (Romans 15:1-7), being inclusive and embracing toward all, Jews and Gentiles (Romans 15:8-12), and what is particularly meaningful is the sense of being primarily accountable to God.

Futile attitudes and fruitless debates about dividing people according to ethnicity, gender, socioeconomics, culture, religion, and other kinds of distinctions are still happening in Christian churches around the world although Paul makes it perfectly clear they are not critical for salvation.²¹ He was obviously deeply aware and disturbed by this universal, characteristically human experience to divide people based on various criteria and we should feel the same. As Greathouse observes, our shared faith makes us immersed in mutual love, inevitably expressed by the Body of Christ (Greathouse 2008b, 203). Also, by our shared faith we are continually transformed and encouraged to receive the fullness of blessing which has always belonged to us.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to discern to what extent our concept of the *dikaio-syne theou* affects us in being the Body of Christ and living consecrated lives of holiness. We are powerfully influenced by Paul's epistle to Romans, especially being impacted by a Western cultural and religious heritage crucially shaped by theologians like Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Barth.

The meaning of the term *dikaio-synē* denotes right standing and a consequent right behavior and not as much the abstract idea of justice or virtue. However, the New Perspective on Paul strongly affirms that two different settings exist, both the law/court setting and the covenantal setting, which are crucial for a right interpretation of the *dikaio-syne theou*. Greathouse is more concerned about the connection between holiness and righteousness of God, holiness being the inner nature and very essence of God and righteousness being God's saving activity. This brings new focus to the appropriate inner mind-set, which equates holiness to the right outward manifestation of righteousness. When transferred from the divine to the human sphere, and especially in light of Christ and His sacrificial death and resurrection, relational and eschatological perspectives of God's righteousness become crucial.

Paul in Romans deals with God's righteousness in its final consummation. In that context, sanctification and salvation become a way of life, mainly expressed by pro-active *agape* and a life shared within an inclusive and supportive community of faith. As we already saw, Brower is not alone in claiming that the righte-

21 i.e. Romans 1 – 11; Galatians 3:26, 28; 1 Corinthians 12:13

ousness of God stands at the heart of Paul's gospel, as his redeeming and saving activity, but also anticipates a covenantal faithfulness and a restorative justice that God makes available for all of creation. The old concept is now elaborated in an eschatological perspective by the faithfulness of Jesus and his obedience to the Father in fulfilling his salvific purposes. In wrestling with the issue of Israel's apparent apostasy, Paul defends the concept of *dikaiosyne theou* by providing the elaborate account of the new community of faith, which is inclusive for all. Paul's scope is comprehensive and universal, from Eden to Eschaton, and all-inclusive, first for Jews and then for Gentiles.

Paul insists that the gospel he preaches is the message of God's righteousness and that the righteousness of God manifests itself in the death of the Messiah. It becomes easier when we know that Jesus was not an innocent, ignorant victim of the raging God but the obedient Son dedicated to do the will of His Father. Paul critically emphasizes that the event of Jesus Christ, which reveals *dikaiosyne theou*, which makes us have faith that justifies, *pistis Jesou Christou*. The traditional concept of passively receiving God's merciful free gift of grace thus becomes transformed into a pro-active and intentional involvement of all parties. Now we can finally see the righteousness of God in its full perspective and brightness: God's love, grace, and faithfulness meet together on the cross, and everything is set right. Except for the Jews, but in Romans 9-11, Paul makes the important shift in addressing this particular problem by providing the proof that God's word do not fail.

Christian ethics is deeply grounded in this universal concept of *dikaiosyne theou* and Christian conduct represents its practical and necessary expression. *Agape* marks people living in genuine Christian community, inwardly and outwardly. Christians as individuals and as a community of faith are primarily characterized by being progressively transformed by the presence and involvement of the Holy Spirit. Emphasis is on continuous transformation – openness, learning, partnerships, and accepting change. And the fruits of this process inevitably become visible in the public and secular sphere.

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Dalia Matijević

Božja pravednost: sposobnost življenja u svetosti

Sažetak

Svrha ovoga članka jest pružiti uvid do koje mjere naše poimanje *dikaiosyne theou* oblikuje način na koji sami sebe vidimo kao kršćane koji predstavljaju Tijelo Kristovo i žive svetim životom. Pod utjecajem Poslanice Rimljanima, razumijemo svetost kao življenje u pravilnom odnosu s Bogom, a pravednost kao praktičnu posljedicu tog odnosa. Svetost kao unutarinja Božja priroda očituje se kao Božja pravednost, koja se pak ostvaruje kroz Božje spasiteljsko djelovanje. Međutim, u svjetlu Krista i njegove žrtvene smrti i uskrsnuća, relacijske i eshatološke dimenzije koncepta *dikaiosyne theou* se nameću kao presudne.

Rečeni koncept stoji u samom središtu Pavlova evanđelja i pretpostavlja više slojeva značenja, prvenstveno Božje otkupiteljsko i spasiteljsko djelovanje, ali također i Božju zavjetnu vjernost te ponovno uspostavljenu pravednost koja je dostupna svakome. Šira perspektiva *dikaiosyne theou* se otvara kroz Isusovu odanost i poslušnost Ocu u ispunjavanju svrhe spasenja. Za nas to znači život koji podrazumijeva trajnu transformaciju na sliku Boga i samoostvarenje kroz odnos s Bogom i bližnjima u eshatološkoj perspektivi.

Kršćanska je etika duboko ukorijenjena u konceptu *dikaiosyne theou*, a kršćanski način života predstavlja njegov nužni praktični izričaj. Ljudi koji žive u autentičnoj kršćanskoj zajednici obilježeni su Božjom pravednošću koja se izražava kao kolektivna *agape*, pri čemu bivaju progresivno preobražavani prisutnošću i djelovanjem Duga Svetoga. Takvi ljudi uranjaju u kontinuirani proces otkrivanja uvijek novih mogućnosti afirmiranja Božje pravednosti. Stoga kršćanska vjerska zajednica treba po svojoj naravi biti uključujuća.