

Justification by Faith and the Inclusion of Gentiles: A Pauline Theological Synthesis in Historical and Contemporary Perspective

Exson Eduaman Pane
Universitas Advent Indonesia
Panexon@gmail.com

Abstract - This writing explores the delicate link between Paul's idea that we gain God's approval by believing and the welcoming of those not of Jewish background into the first Christian group. By carefully studying significant writings from Paul, especially the books of Romans and Galatians, along with current research, such as the *New Perspective on Paul*, this writing suggests that achieving God's approval through belief was more than just a concept about how people are saved. It was also the main religious thought for removing racial and faith-based walls between the Jewish people and those not of Jewish background. The paper investigates how Paul's view of being declare rightwith God came from his Jewish history before he became a follower of Christ. It also considers how his encounter with Christ altered this view, ultimately creating the basis for including those not of Jewish background without needing them to keep Jewish rules. Key points indicate that Paul's idea of being declare rightby faith acted as both a method to grasp personal salvation and a way to understand who God's people are together. The study ends by saying that the chief aim of the teaching of being declare rightwith God was to bring in those not of Jewish background, based on God's promises to Abraham and completed by Christ, rather than it being a side effect..

Keywords: Justification, Faith, Gentiles, Inclusion, Contemporary Perspective

I. INTRODUCTION

The Pauline doctrine of *justificatio ex fide*—that seminal axis upon which the theological revolutions of nascent Christianity so elegantly spun. One cannot overstate the seismic shift this concept effected, not merely in the soteriological imaginations of first-century believers but in the very architecture of covenantal identity. Paul, with all the subtlety of a trained rabbinic mind and the rhetorical flourish of a Hellenistic philosopher, propounded a view of salvation that detonated the ethnic boundaries so jealously guarded by Second Temple Judaism.

At the core of this doctrinal metamorphosis lies the inclusion of Gentiles—not as guests at Israel's covenantal table, but as co-heirs, full participants in the Abrahamic promise sans the

covenantal totems of circumcision and ceremonial law. It's as if Paul turned up at the great theological potluck and threw open the doors to everyone, kosher laws be damned (figuratively speaking, of course).

Now, let's not reduce this to mere ecclesiological pragmatism or post-Damascus opportunism. As Kim (2007) compellingly articulates, Paul's Gentile concern was not some epiphanic afterthought. No, it had embryonic presence even *before* that fateful encounter on the road to Damascus (p. 16). This wasn't Paul pivoting because of a sudden midlife Christ-crisis. Rather, it was the unveiling of a theologically loaded vision—prefigured, perhaps, in Isaiah's servant songs—of a God whose salvific embrace was not geographically or genealogically limited.

Romans and Galatians, those robust twin pillars of Pauline theology, bear witness to a gospel not only of vertical reconciliation (God to humanity) but horizontal deconstruction (Jew to Gentile, slave to free, male to female). One might say Paul was smashing socio-religious hierarchies with the same gusto as a prophet flipping temple tables.

The New Perspective on Paul is a different approach to understanding Paul, promoted by experts like N.T. Wright, James D.G. Dunn, and E.P. Sanders. These experts suggest Paul was primarily worried about people being wrongly left out because of where they came from. But, old-fashioned Protestant beliefs have typically seen justification as how God answered people trying to win his approval. As Dunn (2008) explains, the concept of being declared right through faith was developed "to fight a bad view of the rules that set up divisions, and to help get rid of the social barrier between 'Jew' and Gentile" (p. 1848). Put simply, Paul was not only arguing against the Pharisees, but also the group-based mindset that was harming the early church.

This writing will look at how justification is set up theologically, viewing it as both a core belief and a way to reshape the church. Through a close look at the scriptures and talking about new research (like the New Perspective), my aim is to show that Paul's idea of justification was more than just a hard-to-understand, theoretical idea. It was, instead, a strong and welcoming power that turned Christianity from a small Jewish following into a truly worldwide faith.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly debate over Paul's teaching of justification by faith and its application to Gentile inclusion reads like a theological Netflix movie, with conventional heroes, revisionist upstarts, and plot twists ranging from Wittenberg to Jerusalem. For centuries, the Reformers—those furious theological firebrands—portrayed Paul as the great anti-legalist fighter, valiantly rejecting the spiritual treadmill of Jewish law-keeping in favor of grace via faith. Luther, Calvin, and their theological descendants strongly believe that humans are saved via faith in Christ's atonement, rather than Torah conformity (Bird, 2013). To them, Paul's principal concern was how immoral people might be declared righteous in front of a holy God.

But then came the New Perspective, which, like a surprise guest at a Reformation reunion supper, graciously upended the entire seating arrangement. The movement began in 1977 with

E.P. Sanders and his now-famous Paul and Palestinian Judaism. Sanders did not simply knock on the door of Protestant tradition; he kicked it open with a scholarly footnote and stated that first-century Judaism was not the legalistic meritocracy that Protestants had assumed. No, Sanders argued, Judaism operated on a principle he called *covenantal nomism*—the idea that God's covenant established the relationship, and obedience to the law was a response to that relationship, not a means of earning it. According to Sanders (1977, p. 75), faithfulness to the covenant establishes one's place in God's plan and provides atonement for transgressions. In other words, Judaism was more of a covenantal family with rituals for forgiveness and inclusion than a spiritual bootcamp.

James D.G. Dunn, theological baton in hand, who integrated Sanders' findings into Pauline exegesis. Dunn contended that when Paul spoke of "works of the law," he was not attacking moral self-righteousness in general, but rather the identification marks that served as spiritual gatekeepers. Circumcision, kosher laws, and Sabbath observance were more than just religious disciplines; they were badges of ethnic pride, barriers that said, "You can't sit with us" to Gentiles. According to Dunn (2008, p. 1847), these "test cases of fidelity" were precisely what Paul intended as challenges to the gospel's radical inclusivity.

Then comes N.T. Wright—arguably the New Perspective's most prolific and poetic voice—who swept onto the scene with sweeping narratives and second-temple-era plotlines. Wright repositioned justification as more than a courtroom verdict; it was a divine declaration about who's in the family of God and who's on mission for the kingdom. For Wright, justification is embedded in God's faithfulness to the covenant, His purposes for Israel, and ultimately His plan to renew all creation through the Messiah. It's cosmic. It's covenantal. It's Christ-centered. And it's not just about "me and my salvation"—it's about *us* as God's renewed people.

Contemporary scholars, no longer content with the old dichotomies, are now stitching together a more integrated tapestry of Pauline theology. They understand that justification by faith is more than only avoiding divine judgment; it is also about establishing a new community in Christ where Jews and Gentiles can stand side to shoulder. As Watson (2007, p. 295) points out, "justification by faith and the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ" are not independent theological islands, but interrelated bridges that cross the vast gap between covenantal promise and ecclesial reality.

Therefore, simply put: justification by faith is no longer a one-note doctrine. It sings in three-part harmony—soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. And Paul? He wasn't just a theologian writing abstract treatises in dimly-lit rooms. He was a pastor-theologian wrestling with messy church issues, building a new humanity in Christ, and occasionally blowing up a few walls of hostility while he was at it.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employs a multifaceted methodology to probe Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, centering on Gentile inclusion. Through simple exegetical analysis of Romans 3:21-31,

Galatians 2:15-21 and 3:6-9, it unpacks how Paul redefined covenant membership beyond “works of the law,” emphasizing Abraham’s faith as a theological template. By situating Paul within the diverse landscape of Second Temple Judaism and engaging key events like the Antioch incident and the Jerusalem Council, the study illustrates how his message disrupted ethnic and ritual barriers. The dialogue with both classical (Luther, Calvin) and New Perspective scholars (Sanders, Dunn, Wright) deepens this inquiry, revealing justification as both a declaration of salvation by faith and a call to communal unity. Ultimately, the research constructs a theological synthesis showing how Paul’s vision reframes salvation, ecclesiology, and God’s covenantal character in inclusive and transformative ways.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Context: The Jewish Background

Understanding Paul's teaching of justification by faith is similar to attempting to appreciate jazz: you can't just listen to the sounds; you have to experience the background. In Paul's instance, the setting is rooted in the rich, complicated world of first-century Judaism (Wallace, 2013). This wasn't a monolithic religion with a single party line; it was more like a theological bazaar, buzzing with varied ideas on what it meant to be God's people—and, most importantly, how (or if) Gentiles could be drawn into the fold (Iswahyudi and Kurnia Putrawan, 2022).

The covenant was the central theme of Jewish theology. It was more than just a sacred pact; it was Israel's national identity, or divine passport (Cara, n.d.). The Torah, given at Sinai, was more than just a moral code; it was the community glue that held Jewish identity together despite the chaos of empire and exile. Keeping the law was how one stayed true to the covenant—and how Israel remained "set apart" from its heathen neighbors. (Moo, 2016).

As Kim (2007, p. 18) notes, Jewish thought wasn't entirely insular. There were varying shades of what he calls “Jewish universalism,” including intriguing concepts like the “Eschatological Pilgrimage,” where Gentiles would stream to Zion at the end of days, and “Gentile Proselytism,” which required full conversion—yes, including circumcision—to gain covenantal membership. In other words, Gentile inclusion wasn't off the table, but it often came with a scalpel.

Now enter the Dead Sea Scrolls—the ancient theological time capsules buried near Qumran. In particular, the document 4QMMT reveals how some Jewish sects viewed “works of the law” as essential to demonstrating covenant loyalty. It wasn't just about obeying; it was about qualifying. The phrase “it will be reckoned to you as righteousness” found in this text echoes Deuteronomy 6:25 and sheds light on how righteousness was viewed not simply as moral uprightness, but as covenantal legitimacy (Wright, 2013, p. 185). Righteousness wasn't so much earned as it was confirmed—by behavior that aligned with covenant expectations.

Paul's pre-conversion identity was steeped in Pharisaic rigor, marked by zealous adherence to Jewish tradition and a firm boundary around Gentile inclusion. His own words in Galatians

1:14 underscore a life driven by passion for ancestral customs, suggesting that any Gentile wishing to share in God's promises needed full ritual assimilation (Klang Church of Christ, 2011) This exclusivist view was shattered in the crucible of controversy as Paul wrestled with the theological implications of Gentile faith. The confrontation at Antioch and the deliberations of the Jerusalem Council weren't marginal incidents—they were defining moments that challenged the early church's understanding of salvation and community identity.(Denova, 2021)

From these fiery debates emerged Paul's revolutionary conviction: justification by faith redefined the covenantal boundaries. The locus of righteousness shifted from Torah observance to trust in Christ, liberating both Jew and Gentile to form a new Spirit-led family (Third Millennium Ministries. (n.d.). Paul's theology was no abstract speculation—it was a direct response to pressing questions of belonging. His insistence that faith alone grants covenant membership upended centuries of ritual prerequisite and refocused the gospel on grace, unity, and the crucified Messiah who fulfills the law and welcomes all.(Denova, 2021)

Exegetical and Theological Analysis: Key Pauline Texts Romans 3:21-31, The Universality of Justification

Literary Context and Structure

Immediate Context

Romans 3:21-31 functions as the theological resolution to the problem Paul has systematically developed in the preceding chapters. Having demonstrated universal human culpability—Gentiles through natural revelation (1:18-32), Jews despite covenant privilege (2:1-3:8), and all humanity under the comprehensive verdict of Scripture (3:9-20)—Paul now introduces God's response to this universal predicament. The emphatic *νυνὶ δέ* ("but now") of verse 21 marks not merely a temporal transition but an eschatological shift from the age of condemnation to the age of righteousness (Käsemann, 1980).

The passage also serves as the theological foundation for what follows. Paul will subsequently illustrate his argument through Abraham (Romans 4), explore its implications for Christian existence (Romans 5-8), address the question of Israel's status (Romans 9-11), and conclude with practical applications (Romans 12-16). Thus, the theological principles established in 3:21-31 undergird the entire epistle.

Rhetorical Structure

The passage exhibits a carefully crafted rhetorical structure that supports Paul's theological argument. Following Hengel's (1991) analysis, the section can be understood as an extended exposition of the theme introduced in 1:16-17, structured around the concept of divine righteousness:

A.	Divine	righteousness	revealed	apart	from	law	(vv.	21-22a)
B.	Universal	need	established				(vv.	22b-23)
C.	Universal	provision	described				(vv.	24-26)
B'.	Universal	application	defended				(vv.	27-30)
A'.	Divine righteousness confirmed (v. 31)							

This chiastic arrangement places the description of God's salvific action in Christ (vv. 24-26) at the center, while the parallel sections emphasize both the universal scope of the problem and the universal availability of the solution.

Exegetical Analysis

The Eschatological "Now" (v. 21)

Paul's opening phrase, *συνὶ δὲ χωρὶς νόμου δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ πεφανέρωται*, establishes several crucial theological points. The temporal adverb *συνὶ* carries eschatological significance, marking the inauguration of the new age in Christ (Käsemann, 1980). This is not merely chronological sequence but theological watershed—the transition from the epoch of law to the epoch of grace.

The prepositional phrase *χωρὶς νόμου* ("apart from law") has generated considerable scholarly discussion. Käsemann (1980) argues that this phrase indicates not the absence of law but independence from the law as a soteriological system. The perfect passive verb *πεφανέρωται* suggests both the completed nature of this revelation and its ongoing effects. Divine righteousness has been definitively manifested and continues to be available.

The qualifying phrase *μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν* indicates continuity with Old Testament revelation while announcing something genuinely new. As Hays (1989) demonstrates, Paul consistently argues that the Christ-event represents both fulfillment and transformation of Israel's scriptural tradition.

The Universality Formula (vv. 22-23)

The phrase *δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας* introduces Paul's central claim about universal access to divine righteousness. The genitive construction *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. While traditional interpretation understands this as objective genitive ("faith in Jesus Christ"), recent scholarship increasingly favors the subjective genitive reading ("the faith/faithfulness of Jesus Christ") (Hays, 2002).

Hays (2002) argues persuasively that the subjective genitive reading better explains Paul's theological logic: it is Christ's own faithfulness, particularly his obedient death, that provides the basis for divine righteousness. This interpretation also coheres with Paul's broader theological emphasis on Christ's representative action on behalf of humanity.

The universality of the offer is emphasized by εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας, which Paul immediately reinforces with the explanatory statement οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή. The noun διαστολή, meaning "distinction" or "difference," decisively eliminates ethnic or religious privilege in matters of salvation. As Dunn (1988) observes, this represents a fundamental revision of Second Temple Jewish soteriology.

Verse 23 provides the theological foundation for this universality: πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ. The aorist verb ἥμαρτον points to the historical reality of universal sinfulness, while the present verb ὑστεροῦνται indicates the ongoing condition of falling short of God's glory. This establishes what Käsemann (1980) calls the "democratization" of both condemnation and salvation—all are equally excluded by sin and equally included by grace.

The Soteriological Center (vv. 24-26)

The participle δικαιούμενοι introduces Paul's description of the divine solution to universal sinfulness. The present passive participle suggests both the ongoing availability of justification and its divine origin. The adverb δωρεάν emphasizes the gratuitous nature of justification—it comes as pure gift, not earned reward.

Paul employs three metaphorical complexes to describe God's salvific action: legal (justification), commercial (redemption), and cultic (propitiation). The noun ἀπολύτρωσις evokes both the payment of ransom and the resulting liberation. In the context of the Roman Empire, this term would particularly resonate with manumission—the purchase of slaves' freedom (Moo, 1996).

The most theologically complex phrase appears in verse 25: ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι. The term ἱλαστήριον has generated extensive debate. Dodd (1932) argued for the meaning "expiation," emphasizing the removal of sin rather than the propitiation of divine wrath. However, Morris (1965) demonstrates convincingly that the term carries both connotations—sin is removed precisely through the satisfaction of divine justice.

The phrase ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι connects Christ's death specifically to the Day of Atonement ritual, suggesting that his death effects what the temple sacrifices symbolized. The reference to divine forbearance (ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ) in the πάρεσις of former sins indicates that God's apparent overlooking of pre-Christian sins was not indifference but restraint pending the decisive atonement in Christ.

Verse 26 provides the theological rationale for this arrangement: πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιῶντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ. The purpose clause εἰς τὸ εἶναι articulates Paul's solution to what Anselm would later call the "satisfaction" problem—how God can be both just (δίκαιον) and justifier (δικαιῶντα). The Christ-event demonstrates that divine mercy does not compromise divine justice but fulfills it.

The Exclusion of Boasting (vv. 27-28)

Paul's rhetorical questions in verses 27-28 address the implications of his universality thesis. The exclusion of boasting (καύχησις) follows logically from gratuitous justification. If righteousness comes as gift rather than achievement, no ground remains for human pride.

The contrast between "law of works" (νόμου ἔργων) and "law of faith" (νόμου πίστεως) represents Paul's fundamental reorientation of soteriology. As Sanders (1977) argues, Paul's critique of "works of law" is not directed against legalistic works-righteousness per se, but against the entire system of Torah observance as the boundary marker of covenant membership.

Verse 28 provides Paul's summary statement: λογίζομεθα γὰρ δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου. The verb λογίζομεθα indicates reasoned theological conclusion based on the preceding argument. The phrase χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου completely separates justification from Torah observance, thus eliminating ethnic privilege and establishing faith as the universal principle of salvation.

Divine Unity and Universal Access (vv. 29-30)

Paul's rhetorical questions in verses 29-30 connect his argument to fundamental Jewish theological conviction. The assertion that God is one (εἰς ὁ θεός) invokes the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), the central confession of Jewish monotheism. Paul's innovative move is to argue that divine unity necessitates universal access—the one God must be God of all peoples, not merely the Jews.

The future tense verbs in verse 30 (δικαιώσει) may indicate eschatological completion of justification, though they more likely express logical certainty (Moo, 1996). The slight variation in prepositional usage (ἐκ πίστεως for circumcised, διὰ τῆς πίστεως for uncircumcised) appears stylistic rather than substantive, emphasizing that faith is the common means of justification for both Jews and Gentiles.

The Confirmation of Law (v. 31)

Paul concludes with an anticipated objection: νόμον οὖν καταργοῦμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως; His emphatic response (μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ νόμον ἱστάνομεν) indicates that faith actually establishes rather than nullifies the law. As Schreiner (1998) argues, Paul likely means that faith fulfills the law's true intention—to point toward Christ and reveal human sinfulness.

Theological Implications

The concept of divine righteousness (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) functions as both the problem and solution in Paul's argument. As righteousness that belongs to God, it represents the standard that condemns human sinfulness. As righteousness that comes from God, it represents the gift that saves those who believe. This dual aspect resolves the apparent tension between divine justice and mercy—God maintains righteousness by providing righteousness.

Paul's universality principle represents a fundamental departure from Second Temple Jewish thought. While Judaism maintained that Gentiles could be saved through conversion and Torah observance, Paul eliminates these requirements entirely. Salvation is available to all through faith alone, without ethnic privilege or religious performance.

This universality is not merely quantitative (salvation available to more people) but qualitative (salvation available on entirely different terms). The removal of ethnic and religious distinctions creates what Sanders (1977) calls a "participationist" understanding of salvation—righteousness comes through participation in Christ rather than through Torah observance.

The passage's Christology, while not explicitly developed, provides the foundation for Paul's entire argument. Christ functions as both the revelation of divine righteousness (v. 21) and the means of its bestowal (vv. 24-26). His death satisfies divine justice while his faithfulness provides the pattern for human response. The universal scope of salvation depends entirely on the universal significance of Christ's work. As the second Adam, Christ represents all humanity; as the faithful Israelite, he fulfills Israel's calling on behalf of all nations.

Conclusion

Romans 3:21-31 represents Paul's most concentrated theological reflection on the universality of justification by faith. Through careful exegetical analysis, this study has demonstrated that Paul's universality principle emerges not from theological pragmatism but from his understanding of divine righteousness, human sinfulness, and the Christ-event.

The passage's emphasis on the exclusion of ethnic privilege, the gratuitous nature of justification, and faith as the universal principle of salvation provides the theological foundation for Paul's broader argument in Romans and establishes crucial principles for Christian doctrine and practice. The universality of justification does not eliminate its particularity—salvation comes only through Christ—but extends its application to all humanity.

Paul's argument remains relevant for contemporary theological reflection, providing both the warrant for inclusive Christian community and the foundation for global evangelization. The principle that "there is no distinction" continues to challenge forms of religious and social hierarchy while affirming the equal dignity of all persons before God.

Galatians 2:15-21, The Antioch Incident

Galatians 2:15-21 represents the theological core of Paul's argument following the "Antioch Incident" (2:11-14), where he confronted Peter for withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentile Christians. This passage is not merely a summary of the dispute but a profound exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith.

Paul begins by establishing common ground with his Jewish-Christian audience: "We who are Jews by birth" (v. 15). He acknowledges their shared heritage and understanding that justification does not come from "works of the law" (*ergōn nomou*), a phrase denoting legalistic observance of the Mosaic code, not good deeds in general (Moo, 2013). The pivotal contrast is

introduced in verse 16: a person is declared righteous (*dikaioō*) not through this law-keeping but *only* "through faith in Jesus Christ" (*pisteōs Iēsou Christou*). The triple repetition of this principle underscores its non-negotiable centrality. The genitive phrase *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* can also be interpreted as the "faithfulness of Jesus Christ," highlighting Christ's obedient act as the ground of justification (Hays, 2002). Both readings ultimately affirm that faith, not law, is the instrumental cause of justification.

In verses 17-18, Paul anticipates a potential objection: if seeking justification in Christ reveals us to be "sinners" (like the Gentiles), does that make Christ a minister of sin? Paul's response is an emphatic "Absolutely not!" (*mē genoito*). To rebuild the "law" as a system of justification after tearing it down through faith in Christ would be to prove oneself a transgressor. This is precisely what Peter risked doing in Antioch; his actions implicitly rebuilt the very barrier between Jew and Gentile that Christ's death destroyed.

The climax arrives in verses 19-20 with the personal and mystical language of co-crucifixion. Through the law, Paul died *to* the law so that he might live *to* God. This death occurred through union with Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ" (*Christō synestaurōmai*). His old, sinful self, defined by law and sin, was put to death. The resulting life is therefore no longer his own but is Christ living in him. This new existence is sustained by "faith in the Son of God," the continuous mode of relating to God that is characterized by trust and dependence.

Paul concludes by stating the ultimate absurdity of reverting to the law: it would "set aside" (*atheteō*) the grace of God (v. 21). If righteousness could be achieved through the law, then Christ's death was pointless. The Antioch incident was thus not a minor social dispute but a direct denial of the gospel itself. Justification is by grace through faith alone, resulting in a transformative union with Christ that fulfills the law's ultimate requirement—love (5:14).

In conclusion, Galatians 2:15-21 serves as the theological cornerstone of Paul's letter, articulating the non-negotiable principle of justification by faith in response to the Antioch incident. This passage moves beyond mere polemic to present a positive and profound vision of the gospel. Justification is solely through faith in (or of) Jesus Christ, utterly apart from the "works of the law." This truth is existentially realized through the believer's co-crucifixion with Christ, which terminates the old life under the law and inaugurates a new life of faith lived in union with Him. Ultimately, Paul argues that to reinstate the law as a system of justification is to nullify God's grace and render Christ's death meaningless. The incident at Antioch was therefore a pastoral and theological crisis of the first order, threatening the very foundation of the gospel: that sinners are made right with God by grace through faith alone.

Galatians 3:6-9, The Abraham Paradigm

Paul's argument in Galatians 3:6-9 represents a pivotal moment in his theological defense against the Judaizers who were compelling Gentile converts to embrace Jewish law for salvation (Martyn, 1997). This passage establishes Abraham as the paradigm of justification by faith, demonstrating that righteousness before God has always been accessed through faith rather than

works of law (Dunn, 1993; Longenecker, 1990). Paul's strategic use of Abraham as his "star witness" was particularly devastating to his opponents since Abraham predated Moses by over five centuries and was universally revered as the prototype of godliness among Jewish people (Bruce, 1982).

Textual Analysis

Verse 6: Abraham's Faith Credited as Righteousness

Paul begins with the crucial citation from Genesis 15:6: "Just as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην) (Martyn, 1997). The Greek verb ἐλογίσθη (elogisthē) carries the accounting metaphor of crediting or reckoning, indicating that Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness in God's ledger (Longenecker, 1990). This quotation serves as Paul's foundational proof text that justification preceded and occurred independently of law observance (Bruce, 1982; Dunn, 1993).

The temporal significance cannot be overlooked—Abraham's justification occurred before circumcision (Genesis 17) and centuries before the Mosaic Law (Dunn, 1993). This chronological argument dismantles any claim that law-keeping is necessary for righteousness (Bruce, 1982).

Verse 7: The True Sons of Abraham

Paul's interpretive principle emerges in verse 7: "Therefore know that those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (γινώσκετε ἅρα ὅτι οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ) (Martyn, 1997). The phrase οἱ ἐκ πίστεως ("those of faith") creates a new category of Abrahamic sonship based on faith rather than ethnic descent (Longenecker, 1990). This radical redefinition of covenant membership challenges traditional Jewish exclusivity and establishes faith as the determining factor for inclusion in Abraham's family (Dunn, 1993).

Verse 8: The Universal Gospel Preached to Abraham

The theological climax appears in verse 8, where Paul asserts that "Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (προῖδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφή ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοῖ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ θεός, προενηγγελίσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) (Martyn, 1997).

Paul's use of προενηγγελίσατο ("preached the gospel beforehand") demonstrates that the gospel of justification by faith was not a Pauline innovation but was embedded in God's original promise to Abraham (Longenecker, 1990). The phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ("all the nations") explicitly includes Gentiles in God's redemptive plan from the beginning (Bruce, 1982).

Verse 9: Blessing with Faithful Abraham

Paul concludes in verse 9 that "those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer" (ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ) (Martyn, 1997). The adjective πιστῷ describes Abraham as "the faithful one," establishing him as the archetypal believer whose faith-pattern believers replicate (Dunn, 1993).

Theological Implications

Paul's argument establishes that justification has always operated through faith alone, apart from works (Bruce, 1982). Abraham's example proves that righteousness is credited, not earned—it comes through trusting God's promises rather than performing religious obligations (Longenecker, 1990). This principle applies universally to both Jews and Gentiles who follow Abraham's pattern of faith (Dunn, 1993).

The Abraham paradigm demonstrates remarkable continuity between Old and New Testament salvation (Martyn, 1997). God's plan to bless all nations through Abraham finds its fulfillment in Christ, who enables Gentiles to become Abraham's spiritual descendants through faith (Dunn, 1993). This continuity refutes charges that Paul introduced theological novelty (Bruce, 1982).

Paul radically redefines covenant membership based on faith rather than ethnicity or law observance (Longenecker, 1990). The true "Israel of God" consists of all who share Abraham's faith, whether Jew or Gentile (Martyn, 1997). This theological revolution democratizes access to God's covenant blessings while maintaining continuity with Old Testament promises (Dunn, 1993).

Conclusion

Paul's deployment of the Abraham paradigm in Galatians 3:6-9 represents a masterful theological argument that simultaneously honors Old Testament scripture while defending justification by faith against legalistic distortion (Martyn, 1997). By demonstrating that Abraham—the father of the Jewish nation—was justified by faith apart from law, Paul establishes the universal principle that righteousness comes through trusting God's promises rather than performing religious works (Bruce, 1982; Longenecker, 1990). This paradigm not only validates Gentile inclusion in God's covenant community but also preserves the integrity of the gospel message that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone (Dunn, 1993). The Abraham paradigm thus serves as the theological foundation for understanding how God's ancient promises to bless all nations find their fulfillment in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Martyn, 1997).

Romans 1:13, An Apostle to the Gentiles

Romans 1:13 occupies a strategic position within Paul's opening appeal to the Roman church, serving as a crucial transition from his expressed longing to visit them to his sense of apostolic obligation (Moo, 1996). This verse reveals Paul's persistent intentions, divine hindrances, and missional motivations in his relationship with the Roman believers (Schreiner, 2018). The passage demonstrates Paul's pastoral heart while simultaneously establishing his apostolic authority and universal mandate to preach the gospel among all Gentiles (Cranfield, 1975).

Textual Analysis

Paul's Persistent Purpose

The opening phrase "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers" (οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί) employs a Pauline disclosure formula that emphasizes the importance of the following statement (Moo, 1996). Paul's use of "brothers" (ἀδελφοί) reflects both his Jewish heritage and spiritual kinship with Roman believers, establishing an intimate foundation for his subsequent appeal (Schreiner, 2018).

Paul's declaration that he "often intended to come" (πολλάκις προεθέμην ἐλθεῖν) reveals the repeated and deliberate nature of his planning (Cranfield, 1975). The aorist middle verb προεθέμην indicates a settled resolution made multiple times, demonstrating this was not a casual desire but a persistent apostolic purpose (Moo, 1996). This persistence underscores the genuine nature of Paul's pastoral concern and his strategic recognition of Rome's importance for gospel advancement (Dunn, 1988).

Divine Hindrance

The parenthetical phrase "but was prevented until now" (καὶ ἐκωλύθη ἄχρι τοῦ δεῦρο) introduces the theme of divine sovereignty in apostolic ministry (Schreiner, 2018). The passive voice of ἐκωλύθη suggests Paul understood his hindrances as ultimately orchestrated by God rather than mere human circumstances (Cranfield, 1975). This theological perspective demonstrates Paul's submission to divine providence while maintaining his earnest desire to minister in Rome (Moo, 1996).

Calvin argued that such divine hindrances serve to humble God's servants and teach reliance on divine providence rather than human planning (Calvin, 1960). This interpretation aligns with Paul's broader theology of ministry, where apparent obstacles often serve God's larger redemptive purposes (Dunn, 1988).

Missional Motivation

Paul's stated purpose—"in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles" (ἵνα τινὰ καρπὸν σχῶ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν καθὼς καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν)—reveals his fundamental understanding of apostolic ministry (Schreiner, 2018). The agricultural

metaphor of "fruit" (καρπὸν) encompasses conversion of unbelievers, spiritual growth of believers, and practical expressions of faith through good works (Moo, 1996).

Significantly, Paul explicitly identifies the Romans "among the rest of the Gentiles" (ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν), confirming his primary understanding of his Roman audience as Gentile (Cranfield, 1975). This designation supports the view that Romans addresses predominantly Gentile Christians, despite the presence of some Jewish believers (Dunn, 1988).

Theological Implications

Romans 1:13 establishes the foundation for Paul's subsequent declaration of obligation in verse 14, where he describes himself as a "debtor" (ὀφειλέτης) to all peoples (Schreiner, 2018). Paul's sense of indebtedness flows not from human obligation but from divine grace and calling, compelling him to reach all segments of humanity with the gospel (Moo, 1996). This universal scope reflects Paul's understanding of his apostolic commission to bring about "the obedience of faith among all the nations" (Romans 1:5), making his ministry to Rome both strategically important and theologically necessary (Cranfield, 1975).

The tension between Paul's repeated planning and divine prevention illustrates the delicate balance between human initiative and divine sovereignty in Christian ministry (Dunn, 1988). Paul's experience demonstrates that faithful planning and earnest desire must ultimately submit to God's timing and purposes (Schreiner, 2018).

Conclusion

Romans 1:13 reveals Paul as a strategic missionary with pastoral instincts who recognizes both human responsibility and divine sovereignty in ministry planning (Moo, 1996). His persistent desire to visit Rome, coupled with his theological understanding of divine hindrance, demonstrates mature apostolic leadership that balances earnest planning with humble submission to God's providence (Cranfield, 1975). The verse establishes Paul's identification of the Roman Christians as Gentiles within his broader mission field, setting the theological foundation for his subsequent argument about universal human need and divine grace (Schreiner, 2018). This passage thus serves as a crucial bridge between Paul's personal relationship with the Romans and his theological exposition of the gospel's power for all peoples (Dunn, 1988).

The Jerusalem Council: Theological Principles in Practice

The meeting in Jerusalem described in Acts 15 is a very important moment in the church's story. It was a moment when different religious beliefs met practical choices about the church, particularly about allowing non-Jewish people to join. The big question was if non-Jewish people who wanted to become Christians needed to be circumcised and follow Jewish rules first. Peter said that God had already made it clear that he accepted non-Jewish believers by giving them the

Holy Spirit. He stated, "He did not treat us differently from them, because he made their hearts pure through faith" (Acts 15:8-9). This made belief, not traditions or background, the most important thing for being a member of God's family. It showed that the religious idea that Paul believed in was correct. (Sheehan, 2013).

Rather than imposing the full weight of Jewish law, the council chose a measured response: Gentiles were advised to abstain from four defiling practices (Acts 15:20), reflecting pastoral sensitivity without undermining justification by faith. As Welch (2022) observes, this solution avoided burdening Gentiles with the law while respecting the cultural concerns of Jewish believers. The council's decision demonstrated that justification by faith wasn't simply a theological theory—it was a guiding principle for community formation, identity, and mission in a diverse church (Barclay, 2015).

James' conclusion emphasized the council's balancing act of doctrine and brotherhood. The early church promoted unity without requiring conformity by confirming faith as the basis for inclusion while acknowledging ongoing Jewish observance. This moment established a pattern for how important theological convictions, such as salvation by grace, may coexist with contextual variation in practice. Finally, the Jerusalem Council revealed that the gospel of justification by faith welcomes all peoples while also challenging the church to walk together in wisdom, grace, and mutual respect (Johnson, 2002).

Contemporary Scholarly Perspectives

The New Perspective on Paul

The New Way of Looking at Paul, from thinkers like E.P. Sanders, James D.G. Dunn, and N.T. Wright, has really changed how experts see Paul's ideas about being declare rightwith God through faith, mainly concerning how it involves bringing in non-Jewish people. Old Protestant ideas usually pictured Paul as fighting against Jewish people strictly following the law. But, Sanders' key research brought up the idea of "being in a covenant by following rules." He explained that Jewish life in the first century was not about gaining God's approval by doing good things. Instead, he said it was set up so people joined God's agreement through kindness and remained in it by obeying God, with forgiveness there for mistakes (Sanders, 1977, p. 75). This fresh understanding changed Paul's complaints from going after legalism to questioning who was allowed to be in the agreement.

Dunn used Sanders' ideas and pointed out that Paul's argument against "works of the law" was more about the community and cultural differences that separated Jewish people from non-Jewish people. Dunn thought that Paul was against "Jewish followers of Jesus demanding that they stay separate from non-Jewish people" (Dunn, 2008, p. 1847). This idea switches the attention from what people do individually to who is accepted into the group. It puts importance on Paul's idea of a joined-together covenant group that welcomes non-Jewish people as equals. Wright made it better by putting being declare rightwith God inside the bigger story of God being faithful to his

agreement and his plan to make the world new. He said that Paul's teaching is part of God's whole plan to fix creation using Christ. In this idea, being declare rightwith God has a job in being saved, the church, and the final days.

While the New Perspective has faced criticism for allegedly downplaying the soteriological focus of Paul's writings and placing too much emphasis on social inclusion, it has nonetheless deepened scholarly understanding of Paul's historical context and theological priorities. Its contributions clarify how justification by faith operated in the early church not only as a message of personal salvation but also as a declaration of covenantal unity. The Gentile mission, once controversial, becomes central within this perspective, reframing Paul's theology as one fundamentally designed to bridge cultural and religious divides within the body of Christ (Seifrid, 2000).

Critiques and Response

The New Perspective on Paul has stirred substantial academic discourse, particularly regarding its portrayal of first-century Judaism and its implications for Pauline theology. Critics argue that it sometimes glosses over the diversity within ancient Jewish beliefs, presenting covenantal nomism as a monolithic structure. Others assert that this perspective downplays the theological weight Paul places on human sin and the futility of achieving righteousness through the law. From a traditional Protestant standpoint, justification by faith has long been viewed as a profound response to humanity's spiritual need rather than merely a reaction to socioreligious boundary markers (Gathercole, 2002).

But, those who are for the New Perspective say that it still deals with what Paul really taught about how people are saved. Rather, it shifts our view of how we are declare rightwith God by seeing it as being part of God's promise and what happened in the past, mainly how people who were not Jewish were accepted. They argue that Paul's focus on ethnic reconciliation and dismantling exclusionary barriers enhances—not diminishes—the doctrine's redemptive power. By centering the conversation around God's gracious invitation to all, regardless of ethnic identity, this view underscores the expansive reach of divine salvation and the theological critique of ethnocentric covenantal claims (Watson,2009).

In response to both sides, recent scholarship has moved toward integrative models that synthesize insights from the New Perspective with classical interpretations. This blended approach acknowledges that justification by faith encompasses both vertical (individual salvation) and horizontal (corporate inclusion) dimensions. Paul's theology, particularly his stance on Gentile inclusion, reveals a doctrine rich in complexity—one that addresses sin, grace, faith, unity, and identity within God's redemptive plan. Far from diluting core theological convictions, this integration offers a fuller and more nuanced understanding of Paul's gospel (Barclay,2015).

Theological Implications

Soteriology and Ecclesiology

Paul's lesson that we gain God's approval by believing is tied to including non-Jewish people. This tie is key to knowing how being saved and the church are connected. Old Protestant thoughts often viewed gaining God's approval as something personal. But new studies show Paul saw it more as uniting Jewish and non-Jewish people into a new group. This means that, for Paul, being saved and what the church is are closely linked (Campbell, 2014).

By teaching that believing, not obeying the rules, leads to being saved, Paul says people can know they have a bond with God. He also removes walls between different kinds of people. This makes a base for a church formed of different people who are all equal in Christ. Paul's idea that the church is "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27) and his lesson about joining together in Ephesians 2:14–16 show that how we see the church comes right from how we see being saved. Gaining God's approval is not just about being saved on your own, but also about forming a joined group that shows God's welcome to everyone (Gorman, 2017).

This integrated approach reshapes our understanding of salvation itself. It is not merely a vertical transaction between the individual and God, but a horizontal reality that creates a new social and spiritual identity. The inclusion of Gentiles shows that salvation involves a transformation of relationships and the formation of a community that mirrors God's justice and mercy. In Paul's vision, justification by faith brings people into communion with God—and with one another—forming a church that embodies His redemptive plan for creation (Eastman, 2019).

Covenant Theology

Paul's idea that we are declare rightwith God by believing, especially how he included non-Jewish people, is key to understanding the study of God's agreements. Common ideas often say that the old agreement, which was about following rules, and the new agreement, which is about kindness, are very different. But Paul talks about Abraham, like in Galatians 3:15–18, and this makes that simple difference harder to prove. Paul says that the agreement God made with Abraham, which was based on a promise and on believing, is still good even after God gave the Law of Moses. Here, the law was only a short-term "helper" until Christ came (Galatians 3:24–25). This means that the new agreement in Christ makes the first promise complete instead of taking its place (Schnabel, 2019).

This completion is important for everyone because non-Jewish people are included through belief. Paul talks about God's promise that Abraham would become "the father of many nations" (Romans 4:17). Paul says this means that people from all backgrounds are welcome to join the group under the agreement, not just that Abraham's family would get bigger. Non-Jewish people are accepted not because they get circumcised but because they have the same belief. This shows that God always planned to include everyone. This changes how we see who can be part of the

agreement. It's not just for people who follow the law or who are from a certain family. Instead, it's for anyone who believes and is helped by kindness (Thielman, 2020).

Such a perspective transforms the theological relationship between Israel and the church. Instead of seeing the church as replacing Israel, Paul's view presents a fulfillment theology where the church represents the realization of God's promises to Israel through the inclusion of Gentiles. Christ's work does not annul what came before but brings it to completion. Thus, the covenant in Christ maintains continuity with God's ancient promises while broadening redemption's reach to all people, creating one unified family of faith. (Schnabel, 2019).

Mission and Evangelism

Paul's idea that we gain God's approval by believing, which includes those not of Jewish background, helps us grasp the ideas behind covenant theology. It was often thought that there was a big change from the old rules, focused on laws, to the new agreement, based on God's giving nature. Yet Paul mentions Abraham, especially in Galatians 3:15–18, which makes this straightforward change more complex to understand. He explains that the agreement with Abraham—based on what was promised and on belief—still matters even after God later introduced the rules of Moses. In this case, the law served as a short-term "teacher" (*paidagōgos*) until Christ arrived (Galatians 3:24–25). This shows that the new agreement in Christ makes the first promise fully realized rather than taking its place (Stott, 1968).

This fulfillment is meaningful for all because those who are not Jewish are welcomed through belief. Paul brings up God's word that Abraham would become "the father of many nations" (Romans 4:17). He clarifies that this isn't only about Abraham's family growing larger but about welcoming believers from every nation to be part of the covenant family (Bosch, 1991). God's acceptance of non-Jewish people, not by demanding circumcision but by sharing faith, reveals that God always intended to include everyone. This shifts our perspective on who can belong to the covenant, from being only for those who obey the law or are from a specific background, to being available for everyone through belief and God's generosity (Hiebert, 1985).

Such a perspective transforms the theological relationship between Israel and the church. Instead of seeing the church as replacing Israel, Paul's view presents a fulfillment theology where the church represents the realization of God's promises to Israel through the inclusion of Gentiles. Christ's work does not annul what came before but brings it to completion. Thus, the covenant in Christ maintains continuity with God's ancient promises while broadening redemption's reach to all people, creating one unified family of faith (Thiselton, 2000).

V. CONCLUSION

This look at Paul's view of how people can be seen as righteous by God because of their belief, especially how it involves those who are not Jewish, tells us how much it matters in religious thought and everyday living. Paul's lesson was more than just a thought. It actually made a big difference in how people saw their religion, as it let anyone join God's group, no

matter where they came from or their culture. This growth was a key moment in the story of being saved, where joining God's promise is about belief, not about who your family is or doing what the rules say.

Key writings from Paul prove that being declare rightwith God through faith happens in two ways: it makes people sure they are okay with God (how to get saved), and it gives a religious reason for different groups to join together as one (how the church works). These related parts prove that Paul's religious thinking covers both being saved alone and being part of a group. Also, how it was used in the first church—like what happened at Antioch and the Jerusalem meeting—proves that this idea grew from real talks and problems in the church. These events turned religious ideas into open ways of sharing the faith.

New studies, like the New Perspective on Paul, have really helped us get a better idea of the social and cultural backgrounds of Paul's beliefs. Even though this idea has caused some debate, it has also revealed important parts of Paul's beliefs that people had not seen before. Using the ideas from the New Perspective along with older ideas about Paul's beliefs lets us more fully understand his lessons and their importance.

The effects of this study on religious ideas are not just about looking back at the past. They also have an impact on today's questions about what it means to be saved, what the church is, and what Christians are supposed to do. Paul's lesson that we are declare rightwith God because of our faith gives us a way to understand that the good news is for everyone and that all people are part of the group of believers. It shows that being saved changes people and makes new connections that are bigger than just different cultures and backgrounds.

Understanding how people are seen as righteous through belief and the addition of Gentiles helps us see how the old and new rules are connected. Paul talking about Abraham shows that bringing in Gentiles is God's plan happening, not something new taking its place. Seeing it this way helps us understand the relationship between Israel and the church, noting what remains and what is different.

Also, this research shows that Paul's beliefs and his missionary work were very connected. His idea that people are declare rightwith God by faith didn't happen separately from his job as a missionary. It came up as he answered real questions about sharing the Good News with people from different backgrounds. This link tells us that theology and mission are not separate things. They are instead connected parts of the church's role to share the Good News with everyone.

The inclusion of Gentiles through faith is a very big shift, in both belief and action, in the early days of Christianity. It proves that the Good News is for all and that God's agreement is meant to include everyone who believes in what God has shown us through Christ. This understanding still has a big impact on how the church views itself, its purpose, and its calling in today's world.

In conclusion, Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and the inclusion of Gentiles cannot be understood as separate theological concepts but as interconnected aspects of his understanding of God's redemptive purposes. The inclusion of Gentiles through faith demonstrates that justification by faith is not merely about individual salvation but about the creation of a new humanity that embodies God's purposes for creation. This understanding provides the foundation

for the church's continuing mission to proclaim the gospel to all people and to embody the unity and diversity of the covenant community in its life and witness

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The sole author of this manuscript was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, and original drafting of all chapters. This includes the comprehensive literature review, the development of the biblical and theological framework, and the analysis of Paul's on justification and the view contemporary Scholarly Perspectives. The author also undertook all research, synthesis of information, and the formulation of conclusions and recommendations. All aspects of the writing, from initial drafts to final revisions, were conducted by the single author, who takes full responsibility for the content presented herein.

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