

(and the same is true of the Hebrew *אֱמוּנָה*, *‘emunah*), it is warranted to translate the phrase as referring to Messiah’s own faithfulness. However, the thrust of the verse is clearly that those who are justified have been given this status because they have trusted in the One sent by the Father to die for sins, and that His righteousness would be accredited to their account. Dunn gives the following why the traditional rendering, “faith in Yeshua Messiah,” should be read here. (1) faith in the sense of “believe in” is the most natural understanding of the phrase in this context, (2) the verb and the noun (πιστεύω / πίστις, *pisteuō / pistis*) would normally have the same sense when used together as they are here, (3) both here and in Romans the primary issue being addressed is how some could be acquitted of guilt, i.e., declared righteous, and Abraham (Gen 15:6) is used as the model. In Gen 15:6, the emphasis is upon Abraham’s faith, that what God had promised, He would do, and not upon Abraham’s faithfulness (=obedience), (4) “faith” as trust in God rather than “faithfulness of Yeshua” is a better antithesis for “works of the Torah” with which it is contrasted, and (5) faith in Messiah best fits the overall emphasis upon the Gospel already given in the epistle, for faith in Messiah means an acceptance (trust of and in) both what Yeshua said and did, which forms the core elements of the gospel.⁵³

Paul concludes the verse with a clear and emphatic statement: “for by the works of the Torah no flesh will be justified.” Here, as always, Paul makes no differentiation between Jew and Gentile, for he uses the term “no flesh” in the sense of “mankind,” “flesh” being a shortened form of “flesh and blood.” No one, including the covenant people of God (Israel), could stand before God and claim the status of righteous based upon what they had done, regardless if their deeds were deemed worthy or even very worthy. Even as the many will say “did we not do” (Matt 7:22) and be met with the stern “depart from Me you cursed,” so all who think justification is to be found by any other means than faith in Yeshua will be forever lost.

Here is the core of the Gospel—the genuine “good news,” for what man could not do himself, God has accomplished through His Messiah, Yeshua. And here is the linkage between Peter’s actions (even if they were somewhat naive in the sense of having been governed by galvanized traditions) and the denial of the Gospel. For any teaching that would require something more than faith in Yeshua for obtaining full and eternal covenant membership with God, was diminishing the unique and central place of Messiah in the Gospel itself.

17–19 But if, while seeking to be justified in Messiah, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Messiah then a minister of sin? May it never be! For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the Torah I died to the Torah, so that I might live to God.

What does Paul mean by “seeking to be justified?” We should give the word “seek” (ζητέω, *zeteō*) its normal sense of “inquiring,” “desire to obtain,” and understand justification to be, in its final and full sense, an eschatological reality. It thus envisions the time when those who are in Messiah are finally and eternally declared righteous at the judgment day. Those who have believed or put their trust in Messiah find themselves to be “in Messiah,” Paul’s favorite phrase. By this Paul envisions the safety of a fortress in which the dangers from without have no ability to overcome those within. “There is no

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⁵³ Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 138–39.

condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua” (Rom 8:1).

But apparently the party of the circumcision had labeled Jewish believers in Yeshua, who had openly fellowshiped with the Gentile believers, as “sinners.”

Even though they all, Jew and Gentiles alike, had ‘believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ’, the James faction still insisted on regarding Gentiles as ‘sinners’, and those Jews who disregarded or treated lightly the traditional boundary lines by eating with them as equally ‘sinners’.⁵⁴

Paul’s retort is pointed: “if you are willing to label us as ‘sinners,’ are you likewise willing to say that Messiah Yeshua is therefore a minister of sin, since He also taught that through the gospel Jew and Gentile would eat together in the kingdom” (Matt 8:11)? Here, as before, the word “sinner” must be understood as label used by the faction from James to describe those who, like the pagans (Gentiles), were characterized as outside of the covenant. And if Paul and those Jews who willingly received the Gentile believers as equal members of the covenant were, in the opinion of the James faction, participating in sin, then the same could be said of Yeshua. Such a thought was abhorrent to Paul, and thus he responds with the emphatic “may it never be!” It may well be that Paul has in mind the words of Yeshua (which he no doubt received through oral transmission) that He came, not to be served, but to serve (to be the Servant of HaShem), and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

The word translated “minister” in the NASB is διάκονος, *diakonos*, which had a common usage in the 1st Century of “table-waiter.”⁵⁵ This all fits the picture of table fellowship well, and figures into the manner in which table fellowship had become the issue at hand, and a fitting illustration of covenant membership. Like Yeshua, Who had girded Himself with a towel and demonstrated servanthood to His disciples, so Paul believed that all should serve each other.

For if I rebuild what I have destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor – To what is Paul referring in this metaphor? What had he “destroyed” (καταλύω, *kataluō*, “to abolish, destroy, tear down”) that now he was under pressure to rebuild? We have a close parallel in his later epistle to the Ephesians. Here, in 2:14f, a wall once built which separated Jew and Gentile had been broken down (λύω, *luō*) by the death of Yeshua, a wall that consisted of ordinances (δόγμα, *dogma*). Everywhere this Greek word is used, it refers to the decrees and laws of men, not the Torah given by God.⁵⁶ Thus, in Ephesians, Paul speaks of a dividing wall that consisted of man-made decrees and ordinances, a wall that kept Jew and Gentile separated. In Messiah Yeshua, however, the authority of these man-made *halachot* had lost their power, and a return to the written word of God, as demonstrated in the life and words of Yeshua, had united believer to believer, regardless of their racial identification.

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⁵⁴ Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ So *BDAG*, “διάκονος”.

⁵⁶ See my paper, “Can We Speak of the ‘Law’ in the NT in Monolithic Terms?”, delivered at the 1996 NW Regional ETS Meeting, pp. 11ff. This paper is available at: <http://www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html>.

It would appear that the group from Jerusalem was trying their best to rebuild the wall of separation—to put into place among the congregations of Galatia those man-made rules by which a Jew and Gentile were separated. And it would likewise appear that they were pressuring Paul to agree to just such a rebuilding. But Paul would have none of this. He realized that the separation of Jew from Gentile was not merely a cultural or even religious issue, but it hit at the very core of the Gospel message. To rebuild a wall of separation was not merely to receive one *halachah* over another, but to commit transgression: “I prove myself to be a transgressor.” Separating from Gentiles on the basis of socio-ethnic grounds was, in some measure, to diminish the work of Yeshua as the sole means through which sins could be forgiven and righteousness accredited by God. Once again, Paul brings the debate to focus on the most important factor—the Gospel. For while it is conceivable that the Jerusalem group could have somehow believed that the Gospel of Yeshua and the demand for Gentiles to become proselytes could be compatible, Paul shows that they cannot. The wall had been broken down by Yeshua, and through the message of His gospel as delivered by Paul, its demise had borne its ultimate effect in the communities of the Gentile believers. The cross was the gospel’s hammer demolishing the man-made ordinances that had kept the Gentiles on the other side of the wall. Paul was not about to start rebuilding that wall.

But it was not only a wall that separated Gentiles from Jews, it was a wall that separated Jews from Gentiles. This was Paul’s personal experience, and it was his encounter with the risen Messiah that tore down that wall for him personally. No doubt, his “former life in Judaism” was that lived on the “other side of the wall,” a life built upon a socio-religious status which all crumbled in the light of the Messiah. He came to realize that the picture was much bigger than Israel, even though Israel was (and is) a strategic part in God’s overall plan. God’s plan was for all mankind, and the Gospel was the means to the success of that plan (cf. Rom 1:16).

for through the Torah I died to the Torah, so that I might live to God – Far from distancing himself from Torah, Paul recognized that it was through the divine revelation of the Torah that he had come to the truth.

The metaphor of demolishing and reconstructing has here been taken a step further: to the contrast of life and death. That which had been demolished was that which had died. The resurrected life which came as a result of that death was a life that could not go back—it was a life lived unto God. To reconstruct the wall would be like leaving life and returning to a state of death.

But at first blush Paul’s words seem strange. How is it that he “died to the Torah?” We should not attempt to diminish the stark reality of these words, as though Paul is merely saying “I died to the misunderstood Torah” or “I died to the Torah as misused.” Stern’s translation (in the CJB) makes such an attempt: “For it was through letting the Torah speak for itself that I died to its traditional legalistic misinterpretation” Surely there is a sense in which this translation might explicate Paul’s meaning here, but it rather misses the mark. Actually, Paul, no doubt based in some measure upon his own personal experience, had come to realize that the Torah apart from the Spirit of God is merely words written on stone and have no ability either to justify nor to sanctify. On the contrary, the Torah without the Spirit accomplishes death and condemnation, and is a harsh master without mercy. What is more, the Torah without the Spirit of God, that is, apart from genuine saving faith, only causes a person to sin more. And Paul was personally aware of all of these attributes of the Torah. Thus,

when he glories in the fact that he had “died to the Torah,” we must understand this primarily to mean that he had died to the condemning, death-giving aspects of the Torah in all of its administrations. For not only did Paul stand condemned before the Almighty on the basis of the Torah itself, but in attempting to find his covenant status to be grounded upon the Torah and its man-made additions, he also discovered that his former life in the Torah was ultimately futile and without eternal reward.

Yet there was a point in time when “the commandment came ... and I died” (Rom 7:9). It was through the Torah (the coming of the commandment) that Paul died to self and became alive to God. But it was when the commandment itself “came,” that is, when the Spirit of God made the commandment alive in the soul and heart of Paul, that his eyes were opened to see that the goal of the Torah is Messiah. This gave Paul an entirely new perspective toward the Torah. While before the Torah formed the basis for his zealous war to retain Jewish identity by persecuting those whom he thought were compromising it, it now was the very means by which he sought to find a oneness with Gentiles through faith in Messiah. Whereas before the Torah was the means by which Paul defined himself, now the Torah was a means for revealing Messiah in whom Paul found his full identity. Whereas before the Torah was perhaps the primary stimulus for action in his life, now the desire to honor His Messiah through his obedience to the Torah became the driving force in his life. For Paul, the Torah had not been abolished—no, not by any means! But it had taken on a new role in light of the Messiah. It was no longer the means of his self identification—that was now the role of the risen Messiah in Whose life Paul was entirely bound up. Living out Torah was no longer the means of covenant membership, but the result of it. Living in obedience to the Torah, as he says in the next verse, was now seen by Paul as the life of Messiah being lived within him—a life that in every way defined him.

Thus Paul, through the Torah, died to the Torah, in order that he might “live to God.” It was not as though in his life before faith in Yeshua he did not also believe that he “lived to God.” But here is another contrast in Paul’s life, for while his “former life in Judaism” was no doubt considered as living to God, in reality it was living to self. With eyes blinded and Messiah veiled (2Cor 3), the duties and ceremonies that were supposedly God-ward were, in reality, self-serving. Rather than obeying Torah as the pure expression of joy and love to God for His boundless grace, the Torah had become a means of maintaining covenant membership (“covenantal nomism”) and obedience to it was therefore viewed as one’s connection to the covenant. While the perspective was no doubt to do the *mitzvot* with an eye to God and not man, in reality, the unregenerate man was unable to submit to the spiritual tenor of the Torah. Instead, its outward performance had become the primary goal.

This is not to deny that there were genuine people of faith who lived out Torah as their humble expression of love to God. Surely there were, but they were, apparently, the minority. If we combine the testimony of Yeshua and Paul, we come to the conclusion that many (and Paul numbered himself among them) had fallen into the trap of thinking that perfunctory performance of the Torah was their means of retaining covenant status.

20 I have been crucified with Messiah;⁵⁷ and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Here Paul comes to the crux of his theology: union with Messiah in His death and resurrection. His statement “I died to the Torah” is now explained further: “I have been crucified with Messiah.” The Torah has not died—Paul has died, and in that death, no longer fears the condemnation which the Torah so readily pronounces against those outside of Yeshua.

Paul takes the picture of the sacrifices, detailed in the Torah, and recognizes in them the revelation of the death of Messiah. Even as the worshipper placed his hands upon the head of the innocent animal and in so doing confessed a union with the animal as his substitute in atonement, so Paul recognized that the death of Yeshua was a one-for-one proposition in which the sinner was reckoned to have died in Messiah, and thus received the payment for his sins, and was resurrected in Messiah, thus given a new life of righteousness. Paul’s having died to the Torah was nothing less than Paul having died with Messiah.

This shows conclusively that for Paul, the death of the Messiah did not present an opportunity for salvation, but actually accomplished the payment of sin for all those who died with Him. For Paul, the death of Messiah was an actual payment for sin, sins which could never again require payment at the bar of God’s justice.

We should notice that the tense of the verb “crucified” (συσταυρόω, *sustaurōō*) in the Greek is not aorist, which we might expect, but perfect. The basic nuance of the perfect tense is that of an action which took place in the past but continues to have effect in the present. “I have been crucified with Messiah, and I’m still hanging there with Him.” This is not to deny the resurrection, but to point to an ongoing reality in the life of the Apostle. The death of the Messiah was his death, and anyone who knew the “old Paul” would have to remark that the “old Paul” was still dead—still hanging on the execution stake without any hope of life.

The next bold, conclusive statement that Paul makes is remarkable: “and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me.” “This language is startling, and of course exaggerated.”⁵⁸ Feeling the sharpness of the expression, some of the translations attempt to soften it: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me . . .” (KJV); “I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me . . .” (NJB). But that is not Paul’s point. His point is that he is no longer alive—he has died! While the statement is quite clearly hyperbolic in nature, it should not be understood as fanciful. It truly reflected Paul’s theological perspective: “the Paul you now see living is not the old Paul—he is dead. My life now has as its goal to be a reflection of the Messiah Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” The old Paul is gone; the image of Messiah remains.

But the exaggeration was obviously to make a point. And the point was to bring out the very radical nature of the personal transformation effected by Paul’s encounter with the risen Christ. The old “I” was dead, and had been replaced by a new focus of personality. That meant, on the

57 The versification (punctuation) varies within the Greek manuscripts. Most put the first clause of v. 20 with v. 19 (so UBS 4th Edition [and previous editions], Nestle-Aland, etc.) while a few put it with v. 20.

58 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 145.

one hand, that Paul was no longer the “I” of 1:13-14—the “I” which had found its identity “in Judaism”, as one for whom maintenance of the law in order to preserve Jewish distinctiveness was the very reason for existence. That was why reversion to a table-fellowship which excluded Gentiles as Gentiles was impossible for Paul; it simply would not have been him.⁵⁹

The idea of Messiah “living within me” is not uncommon in Pauline literature (Rom 8:10; 2Cor 13:5; Col 1:27; Eph 3:17) but it is far less common than the reverse: the believer in Messiah. Yet in one sense the two are saying the same thing: it speaks of union of the believer with Messiah Yeshua. Life enveloped within life; the purpose of the One being the purpose of the other.

Here is the testimony of the Apostle, but it comes down to us as a paradigm for each one who believes. Can we say that the life of Messiah is seen in us? Do others recognize Him in us—in our *mitzvot* and in our *halachah*? In our family, our work, our play? Does the life of the Messiah so permeate our lives that thought and action reflect Him? This is the goal and the reality, for if indeed we have been crucified with the Messiah, then surely we are alive to God through Him, and our lives have been transformed.

Yet Paul was not denying the reality of life in this fallen world. He speaks of “the life I now live in the flesh.” Here Paul uses “flesh,” *σάρξ*, *sarx*, to mean “life in this human sphere with all of its weaknesses and corruptibility,”⁶⁰ not “life under the rule of the sinful nature” as he sometimes uses the word “flesh.” But we might take the meaning of “flesh” a bit further, for at times it appears that Paul uses it to denote “ethnic origin.”⁶¹ If that meaning is included in his use of “flesh” here, then he is carefully emphasizing that in his death with Messiah, and the life which Messiah now lives within Him, he has not ceased being Jewish, nor is he trying in any way to deny his Jewishness. To the Corinthians he wrote that Jews should retain their outward, Jewish identity after coming to faith in Messiah (1Cor 7:18-20). Thus, in the current controversy which threatened the very unity of the Galatian congregations, Paul may want the influencers to recognize that he is not diminishing his Jewishness by holding that Gentiles did not need to become proselytes in order to be full-fledged covenant members.

Yet the life he lived as a Jew, “in the flesh,” he nonetheless lived, not with a primary focus toward the Torah (as before), but with a clear focus toward the One upon whom the Torah itself focused, even Yeshua. Thus Paul writes: “I live by faith in the Son of God.” The expression itself could be taken one of two ways: “I live by faith in the Son of God,” (where τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ functions as an objective genitive) or “I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God,” (where τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ functions as a subjective genitive). The CJB opts for this second way: “I live by the same trusting faithfulness that the Son of God had ...,” though most of the other English translations take “Son of God” to be the object of faith. And this is the more natural way to understand the Greek (note the NIV, NRSV, ESV).

Paul substitutes “Son of God” for what we might expect, i.e., Messiah.

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59 Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 145.

60 Cf. 2Cor 10:3; Phil 1:22, 24; cp. 2Cor 4:11.

61 Cf. Rom 1:3; 4:1; 9:3, 5, 8; 11:14.

But this figures into his overall message, namely, that covenant membership is not dependent upon physical lineage. Thus, to emphasize “Son of God” is likewise to bring to the table the concept of “sons of God,” a designation that rightly applies to all who have come to God through faith in the Messiah (John 1:12). If we are in Him, and He is in us, then we are all one in the family of God.

The death which Yeshua died was a demonstration of His love: “who loved me.” For Paul, the love of God, so often expressed in its covenant connections in the Tanach (Deut 7:8, 13; 1Ki 10:9; Ps 47:4; Is 43:4; Jer 31:3; Hos 3:1) is one and the same with the love of Messiah for His own, for the death of Messiah for the elect is for Paul the full expression of the Father’s love. But here again, the personal one-for-one perspective of the sacrifice comes into focus: “who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Once again, this is sacrificial language wrapped in the context of the covenant. “Love” is a covenant expression—to remain loyal to the stipulations of the covenant. Thus Yeshua, in faithfulness to the covenant in which the Father had promised Him a people for His own possession, endured the cross and despised the shame (Heb 12:2). His love for Paul was first His love for the Father — “not My will but Yours.” But it was also His love for Paul, and for all chosen by the Father to inherit eternal life. Yeshua set Himself to give the ultimate sacrifice in order to bring us near to God. Thus, He “gave Himself up” (παράδοντας ἑαυτὸν, *paradontos heauton*), a term that strongly pictures His self surrender to the Father, and ultimately to the penalty of death as payment for sins. In the Lxx, the word is most often used in a military sense, of surrendering something of great value, such as land or troops. Thus Yeshua surrendered to the penalty of death as the sin-bearer for us.

21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Torah, then Messiah died needlessly.

Having spent sufficient time addressing the Antioch incident, Paul now returns to his main point, that his calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles, and the grace that was given to him to succeed in this calling, is in no way diminished by his proclamation of the Gospel that binds Jew and Gentile as one in the family of God. When he insisted that the Gentile be fully accepted on the basis of his faith in Yeshua alone, this was not a nullification of the “grace of God” given to him as an Apostle, but actually a manifestation of it. Rather, if Paul were to agree with the influencers, that the Gentiles could only become *bona fide* covenant members if they became proselytes (i.e., were given the status of a Jew), this would, in fact, nullify God’s grace. For since only those within the covenant of God are deemed righteous by Him, to claim that a full entrance into the covenant was possible through becoming a proselyte (“the works of Torah”) was in effect to teach that there existed a way of righteousness apart from the death of Yeshua. Taken to its logical end, there was really no need for the Messiah to die. But the fact that He did die, and that this alone is the means by which sinners may be made righteous, is proof that becoming a proselyte does not offer a genuine means of gaining the status of righteous.

This is the first time we have the word “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaio-sune*) in the epistle to the Galatians. It will be used three more times (3:6,21; 5:5). What exactly Paul means by this word has become one of the turning points in Pauline theological studies.

The Lxx uses the same Greek word, *dikaio-sune*, to translate זֶדֶקָה, *zedekah*, the majory of the time. The concept of “righteousness” in the Tanach centers first

and foremost on the activity of God toward His people, and specifically in His loyalty and faithfulness to the covenant. Note the following:

Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. (Ex 9:27)

The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He. (Deut 32:4)

So now, take your stand, that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did for you and your fathers. (1Sam 12:7)

O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this. (Ezra 9:15)

Thus, God is seen to be righteous when He fulfills His covenant word. And perhaps the zenith of His covenant promises is that He would make His chosen people righteous:

Gen 18:19 "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us. (Deut 6:25)

He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. (Ps 23:3)

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive a blessing from the LORD And righteousness from the God of his salvation. (Ps 24:3)

Then all your people are righteous; They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified. (Is 60:21)

Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith. (Hab 2:4)

Therefore, there is a clear interwoven motif: God Himself is righteous, meaning that He always acts in justice and truth. His faithfulness to the covenant, made with the fathers, is proof of His righteousness, and this secures the end result: His covenant people will themselves be made righteous. They are not righteous in and of themselves, but they are made righteous by God's own righteousness. And thus the chosen people are treated by God as those who will be made righteous by His faithfulness.

The “status of righteous” or “right standing before God” is therefore neither purely forensic nor purely experimental—it is both. For in God’s choosing some to be His own people, He also sets Himself under the promises of the covenant to actually make them righteous. They cannot attain to this righteousness on their own, since none seek after God, and since all turn aside from the righteous ways of God. Since the heart of mankind is deceitful and desperately wicked, only when God, in faithfulness to the covenant promises, takes the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19; 36:26)—only then are His people enabled to love His commandments, to walk in His ways, and to live righteously.

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Having determined that He would do this work of grace within them, He therefore acts toward His chosen people with compassion and faithfulness, for He reckons them to be what they will become. Since He sees the end from the beginning; since He has committed Himself to making His people righteous, He treats them as beloved children, loving them with the disciplines of a correcting Father, making them to be righteous as He has planned. This He does by writing the Torah upon the heart through the agency of His own Ruach HaKodesh.

But their unrighteous deeds cannot be discounted—they have transgressed the righteous ways of God. And thus, the payment of sin, at the hand of His Messiah, pays for their transgressions, and shields them from the just wrath that they deserve. Having been washed clean by the blood of the Messiah, applied to them through the sovereign appointment of God Himself, the chosen ones are protected, preserved, and maintained as the objects of His covenant faithfulness.

It is in this way that the righteousness of God, and the righteousness of God’s people, are interconnected. No one earns his covenant status by his own righteousness, for no one is able to become righteous apart from God’s work. Each is therefore left up to the sovereign work of God. The Torah, God’s standard of righteousness, is not able to effect righteousness. It remains the eternal standard of righteousness, but is powerless to change the wayward heart and give the ability to live righteously. This ability is rather given by God Himself as He reckons the sinner righteous on the basis of Messiah’s sacrifice, and gives the Ruach in His work of making the sinner righteous.

This is Paul’s perspective on how a sinner attains the status of “righteous” before God. Consider the other verses in Galatians that utilize the word “righteousness:”

Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Gal. 3:6, quoting Gen 15:6)

Is the Torah then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a Torah had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on Torah. (Gal. 3:21)

For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. (Gal. 5:5)

The Scriptures, then, do not make a clear-cut distinction between so-called “positional” and “practical” righteousness. They are two sides of the same coin. God’s determination to be faithful to the covenant means that He treats all of His chosen ones as righteous, meaning that His own righteousness (faithfulness to the covenant) makes their actual righteousness an inevitability.

The prevailing theology of Paul's day was not, on the one hand, so far off the mark. Yet on the other hand, it had entirely missed the mark. For the idea that all covenant members would be counted as righteous by God is true, and this was the presumption of the Sages. God is righteous and would secure the promises of the covenant to all covenant members. But the misdirection was in answering the question of how one became a covenant member. Where the Sages had gone wrong was to presume that physical lineage, or membership in the people-group called Israel, secured one a place in God's covenant. And therefore such membership status also guaranteed a status of righteousness. As long as one maintained Torah obedience, a righteous status was theirs. Such a perspective had placed primary importance upon group membership ("being Jewish") rather than upon faith in God. And thus, the idea that God could also choose Gentiles to be covenant members was out of the question: Gentiles were not part of the covenant people.

This, then, becomes the crux issue: what are the criteria by which God's covenant people are chosen? How do the covenants made with Abraham and with Israel intersect? It is to this question that Paul now turns.