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The Righteousness of God in Romans 3,1–8

1. Orientation

Remarkably widespread today in Biblical studies is the notion that "Yaweh's righteous judgments are saving judgments".[1] The righteousness of God, conceived since the work of Hermann Cremer as a term of relationship,[2] is viewed as a saving gift in such a way that for many a punitive righteousness is inconceivable.[3] This notion has found strong support among Old Testament scholars[4] and from that quarter has now shaped the way New Testament scholars understand the righteousness of God in Paul. Accordingly the righteousness of God in Paul, Leonhard Goppelt argues, does not refer to any sort of "distributive justice" but rather to God's saving "covenant faithfulness".[5] More

[1] E. Achtemeier, Righteousness in the Old Testament, IDB, vol. 4, 83.

[2] Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhang ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen, Gütersloh 1899. Cremer argued "dass der Begriff der Gerechtigkeit in der Tat ein Verhältnisbegriff ist, sich nicht auf das Verhältnis zu einer idealen Norm, sondern auf das Verhältnis zwischen zweien beziehend, welches Ansprüche mit sich bringt, deren Erfüllung die Gerechtigkeit ist" (53).

[3] G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1, New York 1962. He speaks for many when he says, "This *ṣ·dāqāh* (righteousness) bestowed on Israel is always a saving gift. It is inconceivable that it should ever menace Israel. No references to the concept of a punitive *s·daqah* can be adduced. That would be a *contradictio in adiecto*" (377). Similarly Cremer, Rechtfertigungslehre (31): "Im ganzen Alten Testament ist und bleibt die Gerechtigkeit Gottes *justitia salutifera,* weil sie ihrem Wesen nach *justitia justificatoria* ist . . ." But in this same context Cremer does reckon with a punitive divine righteousness. It is not clear to me whether he thinks this could menace Israel though.

[4] See H. H. Schmid, Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung (BHTh) 40, Tübingen 1968. In a section entitled "Gibt es eine strafende Gerechtigkeit im Alten Testament?" (177–79) he cites the scholars who answer yes and no. Crüsemann, Yahwes Gerechtigkeit *(ṣ·dāqāh/sädäq),* EvTh 36 (1976) 449, n. 106 supports his own judgment with a long list of scholars who deny any punitive divine righteousness in the Old Testament.

[5] L. Goppelt, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, vol. 2, Göttingen 1976, 468.

recently under the strong influence of Ernst Käsemann a group of German scholars has argued that "Paul replaced the concept of covenant with the concept of creation"[6] so that the righteousness of God is "the faithfulness of the creator to his creation".[7]

The dominant tendency in the present debate is to regard the righteousness of God as a strictly gracious and saving faithfulness (whether to Israel or to the Creation). But I doubt very strongly that this is an adequate view of Paul's understanding of the righteousness of God. Rom 3,1–8 is a crucial testing ground in this regard. It has been discussed, of course, in Käsemann's commentary "An die Römer" and briefly in his students' monographs;[8] but, beyond that, the text has received very little detailed attention outside the commentaries.[9] Nevertheless, with references to God's πίστις, ἀλήθεια, δικαιοσύνη, and δόξα, Rom 3,1–8 is an uncommonly auspicious passage for discovering Paul's conception of God's righteousness. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to analyze Rom 3,1–8 in order to answer the question: What is Paul's understanding of the righteousness of God? An effort will be made to avoid the errors which I think have misled many interpreters: 1) the failure to define precisely how Paul's rhetorical opponents are arguing, and 2) the failure to distinguish Paul's view of God's righteousness from the view of his Jewish interlocators.

[6] Chr. Müller, Gottes Gerechtigkeit und Gottes Volk, eine Untersuchung zu Röm 9–11, Göttingen 1964, 112. E. Käsemann, An die Römer, HNT; 8a, Tübingen 1974, 74.78. P. Stuhlmacher, Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus, Göttingen 1966. For an excellent survey of this German discussion see M.T. Brauch, Perspectives on God's Righteousness in Recent German Discussion, in: E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, Philadelphia 1977, 523–42.

[7] Schrage, Röm 3,21–26 und die Bedeutung des Todes Jesu Christi bei Paulus, in: P. Rieger, ed., Das Kreuz Jesu, Göttingen 1969, 86.

[8] See Stuhlmacher (A. 6), 85ff., and Müller (A. 6), 49f. 65f. 110f.

[9] One exception I am aware of is G. Bornkamm, Theologie als Teufelskunst, Röm 3,1–9, in: Geschichte und Glaube, Zweiter Teil, 1971,140–8. Other treatments that have tangentially treated the righteousness of God in Rom 3,1–8 include R. Bultmann, Δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ, JBL, 83 (1964) 12–16; G. Klein, "Gottes Gerechtigkeit als Thema der neuesten Paulus-Forschung, in: Rekonstruktion und Interpretation, München 1969, 229; E. Lohse, Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der paulinischen Theologie, in: Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments, Göttingen 1973, 223; K. Kertelge, "Rechtfertigung" bei Paulus, Münster 1967, 63–70; G. Klein, Righteousness in the New Testament, IDB, Supplementary Volume, 751.

2. *The text*

(1) What advantage then does the Jew have, or what profit is circumcision? (2a) Much in every way. (2b) First, they were entrusted with the oracles of God. (3a) For what if some disbelieved? (3b) Their unbelief does not abrogate the faithfulness of God does it? (4a) No indeed! Let God be true, and every man a liar! (4b) As it is written, "So that you might be justified in your words, and conquer when you enter into judgment". (5a) If our unrighteousness shows the righteousness of God, what shall we say? (5b) God is not unrighteous who inflicts wrath is he? (I am speaking like a mere man.) (6a) No indeed! (6b) Otherwise how would God judge the world? (7a) For if the truth of God abounds to his glory in my falsehood, (7b) then why am I still judged as a sinner, (8a) and shall we not do evil in order that good may come (as we are blasphemed and as some claim that we say)?[10] (8b) Their condemnation is just.

Throughout the passage Paul is arguing, as it were, with typical Jewish objectors whom he no doubt encountered in many synagogues as he disputed with his kinsmen about the gospel. What gave rise to this particular dialogue in Rom 3,1–8 was the apparent leveling out of all distinctions between Jews and gentiles in Rom 2. The unbelieving Jew precedes the gentile into God's judgment (2,9); the gentile who keeps the law will judge the Jew who does not keep it (2,27); in fact it is the gentile who may be the true Jew (2,28f.). Such ideas naturally give rise to the question that leads into our text: "What advantage then does the Jew have?" (3,1).

In answer Paul begins a list of advantages which he picks up and completes only in Rom 9,1–5. The only advantage he names here is that the Jews were entrusted with the words (λόγια), that is, the promises of God.[11] In verses 1–4 Paul argues that the unbelief of some Jews (an

[10] This translation and punctuation follow the interpretation of H. Ljungvik, Zu Röm 3,7–8, ZNW 32 (1933) 207–10, and A. Fridrichsen, Nochmals Röm 3,7–8, ZNW 32 (1935) 306–8. V. 8a is construed not as Paul's response to the opponents in v. 7 but as a continuation of the opponent's own objection. Cranfield (Romans, ICC 1975, 186) objects that this leaves the objections unanswered and that it results in "a very awkward combination of the first person singular and the first person plural in the same question". But perhaps Paul does not want to be diverted here and so postpones his answer until 6,1. And is not v. 6 at least a partial answer? Cranfield's second objection is stronger and makes a final decision uncertain. I would only point out that the ὧν τὸ κρίμα of v. 8b which definitely refers to the plural τίνες of v. 8a also refers to the singular κρίνομαι v. 7. Thus the "I" of v. 7 and the "we" of v. 8 may be viewed simply as two ways of expressing the objectors' identity. The main arguments of this essay do not, in any case, rest on this uncertainty.

[11] The reason the *logia* of God are generally interpreted as promises is that the following verse (3) refers to Jewish *unbelief* and to God's *faithfulness* both of which make best sense in relation to a word of promise.

understatement in view of 11,14) does not abrogate God's faithfulness to these promises (cf. 11,29). Then in verses 5–8 Paul deals with objections which his dialog partner raises because of the things Paul says. My concern is not primarily with the advantages of Israel in this text but with Paul's unterstanding of God's righteousness as it emerges in the argument of the dialog.

It is helpful to note the parallels in the terminology of this passage. They are as follows.

v. 3 our ἀπιστία	does not abrogate	God's πίστιν
v. 4 every man is ψεύστης	but	God is ἀληθής
v. 5 our ἀδικία	shows up	God's δικαιοσύνη
v. 7 my ψεύσμα	causes to abound	God's ἀλήθεια

The position of the opponents

With this data before us the most fruitful place to begin our analysis is in v. 5 with an attempt to reconstruct as precisely as possible how Paul's opponents were arguing. The rhetorical question suggests that the opponents think they have trapped Paul in a contradiction. Literally v. 5 reads, "If our unrighteousness shows (συνίστησιν)[12] the righteousness of God, what shall we say? God is not unrighteous, who inflicts wrath, is he? (I speak like a mere man.)" The second question expects the answer: No (interrogative with μή). Commentators[13] generally recognize, rightly, that this is not the way Paul's opponent would have formulated their question. Theirs would have been: "Then surely God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us isn't he?" But Paul, even though he admits that he is speaking as a mere man ("whose mental horizon takes in only what is human"),[14] nevertheless cannot bring himself to pose a question which seems to impugn the righteousness of God. (The same trait occurs in Rom 9,14.) But the basic outline of the opponents' argument is still clear. They are saying: "If our

[12] See Rom 5,8; Gal 2,18; 2 Cor 6,4; 7,11 for Paul's use of this verb.

[13] H. Lietzmann, An die Römer, HNT 8, Tübingen 1971, 45; C. K. Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans, New York 1957, 64; C. E. B. Cranfield (A.10), 184.

[14] Lietzmann (A.13), 45. Cf. I Cor 9,8; Gal 3,15; Rom 6,19.

unrighteousness shows up God's righteousness, then God is unrighteous to inflict wrath upon us for our unrighteousness."[15]

The question that needs to be answered with more precision than is usually found in the commentaries is: What did the *opponents* mean by "the righteousness of God" in Rom 3,5? The most common answer is that the righteousness of God in 3,5 refers to God's distributive justice[16] (according to which he renders to each his due). The support for this view is at first glance fairly strong. It could be sketched as follows.

The opponents' rhetorical question (3,5) is most naturally construed as a response to what Paul just said in 3,4b. He has just quoted Ps 51,4 (LXX 50,6): "Just as it is written,

So that you might be justified in your words
And conquer when you judge.

The "so that" of the Psalm quote shows that God's (="you") vindication is the *result*[17] of the preceding statement in the Psalm:

Against thee and thee only have I sinned,
And done what is evil in thy sight
So that you might be justified in your words.
And conquer when you judge.

"Your words" refer to God's words of judgment[18] and the middle voice of κρίνεσθαι ("when you judge") is to be preferred to the passive

[15] This is the most common reconstruction of the opponents' position. Bornkamm (A.9), 144, states their argument as follows: the opponent in v.5 attacks the righteousness of God, "dass sie unsere Ungerechtigkeit als Folie benötige, um so erst ins rechte Licht gerückt zu werden (συνίστησιν), und folgert daraus, dass damit dem Strafgericht Gottes (ὀργή) die Rechtsbasis entzogen sei. Ein Gott, der auf die Ungerechtigkeit der Menschen angewiesen ist, um sich selbst als gerecht zu erweisen, wäre ungerecht, wenn er eben diese ἀδικία richtete."

[16] Bultmann (A.9), 13; Bornkamm (A.9), 145; Ch. Hodge, A Commentary on Romans, Edinburgh 1972, orig. 1864, 72; and others.

[17] John Calvin, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Wm. B. Eerdmans), 1960, 61 "The particle *that* is not final and does not refer to a far fetched consequence, but suggests the conclusion, 'Against thee only have I sinned, therefore thou wilt punish me justly'." Similarly J. Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NIC 1968, 95. Cranfield (A.10), 183 gives no support for his peculiar idea that the ὅπως is "dependent not on the preceding half-verse but on v.3 (LXX: 5)".

[18] Calvin (A.17), 61. "By the *words* of God David means the judgments which he pronounces upon us. It is too forced to understand by this, as is commonly done, the promises of God."

voice ("when you are judged")[19] because of the poetic parallelism [20] and the general sense of the following verses which refer to God's judgment. Therefore it is fair to conclude that Paul is using this Psalm quote in 3,4b to show that man's sin vindicates God's judgment upon it.[21] Accordingly since the opponents' response to Paul follows immediately, one could easily conclude that *for them* the righteousness of God in 3,5 refers to God's "activity of judging" [22] and thus includes punishment or retribution towards his people.

But I would like to argue that this is a premature conclusion, for if this is the meaning of divine righteousness in the mind of the opponents expressed in 3,5, then their objection loses all its plausibility. (I assume that while a rhetorical objection need not be – indeed cannot be – entirely valid, yet it must, at least on the face of it, have a measure of plausibility.) I will try to show in the following why this view of divine righteousness depletes the opponents' objection of all plausibility and rules itself out. In the process a different view of the opponents' conception of righteousness will emerge.

Let us try to reconstruct the opponents' argument on the assumption that by "the righteousness of God" in 3,5 they meant a punitive,

[19] So A. Schlatter, Gottes Gerechtigkeit, Stuttgart 1935, 116; C. K. Barrett (A. 13), 63. Käsemann's (A. 6, 75) defense of the passive meaning on the basis of the passive κρίνομαι in v. 7 seems to me to prove the opposite: if man is judged then God must be judging. See note 21.

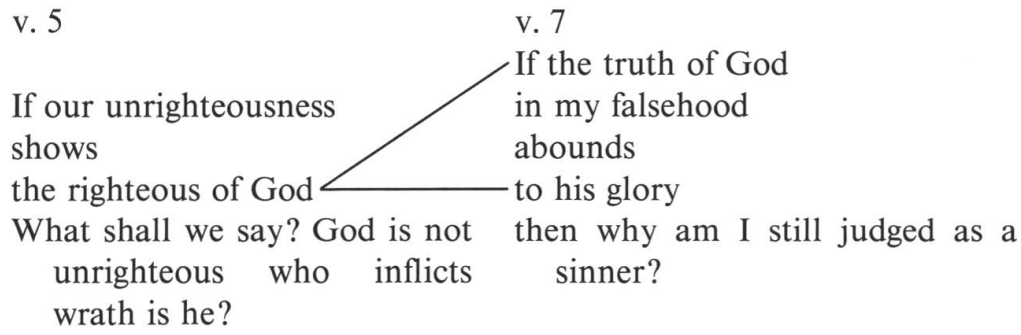
[20] O. Michel, Der Brief an die Römer, MK, 1966, 96: "Die Parallelität des doppelten ἐν spricht eigentlich mehr für die mediale als für die passive Bedeutung von κρίνεσθαι."

[21] Käsemann's (A. 6), 76f. view of the significance of the Psalm quote is radically different from mine. He too thinks it is of great relevance for Paul but not because it speaks of God's retributive justice. Rather "with these quotes the *justificatio impii* . . . was asserted" (77). "God's victory [referred to in the Psalm quote] is achieved over the faithless and, as 11,32 sums up, over rebels. It is continually, as 4,5 will say, the justification of the ungodly" (76). Thus Käsemann argues that the Psalm quote is a statement that God justifies the ungodly and this, he says, is correctly understood by Paul's pious opponents. I cannot follow Käsemann for at least two reasons: 1) his view demands the possible, but in this case wholly unnecessary, assumption that Paul has ignored the basic OT meaning of the Psalm and would seem to offer no explanation for the ὅπως; 2) I cannot see how an assertion of the justification of the ungodly gives rise to the opponents reference to wrath (v. 5) and judgment (v. 7) upon them? See below n. 4 for a discussion of how 3,4b functions in Paul's argument.

[22] The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul, Cambridge 1972, 190. "In v. 5 God's righteousness is opposed to man's wickedness and thus means his own righteousness, but specifically his activity of judging."

retributive justice. They would be saying, "If our unrighteousness shows up God's *punitive* righteousness (by giving him a just cause to judge us), then he is unrighteous to punish us for our unrighteousness". That is so obviously self-contradictory that it has no plausibility. It is like saying: "Since my sin justifies God's judgment upon me, therefore he is unjust to judge me." Surely this cannot be the argument of the opponent. Therefore it is wrong to contrue the meaning of "the righteousness of God" in 3,5 as the distributive justice of God manifest in his act of judging. There must be a measure of plausbility in the opponent's objection.

The same thing emerges when we reconstruct the opponents' argument in v. 7. Literally the text reads, "If by my falsehood the truth of God abounds to his glory, why am I still judged as a sinner?". The similarity to v. 5 is clear from the following table of parallels.



"My falsehood" stands in the place of "our unrighteousness"; God's "truth" and "glory" stand in the place of God's "righteousness"; and being "judged" stands in the place of incurring "wrath". The change to first person singular ("my falsehood") from first plural ("our righteousness") is not significant as far as I can see, especially since the singular phrase, "I am judged" of v. 7, is described in v. 8b as "their (plural) judgment". The argument is thus virtually the same as that of v. 5 except that it is strengthened: my falsehood does not just *"show"* God's truth but more, it causes God's truth to "abound" to his glory; therefore he would be unjust to punish me as a sinner. (This is the force of the rhetorical question, "Why am I still judged as a sinner?".)

This confirms that the meaning of God's righteousness in v. 5 is not mere retributive justice, since the "truth" of God (v. 7a) is parallel to his "righteousness" (v. 5a) but in all likelihood refers to his "truthful-

ness . . . in keeping His promises".[23] Thus, as Stuhlmacher argues, the *faithfulness* of God in v. 3 which man's unbelief does not abrogate, the *righteousness* of God in v. 5 which the unrighteousness of man highlights, and the *truth* of God in v. 7 which the falsehood of man causes to abound all refer basically to the same thing.[24] Since the "faithfulness" of God in v. 3 is that which grounds the "advantage" (περισσόν v. 1) of Judaism, its primary meaning in this passage is something mainly positive and gracious rather than punitive. This then is probably the main force which each of the three parallel terms (πίστις, δικαιοσύνη, ἀλήθεια) carries throughout (but as we shall see, we must be prepared to allow for differences between Paul's definitions and those of his opponents).

This receives added confirmation when we examine the third and final argument of Paul's opponents in v. 8. They claim that Paul's teaching leads to the untenable conclusion: "Let us do evil that good may come." In conjunction with the preceding arguments of vv. 5–7 this would mean: "Let us be as 'unrighteous' and as 'false' as we can so that God's righteousness and truth might abound to his glory." But the opponents would never say this (even hypothetically) if "the good" they hoped for (i.e. the glorification of God's righteousness and truth) included their own judgment. Therefore the truth and righteousness of God which would abound through "doing evil" is something beneficial not punitive. This is supported by Rom 6,1 where Paul cites the same slander, but with the words: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" We may be reasonably sure, then, that Paul's *opponents* construed the righteousness of God in Rom 3,5 as saving and gracious not retributive.

Now let us test this conclusion by trying again to reconstruct their argument in v. 5. It would apparently run like this: "If our unrighteousness shows up God's *saving* righteousness (in that it gives him an occasion to be more gracious), then God is unrighteous to inflict us with wrath (for that would mean that he fails to take advantage of an opportunity to magnify his grace)." Similarly the opponents' argument in v. 7 would be: "If the truth of God (which is manifest in his saving me in spite of my falsehood) thus abounds to his glory by my falsehood, then God should not judge me as a sinner but save me and thus magnify

[23] W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, The Epistle of the Romans, ICC 1902, 73.

[24] A. 6, 86; so also E. Käsemann (A. 6), 73f.

his gracious truth." That this argument is indeed plausible further validates our conclusion that for Paul's opponents the righteousness of God in Rom 3,5 refers to God's gracious saving action which should guarantee their salvation (escape from God's "wrath") even if they are "false"[25] toward God.

Therefore, when Paul's opponents react to his reference to judgment in 3,4b (= Ps 51,4) they are claiming to have caught Paul in a contradiction. On the one hand they agree with 3,1–4a that the unbelief of some does not abrogate the faithfulness (= righteousness) of God and that even if all become liars (= unbelievers)[26] God would remain true to his promises. But, on the other hand, as Bornkamm keenly points out, they draw the false conclusion that "the faithfulness of God would completely exclude any judgment at all upon the covenant people".[27] And, therefore, when Paul says in 3,4b that God would be righteous in judgment even upon David, the opponents think Paul has contradicted himself.

That this is the sequence of the opponents' thought can also be shown by pointing out the parallels between v. 4 and v. 7.

v. 4	v. 7
Let God be *true*	If the *truth* of God abounds to his glory
and every man a *liar.* As it is written, "so that you might be	by my *lie,*

[25] The human "unrighteousness" of v. 5 and "falsehood" of v. 7 are virtually the same as the "unbelief" of v. 3 (or at least broadly overlap with each other), Sanday and Headlam (A. 23), 72. This finds support in this: when Paul says, "let . . . every man be a liar" (v. 4b) the sequence of thought between v. 3 and 4 shows that "unbelief" and "lie" are basically the same. Thus when the term "lie" or "falsehood" turns up again in v. 7 it is likely that the same meaning is intended, namely unbelief – which is tantamount to unfaithfulness to God's covenant mercy.

[26] The "eloquent progression" (Murray (A. 17), 95, n. 2) from "some" (v. 3a) to "every" (v. 4b) would collapse if "liar" meant *less* than unbeliever. All unbelievers are liars in the sense that they deny the truth of God's promise: unbelief is the false assertion that God is not trustworthy. If the question is raised, how could God be true to his promises if every man were an unbeliever, my answer would be that he could not be. But part of his faithfulness is to preserve a believing remnant to whom the promises will be fulfilled. Thus I regard the statement: "Let God be true and every man a liar", as a hypothetical case that leaves out of account the effectual grace of God to preserve a believing remnant. The point of the statement is to show that nothing man can do will ever call God's truthfulness into question.

[27] A. 9, 143.

justified in your words and conquer when
you judge". why am I still *judged* as a sinner?

These parallels show how the Jewish opponents construe Paul's words: On the one hand they see a claim that man's falsehood, i.e. unbelief, does not abrogate God's truthfulness but magnifies it. They take this to guarantee their own security even if they themselves should be the ones who are false. But on the other hand they hear Paul say that Jews can be judged for what they thought magnified his truthfulness. Therefore, their accusation that Paul is contradicting himself finds expression in the rhetorical question: If our unrighteousness shows up God's *saving* righteousness (= truth) as you imply in 3,1–4a, then God is unrighteous to inflict wrath as you suggest he could do in 3,4b.

We may conclude then that when the opponents use the term "righteousness of God" in 3,5 they mean by it a strictly saving commitment of God to his covenant people.[28] It excludes a punitive or retributive dimension at least in relation to themselves.

4. *Paul's position and the function of Rom 3,4b*

What has become evident now is that the validity of the opponents' objection hangs on the twofold assumption that the righteousness of God in Rom 3,5 is his strictly saving commitment to Israel and that this was Paul's intention in 3,1–4a, which then contradicted his use of Ps 51,4 in 3,4b. The fault with this assumption is that 3,1–4a does not necessarily imply that for Paul the righteousness of God is strictly saving for Israel. To find out how Paul does conceive of the righteousness of God we should ask how 3,1–4a and the Psalm quote in 3,4b cohere, rather than assuming (with the opponents) that we already know Paul's view and then finding a contradiction to it in 3,4b. Therefore we must now try to give an account of how the Psalm quote functions for Paul in this context – a problem the solution of which will help clarify more precisely Paul's underlying concept of God's

[28] Note that I am not trying to show *in general* how the opponents conceived of the "the righteousness of God". I am only concerned with what they mean by that term in Rom 3,5 which may merely be a reflection of how they (erroneously!) construe Paul.

righteousness. I call it a problem because the logical relationships of verses 2–4 are not readily obvious. To show this let us paraphrase the four steps of the argument:

Step 1: the Jews have been blessed with the promises of God (v. 2).
Step 2: the unbelief of some does not abolish God's faithfulness to keep those promises (v. 3).
Step 3: for nothing man can do will abrogate God's truthfulness (v. 4a, see note 26).
Step 4: just as Scripture says: the sin of man justifies God's judgment upon it (v. 4b).

The problem here is how step 4 functions in the argument. Since Paul is stressing in steps 1–3 God's gracious faithfulness to his promises in spite of man's sin, why does he introduce an OT quote (step 4) that asserts God's righteousness in punishing sin? It does not seem to fit. I have already given the reasons why I cannot follow Käsemann who solves the problem by seeing in the Psalm quote not a reference to punishment but to the justification of the ungodly (see note 21).

Such a view seems to smooth out the logic of vv. 1–4 but it makes the references to wrath and judgement in vv. 5–7 (and thus the opponents' objections) inexplicable as far as I can see.

How then shall we understand the relationship between step 4 and the preceding steps? The καθὼς γέγραπται "as it is written" is used by Paul ten times in Romans,[29] always to refer to an OT text which supports the point he is making. What Paul wants to support in Rom 3,2–4a is that man's sin of unbelief does not abrogate God's faithfulness. The unusual way Paul chooses to support this is by citing an OT text which shows what effect man's sin does have on God. Far from impugning God's faithfulness and truth it highlights the righteousness of God's punitive judgment. In other words Ps 51,4 is a support for what sins do not do to God (abrogate his faithfulness) by showing what in fact they do do to God (justify his judgment).

But here we get a crucial insight into Paul's understanding of God's righteousness. Paul's OT support only has force if the righteousness of God embraces both his merciful faithfulness *and* his punitive judgment. Only if God's judgment because of sin and his merciful faithfulness in

[29] 1,17; 2,24; 3,10; 8,36; 9,13.33; 10,15; 11,26; 15,9.

spite of sin cohere in one concept of divine righteousness, can Paul argue that the righteousness of judgment, highlighted by the gravity of sin, supports the merciful faithfulness of God to his promises in spite of man's sin. The sequence: "God is faithful" (v. 3), "God is true" (v. 4a), just as it is written, "God is shown righteous" (v. 4b) indicates that God's righteousness embraces his truth and faithfulness. But since the way he is "shown righteous" is through the gravity of sin vindicating his judgment, therefore, we should conclude that in Paul's mind God's righteousness also embraces his punitive judgment.[30] Paul found himself thus in conflict with a Judaism whose erroneous view of its own solidarity[31] and of God's faithfulness contradicted the pauline message of justification by free grace through faith alone. Consequently I cannot follow the scholars who maintain that for Paul the righteousness of God is the opposite of his wrath and is always a saving, never a punitive, reality.[32] They have, in my judgment, failed to distinguish in

[30] When Kertelge (A. 9, 70) objects to a punitive righteousness here and argues, with Stuhlmacher (A. 6, 85) and others, that righteousness and wrath are not the same in Rom 3,5 but are opposites, he makes two mistakes I think: 1) he overlooks that the opponents' view, not necessarily Paul's, is expressed in 3,5 and 2) he knocks down a straw man, for no one equates God's righteousness and his wrath. All I am maintaining is that God's righteousness embraces *also* punishment, or that punishment is *one* expression of it.

[31] This emerges in the failure of Paul's opponents to grasp the significance of Paul's "some" in 3,3a and their false inference from God's faithfulness, namely, that all Jews will be spared judgment. Paul attacks this false view of solidarity head on in Rom 9,6: "not all Israel is Israel" – that is why the promises of God have not fallen (9,6) even though "some" Jews are accursed (9,3).

[32] J. Becker, Das Heil Gottes, Göttingen 1964, 275 ("immer positiv als Heilsbegriff bestimmt"); Stuhlmacher (A. 6), 85f.; Käsemann (A. 6), 76.93; Kertelge (A. 9), 70. Kertelge seems to try to have it both ways by saying the wrath and righteousness of God are in "Spannung" with each other but that the one is the "Kehrseite" of the other. He cites two works where a punitive righteousness is defended, O. Olivieri, Quid ergo amplius Iudaeo est? Rom 3,1–8, Bib. 10 (1929) 31–52; M. Pohlenz, Vom Zorne Gottes, FRLANT 12 (1909) 11f. H. Thyen, Studien zur Sündenvergebung, Göttingen 1970, 165f., gives a short but pointed critique of Stuhlmacher's interpretation of Rom 3,1–8. He says, "Gott erweist sich also dadurch als 'gerecht', dass er die ἀδικία durch seinen Zorn ahndet. Nicht die 'Bundestreue' Gottes, sondern der Aufweis, dass sein Zornesgericht verdientermassen und das heisst eben 'gerecht' ergeht ist das Thema" (166). That Paul knew of a punitive divine righteousness is confirmed, it seems to me, by II Thess 1,5f., "(Your persecution) is a sign of the δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ in order to make you worthy of the kingdom of God for which you suffer, since it is δίκαιον παρὰ θεῷ to pay back tribulation to those who oppress you and to give you who are oppressed rest with us". Parallel to this

Rom 3,5–8 between Paul's view and the view of his opponents. The view of divine righteousness which they ascribe to Paul is precisely the one upon which his opponents base their argument and which Paul rejects on the basis that it excludes punitive judgment.[33]

What then is Paul's understanding of the righteousness of God reflected in Rom 3,1–8? The reference to the glory of God in v. 7 indicates that Paul's opponents had probably heard Paul defend God's actions as righteous in that they displayed God's glory.[34] So they responded: "If the truth of God by my lie abounds to his glory then God would be unrighteous to judge me." The truth in this argument is that God's righteousness is manifested when his truthfulness abounds to his glory. The error is the twofold assumption: 1) that God's truthfulness would abound to his glory even if he indefinitely spared persistent unbelievers from judgment, and 2) that his glory would not abound if God judged unbelieving Israel.

It emerges from Rom 3,1–8, therefore, that for Paul God's righteousness is neither a strict distributive justice nor a merely saving activity. It is more fundamental to God's nature than either of these and thus embraces both mercy and judgment. It is God's faithfulness to his own name, his unwavering commitment to preserve and display his glory.[35]

In accord with the logic of 3,2–4 God's righteousness embraces both his gracious faithfulness to his promises and his punitive judgment upon sin. As far as individual man is concerned, what determines whether he glorifies God one way or the other is not his belonging to Israel, as the opponents thought, but his faith in the promises of God.

would be Rom 2,5 where those Jews who spurn God's mercy store up for themselves "wrath on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the δικαιοκρίσιας τοῦ θεοῦ".

[33] This is the point of 3,6: "Otherwise how will God judge the world?" In other words: if your view of God's righteousness prevails, it rules out all judgment. Therefore since there is judgment, your view of a strictly saving righteousness is not correct. Righteousness is not the gracious opposite of punitive judgment but rather finds one expression precisely in judgment (v. 4b).

[34] Käsemann (A. 6, 78) is on the right track when he says, "Zu beachten ist, dass gleichsam nebenbei Gerechtigkeit und Herrlichkeit Gottes ausgetauscht werden, wofür AT und jüdische Apokalyptik die Grundlage boten."

[35] In another article I have argued that this conception of the righteousness of God yields the best explanation of Paul's meaning in Rom 3,25 also. Cf. The Demonstration of God's Righteousness in Rom 3,25.26, Journal for the Study of the New Testament (scheduled for fall 1979).

Thus God manifests his righteousness in keeping his promises to those who believe, for in this he displays the value of his glory by blessing those whose stance of faith renders his glory most conspicuous (Rom 4,20). But he also manifests his righteousness in punishing those who remain in unbelief because unbelief is the gravest assault on God and to bless it indefinitely would be to deny the infinite value of his glorious trustworthiness. God's righteousness is his faithfulness to his own name, his unwavering commitment to preserve and display his own glory in salvation and in judgment.

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