

# RETROSPECTIVE

Having traced the millennia of consideration and debate concerning justification in the various Christian traditions, we feel that it is worthwhile to take a large step back and reflect on our evaluation as well as on our evaluative standard in a comprehensive way.

Justification, of course, is related to righteousness, and the divergent understandings of justification that have arisen through the centuries can largely be traced to differences in the understanding of righteousness. Thus, we should first answer the question, What is righteousness, and more precisely, what is the righteousness that God requires for our justification? The common and natural answer to this question is that human beings should somehow be free from sins. We need not define this precisely; here it is necessary only to point out that the common assumption is that righteousness before God is related to somehow negating sins. This assumption is evident in many of the traditions that we have evaluated. But we believe that this assumption is mistaken, and because it is mistaken, many of the traditions have misunderstood justification before God.

In our view, being right before God relates directly to God's original intention in creating human beings, and thus, we appeal to the words of God's counsel in that creation: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26). To be right before God, to be right according to God, is to fulfill His intention in creating us, that is, to bear His image and likeness and exercise His dominion. These are, we would say, the finer characteristics of what the Bible elsewhere refers to as glorifying God. The right thing for a human being to do is to glorify God by expressing His image and likeness and exercising His dominion, not simply to be free from sin or to behave sinlessly. This, we submit, is the righteousness that God desires and requires. The sad fact of the fall of humankind, with the introduction of sin and death, neither changes God's original intention for human beings nor alters what is fundamentally the right thing for human beings to be and do. Thus, the issue that righteousness addresses is not simply sin but, more importantly, glory, which is God expressed. When we read what Paul writes, "All have sinned and fall

short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), we take him to mean that there are two separate issues with human beings that require attention: sin and glory. For sin there is the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ, which we all must accept in faith. But glory refers to that original intention of God in creating human beings, which precedes the fall, and to that which is fundamentally right for all human beings to do: to express God in His image according to His likeness and to represent God with His dominion.

If we concede that the righteousness that God desires and requires for justification is related only to somehow negating sins, then we must also admit that human beings could be righteous in themselves before God if sin had not come in or once the problem of sin has been properly addressed. This we cannot accept. Paul makes a very clear distinction between a righteousness that is related to the law (and therefore to sin, which is exposed by the law and acts through the law [Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20; 7:5, 7; 1 Cor. 15:56]) and a righteousness that is according to God (Rom. 1:17; 3:21; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Many of the traditions equate the righteousness according to God with forgiveness of sins. But to us that equation makes Paul's distinction meaningless. If the righteousness that God requires were related mainly to the forgiveness of sins, then the righteousness that is according to God would be a righteousness that is of the law, and the distinction of the apostle would dissolve. To uphold Paul's distinction, there must be a righteousness that is purely according to God, distinct from that which is obtainable through the law with its relationship to sin. Further, this righteousness cannot be one that is based only on what human beings are apart from sin, for that would be a righteousness that is according to human beings, not according to God.

The righteousness that is according to God must be a righteousness that is of God Himself, and according to Paul this righteousness is given to us by God as a gift (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 5:17) through faith. Many believe that this righteousness, given as a gift for our justification, is the righteousness of Christ, applied to us in some forensic and purely declarative sense. But nowhere in the Bible is this actually said, and