

JUSTIFICATION IN THE LAW: ITS MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

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The expression *dikaiwqh/nai evn no, mw|* occurs twice in Paul's letters (Gal 3:11; 5:4; cf. Acts 13:38). In Phil 3:6 Paul mentions "righteousness in the law" (*dikaiosunhn th.n evn no, mw|*). As we shall see below, most commentators have not explained satisfactorily the meaning of *dikaiwqh/nai evn no, mw|*. Nor have they done justice to the theological and social significance of justification *evn no, mw|*. Thus it is necessary to investigate the meaning and significance of "justification in the law."

THE MEANING OF DIKAIWQHNAI

Without attempting to investigate *dik*-root words in Paul's letters,⁵² we will discuss the meaning of the verb *dikaio,w*, focusing on Galatians. The verb occurs 25 times in Paul alone (excluding the Pastorals) out of 39 times appearing in the NT. In Galatians it occurs 8 times (2:16 [3 times], 17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4). Scholars have debated whether *dikaio,w* means "make righteous" (the classic Roman Catholic position)⁵³ or "declare as righteous" (the classic Protestant position).⁵⁴ As we investigate the meaning of *dikaio,w* in Galatians, it must be understood in light of the rhetorical context of the epistle

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⁵²For the study of *dik*-root words, see the extensive bibliography in J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (Dallas: Word, 1998), 1:36-37; K. Kertelege, *dikaiosunhn*, *EDNT* 1.325-330; J. Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 127-135; J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

⁵³E.g. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138; K. Kertelege, *Rechtfertigung bei Paulus* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1966), 115-120; F. J. Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 93; H. Schlier (*Der Brief an die Galater* (5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 89-91).

⁵⁴E.g. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1951), 1.271-278; R. Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 125-126; idem, "The Forensic Character of Justification," *Themolix* 3 (1977-78), 16-21; H. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 99.

itself because the meaning of a word is determined by its literary context. Since the Reformation the issue of justification in Galatians has been read within the context of the individual's pursuit of salvation.⁵⁵ According to the traditional understanding of justification, the essential issue in Galatians concerns individual salvation: one is justified by faith in Christ, not by meritorious good works.⁵⁶ Recently this traditional understanding has been challenged. Notably, K. Stendahl argues, "Paul's thoughts about justification were triggered by the issues of divisions and identities in a pluralistic and torn world, not primarily by inner tensions of individual souls and conscience."⁵⁷ Gal 2:16-21 is not so much concerned with how individuals can earn enough merit to be declared righteous as with what is the soteriological basis on which Gentiles become members of the people of God (the law or God's grace and Christ – 2:21). Most interpreters have agreed that one of the critical issues in Galatia is the social issue of how Gentiles become the people of God.⁵⁸ Commentators have argued that Paul's Gospel of justification by faith is to be understood in light of this social issue.⁵⁹ Thus, it is fair to say that the primary thrust of Paul's justification language in Galatians is not individual but social or ecclesial.⁶⁰

Moreover, we need to understand the meaning of justification in light of the immediate literary context of 2:16 in which Paul first introduced justification into the argument. In the preceding context the

⁵⁵Luther struggled with a tormented conscience how he could be right before God. Lutherans emphasized the forensic nature of justification by individual's faith in Christ.

⁵⁶Matera, *Galatians*, 28.

⁵⁷K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 40.

⁵⁸See, in particular, E. P. Sanders (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 20) who argues, "The debate in Galatians is a debate about 'entry' in the sense of what is essential in order to be considered a member at all" and Matera, *Galatians*, 29-30.

⁵⁹Notably, according to Stendahl (*Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 2), the doctrine of justification by faith "was hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs of the promises of God to Israel." This point has been observed by several other scholars. M. Barth, "Jews and Gentiles," *JES* 5 (1968): 259; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 202; P. Esler, *Galatians* (London: Routledge, 1998), 177; G. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia. A Study in Early Christian Theology* (SNTSMS 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 46; N. T. Wright, "Justification," in *The Great Acquittal*, ed. G. Reid (London: Collins, 1980), 22.

⁶⁰Notably J. D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God," *JTS* 43 (1992): 1-22; F. J. Matera, "Galatians in Perspective," *Int* 54 (2000): 231-245.

explicit issues are circumcision (2:1-10) and dietary regulations and table-fellowship (2:11-14). In the Jerusalem consultation (2:1-10) and the Antioch incident (2:11-14), the issue was how Gentiles can be members of the covenant community. In other words, justification not $\epsilon\nu\chi\ \epsilon;\ \rho\gamma\omega\nu\ \nu\omicron,\ \mu\omicron\upsilon$ but $\epsilon\nu\kappa\ \rho\iota,\ \sigma\tau\epsilon\omega\jmath\ \text{Cristou}$ / is Paul's answer to the question: What is the soteriological basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God?⁶¹ The primary issue in 3:6-29 is how Gentiles can become Abraham's offspring and children of God to receive the blessing of Abraham. We may justly infer, therefore, that the meaning of justification in Galatians should be understood in light of the issue: How the Gentile Christians could be regarded as members of the people of God, which was central to the dispute between Paul and Jewish Christians?

With that in mind, it is noteworthy that Paul equates "to be justified" with becoming Abraham's offspring (3:29), becoming the children of God (3:26; 4:6), becoming heir (3:29; 4:7), receiving adoption (4:5), and becoming the children of promise (4:28). The term "justification" is elaborated by those equivalent terms. As E. P. Sanders rightly argues, "the passive verb 'be righteous' is employed in his discussions of transferring from one status to another."⁶² It may well be, therefore, that $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omega\eta\ \nu\alpha\iota$ means to be set in right relationship with God as God's people (i.e. to become members of the people of God).⁶³

⁶¹So rightly J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 340.

⁶²Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 6. Elsewhere E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 544) argues, "Most succinctly, righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect; in Paul it is a transfer term. In Judaism, that is, commitment to the covenant put one 'in', while obedience (righteousness) subsequently keeps one in. In Paul's usage, 'be made righteous' ('be justified') is a term indicating getting in, not staying in the body of the saved."

⁶³J. D. G. Dunn (*The Epistle to the Galatians* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993], 134-135) states that to be justified means "to be counted as one of God's own people who had proved faithful to the covenant." Esler (*Galatians*, 141-177) convincingly argues that Paul understood "righteousness as privileged identity" as God's covenant people. See also Bruce, *Galatians*, 138; R. B. Hays, "Justification," in *ABD* 3.1130-1132; B. W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), 104.

THE MEANING OF THE PHRASE EN NOMW

The phrase *evn no, mw|* and its cognates (*evn tw/| no, mw|* and *evn w-|*) occur 12 times in the undisputed Pauline letters (Rom 2:12, 20, 23; 3:19; 7:6, 23 [twice]; 1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; Gal 3:11; 5:4; Phil 3:6). The phrase also appears in the Gospels (Matt 12:5; 22:36; Luke 2:23, 24; 10:26; 24:44; John 1:45; 8:5, 17; 10:34; 15:25). All occurrences in the Gospels unanimously refer to “in the book of the Mosaic Law.”⁶⁴ On the one hand, Paul uses the phrase in the sense of “in the book of Torah” in several places (Rom 2:20; 1 Cor 9:9; 14:21). It is fairly clear that in 1 Cor 9:9 and 14:21 Paul uses the phrase in reference to the book of Moses; the similar formula (*evn tw/| no, mw| ge, graptai*) appears in 1 Cor 9:9 and 14:21. In Rom 2:20, he says that Jews have “the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law.” Probably the law refers to the book of Torah in which Jews think that knowledge and truth is to be found. The usage of the phrase as such in the Gospels and Paul’s letters is probably derived from LXX.⁶⁵

On the other hand, Paul employs *evn no, mw|* in the sense of “in the sphere of the law” (Rom 2:12, 23; 3:19; 7:6, 23; Gal 3:11; 5:4; Phil 3:6; cf. Acts 13:38). The precise meaning of the phrase must be judged by the immediate literary context where it occurs. Paul uses the phrase in reference to the sphere of Jews’ existence and life (Rom 2:12, 23; 3:19). The sentence *o[soi evn no, mw| h[marton* (2:12) can be understood as “all who have sinned in the sphere of the law.” In light of a Jewish perspective, Paul divides humanity into two groups: *o[soi evn no, mw| h[marton* and *o[soi avno, mw] h[marton* (2.12).⁶⁶ Jews are described as people who live “in the sphere of the law” which marks off from the Gentiles. Paul speaks of the Jew as boasting in the law because the law defines the Jew as the people of God (Rom 2:23). Moreover, he describes the “Jew” as *oi` evn tw/| no, mw|* (Rom 3:19). Jews lived within the boundary defined and characterized by the law (cf. e.g. Neh 10:30; Jer 51:23; Pss 77:10;

⁶⁴In most cases, the phrase is used in the form of *ge, graptai evn no, mw|*. This indicates that the phrase refers to “in the book of Torah.”

⁶⁵The formula *ge, graptai evn tw/| no, mw|* and its similar formulae occur in LXX (Josh 9:21; 1 Kgs 2:3; 1 Chr 16:40; 2 Chr 23:18; 31:3; 31:21; 35:26; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh 8:14; 10:35, 37; *Pss. Sol.* 10.4; 14.2; Bar 2.2; Dan 9:11).

⁶⁶Dunn, *Romans*, 1:95; D. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 145.

118:1; Sir 23:23 - LXX; *Pss. Sol.* 14.2). The Jews cannot imagine their life outside the law because the law defines their identity and existence. In a word, the law is the boundary of Jewish identity and existence. As James Dunn well observes, the law in Judaism plays a role as identity marker and boundary marker. Dunn highlights “the social function of the law” which he believes to be important for understanding the mindset with which Paul is engaging in Romans and Galatians.⁶⁷ Dunn is distinctive in understanding the social function of the law that “serves both to identify Israel as the people of the covenant and to mark them off as distinct from the (other) nations.”⁶⁸ Therefore, it is fair to conclude that *evn no, mw|* means “in the sphere of the law” within which Jews live and where their identity is defined.

Furthermore, Paul depicts his past state and that of the Romans (“we”) as those who were in the domain of the law. The law is likened to a “power-sphere” within which they were held captive (*evn w-| kateico, meqa* – Rom 7:6). Rom 7:23 supports this interpretation (*aivcmalwti, zonta, me evn tw/| no, mw| th/j a`marti, aj*). If *no, moj* refers to the Torah,⁶⁹ Paul understands that the law takes one captive within the “power-sphere” of the law of sin. In other words, he regards the law as “domain” in which one is imprisoned. Paul’s understanding of the law as “domain” is also indicated by the phrase *u`po. no, mon*. It is generally recognized that *u`po. no, mon* (Gal 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18; Rom 6:14-15; 1 Cor 9:20) denotes “under the power of the law.”⁷⁰ Paul’s perception of the law as power also is indicated by that the law brought condemnation of

⁶⁷Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch (Gal 2.11-18),” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 129-182; idem, “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 183-214; idem, “The Relationship between Paul and Jerusalem according to Galatians 1 and 2,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 108-128; idem, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 215-241.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 223.

⁶⁹Scholars have debated whether *no, moj* occurrences in 7:22-25 refer to the Mosaic law or “principle or authority.” For the debate, see Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 462-465. Paul’s ideas of both the slavery to the law (Rom 7:6b; cf. Gal 5:1) and the captivity within the domain of the law (Rom 7:6a) and under the power of the law (Rom 6:14, 15; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 3:23; 4:5) suggest the former is preferable.

⁷⁰See e.g. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 141-142; I.-G. Hong, *The Law in Galatians* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 156-161; J. L. Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 370-371; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 389.

sin (Rom 4:15), rules (Rom 7:1), and has a cursing power (Gal 3:10, 13).

Paul also employs *evn no, mw|* as the sphere within which some hope to be justified (Gal 3:11; 5:4) and the gift of righteousness is available (Phil 3:6). Most commentators have rendered *evn no, mw|* in Gal 3:11, 5:4, and Phil 3:6 as “by the law” taking the preposition *evn* as instrumental.⁷¹ A few commentators have rendered it as “in the sphere of the law,” taking the preposition as locative.⁷² The phrase in 3:11 is likely to be rendered in a spatial sense because the phrase *evn no, mw|* (3:11) and *evn Cristw/| VIhsou/* (3:14) are contrasted as two mutually exclusive spheres of righteousness. In contrast with justification in the law, Paul argues that the blessing of Abraham (i.e. righteousness)⁷³ is given to the Gentiles in Christ.

⁷¹Most commentaries and J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 260; R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (SBLDS 56; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 206; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 138, 170; J. M. Gundry-Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying in and Falling Away* (WUNT 2/37; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1990), 210.

⁷²Dunn (*Galatians*, 267) notes that the phrase could be translated “in/within the law.” See also D. Guthrie, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 129.

⁷³What is the reference of the blessing of Abraham? There is no agreement among scholars. Several commentators hold that it refers to the gift of the Spirit (e.g. Bruce, *Galatians*, 168; Dunn, *Galatians*, 180; Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, 128). A number of commentators reckon that Paul employs the phrase to refer to the blessing of justification (E. D. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921], 175; Fung, *Galatians*, 151; Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998], 228). On the basis of Gen 22:17-18 and 28:4, Matera (*Galatians*, 120) seems to think that it refers to the fact that Abraham becomes the father of innumerable descendants. The disagreement among commentators requires us to clarify what is meant by the blessing of Abraham. One can find “the blessing of Abraham” in Gen 22:17-18, Gen 26:3-4, and Gen 28:3-4. For example, Gen 22:17-18 says, “I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice” (NRSV). The blessing of Abraham has something to do with the blessing of innumerable descendants, the blessing of the land, and the blessing of all the nations of the earth through the offspring of Abraham (cf. Gen 26:3-4; 28:3-4). But the blessing of Abraham (3:14) must be understood in light of Gal 3:8-9 because the passage (the immediate literary context of 3:14) deals with the theme. The blessing of Abraham in 3:14 is not so much related either to the fact that the

In Gal 5:4 Paul persuades Galatians who want to be justified *evn no, mw|* not to rely upon the law for their justification by contrasting the law with Christ in terms of “sphere of influence.”⁷⁴ Paul says, *kathrgh, qhte avpo. Cristou/ (oi[tinej evn no, mw| dikaïou/sqe*. Here Paul implies that justification *evn no, mw|* means to be alienated from Christ (*evn no, mw|* vs. *evn Cristw/|*; *evn no, mw| = avpo. Cristou/*). Paul attempts to persuade the Galatians not to go within the boundary of the law for their justification by contrasting the law with Christ in terms of two antithetical spheres of justification. The rhetorical force of the antithesis is that Paul urges the Galatians to continue to stay within the sphere of Christ in which they can be justified, without being persuaded by the agitators’ message of justification in the law. This antithesis is Paul’s answer to one of the critical issues in Galatians: whether Gentiles must enter the boundary of Israelites (i.e. the Mosaic covenant) to become God’s people. Paul answers that Jews and Gentiles alike must enter the boundary of Christ for salvation. Since Christ is the legitimate boundary of salvation, the boundary of the law must be rejected. Therefore, it is probable that the *evn no, mw|* in Gal 5:4 probably means “in the sphere of the law.” Moreover, he contrasts *evn no, mw|* (5:4) with *evn Cristw/|* (5:6) as two antithetical redemptive-historical spheres. These observations make the rendering of the preposition *evn* as instrumental improbable.

Having understood *evn no, mw|* in Phil 3:6 in the sense of “rooted in the law,”⁷⁵ some interpreted “righteousness *evn no, mw|*”

descendants of Abraham shall possess land or that Abraham becomes the father of innumerable descendants (*Pace Matera*). Rather it is closely bound up with the fact that “all the tribes of the earth” (Gen 12:3; 28:14) “shall be blessed in you” (Gen 12:3). What then is the blessing that the Gentiles are receiving in Abraham? To put it another way, what is the blessing with which those of faith are blessed together with Abraham? Paul relates the blessing to justification of the Gentiles by faith. God’s justification of the Gentiles by faith fulfills the promise that all the Gentiles shall be blessed in Abraham (3:8). Moreover, the blessing that those of faith share with Abraham is intimately related to righteousness that Abraham received by faith (3:6, 9). For Paul, then, the blessing of Abraham refers to justification of the Gentiles and it comes to the Gentiles in Christ.

⁷⁴K. Snodgrass, “Spheres of Influence,” *JSNT* 32 (1988): 93-113.

⁷⁵Bruce, *Galatians*, 160; G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1983), 134; S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1981), 41.

as the righteous way of life prescribed by the law.⁷⁶ But Paul uses the phrase *evn no, mw|* in Phil 3:6 in a locative sense⁷⁷ because he contrasts *evn no, mw|* (3:6) with *evn auvtw/|* (3:9)⁷⁸ as two incompatible spheres in which righteousness was thought to be available. Paul asks, *kai. eu`reqw/ evn auvtw/| (mh. e;cwn evmh.n dikaiosunhn th.n evk no,mou avlla. th.n dia. pi, stewj Cristou/ (th.n evk qeou/ dikaiosunhn evpi. th/| pi, stei.* What does it mean *eu`reqw/ evn auvtw/|*? The expression may have a special nuance, approaching the sense of “turn out, appear, be shown.”⁷⁹ Apparently, when the verb is passive, it really means “to be” and “be evident,”⁸⁰ and it is likely that “to be found in Christ” simply means “to be in Christ”⁸¹ Then, what is the meaning of “being in Christ”? Several scholars argue that it refers to “full participation in Christ.”⁸² Some commentators take it as referring to “being united with Christ” in light of corporate personality.⁸³ Others interpret it in the sense of the final and eschatological dimension.⁸⁴ The phrase probably should be interpreted “in the sphere of Christ,” which is contrasted “in the sphere of the law” (3:6), and thus “to be found in Christ” means “to exist in the realm of Christ” in which Paul wants to be found. Certainly, in Phil 3:9, Paul emphasises righteousness in Christ as his theological rationale for rejecting righteousness in the law (3:6). Paul considers all things (e.g. righteousness in the sphere of the law, confidence in the flesh) as loss that he may be found in the sphere of Christ and gain righteousness in Christ. He regards his righteousness within the law as rubbish

⁷⁶E.g. P. T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 379; M. Silva, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 177.

⁷⁷So rightly Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God*, 99.

⁷⁸The pronoun refers back to Christ in 3:8.

⁷⁹BAGD s.v.; Silva, *Philippians*, 188.

⁸⁰S. Pederson, *eu`ri, skw*, *EDNT* 2.84.

⁸¹On the passive of *eu`reqw/* as signifying “to be,” see Burton, *Galatians*, 125; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 393; R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), 118.

⁸²Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ*, 118; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 392.

⁸³Silva, *Philippians*, 188; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 140; M. R. Vincent, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians and to Philemon* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 102.

⁸⁴F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 88; G. B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 137; P. Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 99.

because of the surpassing value of righteousness in Christ. In light of his Christocentric perspective, Paul replaces the valid sphere of justification from the sphere of the law to the sphere of Christ. As evident in Phil 3:6-9, Paul sets the law in antithesis with Christ as two antithetical spheres of justification. So, we can conclude that righteousness in the law means the gift of righteousness available within the boundary of the law.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the study above, it may be fair to argue that *dikaiwqh/nai evn no, mw|* means to be set in right relationship with God as God's people within the sphere of the law. It does not mean to be justified by the law. Righteousness in the sphere of the law does not mean ethical righteousness demanded by the law and required of human beings by God. Rather, it denotes becoming God's people acceptable to God by being within the boundary of the law within which the covenant community lives.⁸⁵ It also implies that the privileged status of the covenant people (i.e. righteous status before God) is limited within the sphere of the law (within the boundary of the law). Furthermore, *dikaiwqh/nai evn no, mw|* connotes "justification on the basis of the law" because the former includes the latter conceptually.⁸⁶

Of course, "justification within the sphere of the law" is an important part of the different gospel that the agitators in Galatia preached to the Galatians. Justification by membership in the covenant through Torah-observance⁸⁷ is in harmony with the agitators' teaching of circumcision, i.e. the inclusion of Gentiles into God's people through circumcision. Without entering the boundary of the law, the Gentiles are cut off from the people of God and from salvation. For them righteousness is a consequence of membership of God's people staying

⁸⁵As Dunn (*Galatians*, 267) puts it well, "To be justified in the law" denotes "an attempt to get within the area of safety marked out by the law, 'in the sphere of the law', 'within the boundary of the law,' that is, membership of the Jewish people."

⁸⁶While taking the phrase as "in the sphere of law," Burton (*Galatians*, 276) understands it meaning "on the basis of the law."

⁸⁷According to Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 147ff.), salvation by membership in the covenant is the soteriology of covenantal nomism. Jews must live within the boundary of the law because one can maintain the status of God's covenant people only by staying in the sphere of the law.

within the boundary of the law. It connotes Jewish Christian ethnocentric exclusivism or separatism arguing that salvation is given to the covenant community exclusively.⁸⁸ In the context of Galatians, moreover, justification in the law represents “Jewish Christian covenantal nomism”⁸⁹ holding that acceptance by God is restricted to Jewish Christians who maintain the status of God’s covenant people by staying in the sphere of the law through Torah-observance. At the same time, it represents the agitators’ proselytism that requires Gentile believers to come within the boundary of the law through Torah-observance. The agitators maintained that since Gentiles who are outside the law are outside the sphere of salvation, they must enter the boundary of the law by observing the law because salvation is within the sphere of the law. The agitators’ proselytism is based on Jewish ethnocentric proselytism.⁹⁰ In short, for the agitators, the law is the domain of salvation, and the means to get in the domain is to adopt the law and circumcision.

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⁸⁸Having not paid sufficient attention to this significance, however, Dunn (*Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 183-214; 215-241) rightly points out that “Jewish Christian separatism” was the problem addressed by Paul in Galatians. See also V. M. Smiles, *The Gospel and the Law in Galatia* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 15-21, 65-67.

⁸⁹J. L. Martyn calls it “modified covenantal nomism.” See, “Events in Galatia: Modified Covenantal Nomism versus God’s Invasion of the Cosmos in the Singular Gospel: Response to Dunn and Gaventa,” in *Pauline Theology, Volume I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (ed. Jouette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 160. C. K. Barrett (*Freedom and Obligation: A Study of the Epistle to the Galatian* [London: SPCK, 1985], 44) notes, “the theology of the Judaizers . . . to tally in some remarkably ways (though not in every way) with the covenantal nomism of E. P. Sanders.”

⁹⁰For Jewish nationalistic proselytism, see W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 58-66; T. L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 54-60.

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