

Paul's concept of *dikaiosyne*, which is generally translated by "righteousness" in the forensic sense of "righteousness before God," can also be interpreted to mean "acceptance by God" or "communion with God."

Correspondingly, sin for Paul is not wanting to accept the righteousness that comes from God as a gift, but wanting instead to achieve one's own righteousness. Because God has always already freely given communion with Godself, anyone who attempts to earn this communion by her- or himself is guilty of the sin of rejecting God's gift and insulting God the giver.

Just this, according to Paul in Romans 1, is the guilt of the gentiles who do not accept God's acceptance. But it is also the guilt of the Jews who seek to achieve righteousness before God by fulfilling the law. In both cases, what is involved is godlessness, in the literal sense of trying to live without God's gift, of trying to earn what has already been freely given. Thus Paul came to recognize that as a Pharisee he had been motivated by the goal of achieving righteousness before God, of working to earn the reign of God. Thus he scrupulously observed the prescriptions of the law and the traditions of the fathers (Phil 3:6; Gal 1:14). Only when he came to realize that what he was striving for had already been given did he recognize that he had acted without understanding. He had wanted to run *to* God only to realize, finally, that his was a godless running because he always already could and should have run *with* God.

Notwithstanding this godlessness, however, God never ceases to give the gift of communion with God, acceptance by God, righteousness before God—giving it explicitly and decisively through Jesus Christ, who is rightly understood to be the decisive re-presentation of God's gift of communion with Godself. And what makes one a Christian is that one accepts God's gift as it is decisively given through Jesus Christ and then lead's one's life accordingly, one's action as a Christian being, in the very nature of the case, always a passive action, an action growing out of one's prior acceptance through faith of God's action, of God's prevenient grace. Otherwise put: Christians are not motivated to act by a goal out ahead of them in the future still to be attained, but rather by a goal that has already been attained in the

past, to which they can open themselves and out of which they can ever and again live and act.

Consequently, if action is wanting from Christians, the first concern is to preach the good news of the gospel, not to proclaim a law, however reasonable and illuminating and however much it may appeal to Jesus for authorization. To be sure, anyone who allows her- or himself to be given God's gift of presence, who allows God to come in God's rule, thereupon repents. Such repentance, although not the condition of God's giving God's reign, *is* the consequence of accepting God's reign as already given. Therefore, what appear to be moral instructions or commands are not things that one has to do but rather the house rules of God's reign by which anyone simply lives who allows this reign to be given to her or him. Thus, for example, there is no command not to be angry, but anyone who believes in God, who therefore reckons with the unmerited gift of God's presence, who allows God's communion with her or him (and this means: God's reign) to be given to her or him, simply does not get angry. She or he doesn't need to be commanded, "Thou shalt love thine enemy," for she or he has no enemy. In short, what is involved are not works, but fruits: the good tree *can* bear only good fruit.

But now the christology that is clearly indicated by this is not a christology according to which Jesus himself believed in God's presence and then, through his words and deeds, so lived God's presence toward others that they were thereby confronted with the possibility of so believing and living themselves, thereby making it possible for still others so to believe and live, and so on. No, whether or not Jesus himself believed in God's presence, he was experienced by some of those around him as the one through whom God was decisively re-presented—to them, and to women and men generally. For these persons, therefore, Jesus could be called the Son of God in a unique sense—not because he himself believed in God's presence and then acted out of communion with God in the way in which they had been given the possibility of doing through him, but solely and simply because it was through him that they themselves had been decisively given this possibility. In *this* sense, Jesus made the presence of God, the coming of God, communion with God, acceptance by God, righteousness before God, an

event—not in the sense that he himself believed it and acted out of it, however true it may be that he did that also, but in the sense that through him they were decisively given the possibility of themselves so believing and acting.

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