

Submitted Book Review of "Christ our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification" by Mark A. Seifrid. Anvil 18 (4):313-4.,

Mark A. Seifrid

Christ our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification

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One of the hallmark doctrines of evangelicalism, rooted in its reading of the apostle Paul, is justification by faith. In the last twenty years, however, academic Pauline studies have seen a reaction against the Lutheran readings of Paul dear to many evangelicals and the development (by such diverse writers as Ed Sanders, James Dunn, Richard Hays and Tom Wright) of a "new perspective". This volume, the ninth in the excellent Apollos series, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, marks a major stand against this paradigm shift in the interpretation of the apostle.

Seifrid here makes available to an intelligent Christian readership outside the scholarly world the fruit of his own doctoral work and that of much recent, untranslated German Lutheran Pauline studies. Although acknowledging some insights in the new perspective the general tone of this work is highly critical – leading Anglican evangelical Wright is referred to six times, all of them strongly negative. He begins with a study of Paul's conversion and then examines the righteousness of God. He rightly views this as central to the message of Romans (although his exegesis here is very focussed on 1.18-3.26) and understands it in terms of God's legal dispute with sinful humanity. Justification language therefore speaks of both God's justification and ours: God's judgment on sin and his condemnation of humanity in Christ's death and his granting, in Christ's resurrection, righteousness and life to those who believe. The following chapter explores this theme in other Pauline letters again emphasising that "it is not the problem of nationalism or ethnicity, but the divine contention with fallen humanity which calls forth [Paul's] statements on justification" (84-5). An illuminating footnote (p90) explains that Philemon is left out of consideration which is surprising as it vividly demonstrates the concrete meaning of Paul's doctrine of justification.

Two chapters address complex issues surrounding the law and the nature of faith. Key passages in Galatians and (again) Romans are examined here. The discussion is wide-ranging, including a traditional reading of "works of the law" (in which Paul's critique is of the assumption that outward conformity to the law may secure God's favour and bring salvation) and a rejection of the increasingly popular subjective genitive reading of "faith of Christ". The penultimate chapter examines Israel and the Gentiles, focussing on Romans 9-11, and the book concludes with a wider account of justification in the New Testament relating it to some

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contemporary church debates. Here Seifrid shows he is not simply restating traditional popular evangelical views (he is critical of a focus on Christ's imputed righteousness) and stresses that "God's justifying work *extra nos* in Christ determines all that we are and shall be" (177).

Overall, the book offers a powerful and original restatement for today of a Reformed interpretation of Paul. It will be welcomed and valued by those unhappy with the new perspective. Its disjointed treatment of biblical texts is a weakness but it will still prove valuable for anyone preaching on Paul's letters (especially Romans) who wishes to be aware of wider issues in Pauline theology. Its treatment of newer alternative paradigms is, however, too unsympathetic for it to offer a good overview of the current literature or to provide the constructive dialogue needed between traditional evangelical/Lutheran theologians and those who believe that what Saint Paul really said had a different focus.