

Paul and Revelation 14

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The purpose of this essay is to determine whether there is an exegetical basis for Ellen G. White's statement that justification by faith is the third angel's message "in verity."¹ This essay will address only this concern, and all other concerns, pressing and tempting as they may be, will go unaddressed.

There are three main sections to this essay. The first section compares Rev 14:6-12 and Rom 1. This investigation seeks to determine whether there is an intertextual relationship between Rev 14 and Rom 1. The reason for choosing Romans 1 is twofold. Romans is Paul's most lucid presentation of justification by faith. Also, there are significant verbal correlations between Rev 14 and Rom 1 that call for investigation. In the second section, I will examine Rom 2 as a test case to see whether the concept of the gospel in Rev 14 coincides with the concept of the gospel in Romans. Romans 2 is ideal for this purpose because it contains the most complete discussion of law and judgment in the entire Pauline corpus. In the final section, I will seek to clarify the role of faith, law, and judgment in Paul's thinking based on passages taken from Rom 4, 6, 7, and 14. I will

¹ E. G. White, "Repentance the Gift of God," *Review and Herald*, 1 April, 1890, 193. Eric Claude Webster, "Damnation or Deliverance," *Ministry*, February, 1988, 37-40, appears to be the only serious attempt to explain the relation between the two. Webster argues that the Sabbath, which is the opposite of the mark of the beast in Rev 14, is the sign of the sanctification that results from justification by faith. Webster does not offer detailed exegesis to support his views.

conclude by answering possible objections to my thesis. Finally, due to space, discussion of secondary literature will be kept to a minimum.

Romans 1:14-32 and Revelation 14:6-12

One might not suspect that Revelation and Romans could have much in common. In his commentary on Revelation, David Aune states that the word *gospel* in Rev 14:6 has “no semantic connections to Pauline usage.”² Martin Luther considered Revelation “neither apostolic nor prophetic.”³ Indeed, for many, Revelation is a book filled with exotic imagery, symbolism, and numbers that evoke wild speculations. It is also a book full of threats of hellfire and brimstone and of curses that are poured out without mercy upon the inhabitants of the earth to their great devastation. By contrast, Romans is a clear expression of the joyous gospel, full of grace and forgiveness. For example, Romans does not once mention the word “curse” in its discussion of the history of Israel’s apostasy in chs. 9-11.

A careful look, however, reveals that there is a closer affinity between Romans and Revelation than meets one at first glance. To begin with, both letters have a strong Roman connection. Revelation was sent to the seven churches on the western coast of Asia Minor facing persecution from Rome. Romans was directly sent to Rome, where nascent Christianity was struggling to take root. In other words, both letters address early Christian communities struggling to survive in the hostile environment of the Empire. More importantly, significant verbal parallels exist between Romans and Revelation. For this essay, we will limit our comparisons to Rom 1:14-32 and Rev 14:6-12. The first parallel concerns the universalism of the gospel. Rom 1:15-17 states: “I am eager to *preach the gospel* (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to *every one* (παντί) who has faith.”⁴ The two words in this passage that capture the universalism of Paul’s gospel are παντί (*every*) and εὐαγγελίζω (*preach the gospel*). The same two words

² David Edward Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52 a (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1998), 825.

³ Quoted in Werner Georg Kümmel and Paul Feine, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. C. Kee, Rev. ed. (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 1975), 471.

⁴ All quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise indicated. The italics appearing within scriptural quotations are all mine, unless otherwise indicated.

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appear in Rev 14:6, also denoting the universalism of the gospel.⁵ The eternal gospel (εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον)⁶ is to be *preached* (εὐαγγελίσαι) “to every (ἐπὶ πᾶν) nation and tribe and tongue and people.” Another eye-catching parallel is the expression *the wrath of God*. In Rom 1:18, the expression ὀργή Θεοῦ (the wrath of God) describes the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against the wicked (ἀποκαλύπτεται γὰρ ὀργὴ Θεοῦ ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ).⁷ A virtually identical phrase appears in Revelation 14:10, warning deluded humans about the wrath of God (αὐτὸς πίεται . . . τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ). And both Rev 14 and Rom 1 describe the wrath in the context of idolatry. Romans 1:23 denounces those who exchange the glory of God for *images* of mortal creatures (ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ). Revelation 14:9-11 likewise pronounces the wrath of God upon those who worship the beast and its image (εἴ τις προσκυνεῖ . . . τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ). Moreover, both Rev 14 and Rom 1 directly link idolatry with immorality. In Rom 1:24-31, immorality and vices are the direct result of idolatry. In Revelation 14:8, the wine of the idolatry of Babylon is its immorality (τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας).⁸ These parallels suggest that Revelation 14 is dependent on Romans 1 for its language of judgment.

The unusually large number of occurrences of the term *wrath* (ὀργή) in Romans and Revelation are yet another indication of literary dependence. The term ὀργή occurs 36 times in the New Testament. Of these, 21 occurrences are in Paul, and the majority of them (12 times) are in Romans (1:18; 2:5 [2×], 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22 [2×]; 12:19; 13:4; 13:5). In other words, Paul speaks about the wrath of God more than any other New Testament writer, and fully one third of the occurrences of ὀργή are found

⁵ Aune, 827; see also Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 239-243.

⁶ For the purpose of this essay, the anarthrous state of εὐαγγέλιον is not critical because there are many other parallels besides this one (cf. Aune, 825). The missing article may simply be due to faulty Greek. Concerning the Greek of Revelation, C. F. D. Moule remarks: “the author of the Apocalypse, who writes like a person who, nurtured in a Semitic speech, is only just learning to write in Greek”; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1960), 3.

⁷ The term “anger (θυμός)” expressing God’s wrath (ὀργή) occurs in Rev 14:8, 10, 19, and it also occurs in the same sense in Rom 2:8.

⁸ Aune, 831: “τοῦ οἴνου, ‘wine,’ is a partitive genitive, τοῦ θυμοῦ, ‘passions,’ ‘appetite,’ is an appositive or exegetical genitive.” In other words, the wine is the passion (cf. 17:2).

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in Romans.⁹ Remarkably, Revelation has the next largest occurrence of the term in the NT—six times (6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:9; 19:15). If we add the verb ὀργίζομαι (to be angry), which does not occur in Paul, to the list (Rev 11:18; 12:17), then the total occurrences of “wrath” in Revelation come to eight. One asks: Is it possible that Paul’s gospel is the source of the language and concept of “the wrath of God” in Revelation? The answer is yes.

This is further evident from the way Rom 1 and Rev 14 use the term glory (δόξα; *doxa* henceforth). Both chapters use *doxa* to underscore the importance of renouncing idolatry and of recognizing God as the sole Creator of the world. Romans 1:21-23 condemns the human refusal to *give glory* to Creator God (οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν) and the resultant idolatry that exchanges the glory of God for images resembling creatures (ἤλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνοσ). Similarly, Revelation 14:7-10 calls upon humans to *give glory* to God (δοτε αὐτῷ δόξαν) and to avoid the image of the beast—in other words, to renounce idolatry. In Jewish monotheism, the worship of Creator God and the rejection of idolatry are, as it were, the two sides of the same coin, and it appears that Rev 14:7-10 is the obverse of Rom 1:18-23: Romans 1 denounces idolatry, and Revelation 14 extols the worship of Creator God. What needs to be noted here, however, is that *doxa* is a theological theme bearing Paul’s own unique stamp. As Robert W. Yarborough rightly notes, the noun δόξα occurs 77 times in Paul and figures very prominently in his theology.¹⁰

One particularly interesting occurrence of a Pauline term in Revelation is the word *mind* (νοῦς). Except for its one occurrence in Luke 24:45, the Greek word νοῦς (*nous* henceforth) occurs in the NT only in Paul and

⁹ Not all the occurrences of ὀργή (*wrath*) in Paul refer to the wrath of God (Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Tim 2:8). Although Rom 12:19; 13:4; 13:5 do not directly refer to the wrath of God, one cannot preclude this possibility. Even when one removes these six occurrences from the count, Paul is still the most frequent user of ὀργή in relation to divine judgment.

¹⁰ Robert W. Yarborough, “Paul and Salvation History,” *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 322-324; Yarborough also notes that glory is a neglected theme in Pauline scholarship. Jacob Jervell’s definition according to which the glory of God in Paul refers only to the divine image in humans is too narrow; see Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei. Gen 1, 26 f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den Paulinischen Briefen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 320, 325.

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Revelation. It occurs a whopping 21 times in Paul (Rom 1:28; 7:23, 25. 11:34; 12:2; 14:5; 1 Cor 1:10; 2:16 [2×]; 14:14, 15 [2×], 19; Eph 4:17, 23; Phil 4:7; Col 2:8; 2 Thes 2:2; 1 Tim 6:5; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:15), and twice in Revelation (13:18; 17:9). In Paul, *nous* or *the mind* is a human faculty that enables one to discern the will of God morally and in the events taking place in history.¹¹ Thus Rom 12:2 states, “be transformed by the renewal of your *mind* (μεταμορφουῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαλινώσει τοῦ νοός), that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The *nous* is also the faculty that enables a person to acknowledge and worship Creator God. The reason for idolatry is that idolaters have a degenerate *nous*. Paul states in Rom 1:28: “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base *mind* (παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν) and to improper conduct.” Interestingly, the two occurrences of *nous* in Revelation bear more than a passing resemblance to these uses of *nous* in Paul. Revelation 13:18 states: “This calls for wisdom: let him who has a *mind* (ὁ ἔχων νοῦν) count the number of the beast” (my translation). And again, Rev 17:9 states: “This calls for a *mind* with wisdom (ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν)” (RSV). The word *nous* or *mind* in these two passages denotes a renewed human faculty that enables one to discern the identity of the beast and its immoral and impious schemes. *Mutatis mutandis*, this means possessing a renewed *mind* is essential to faith because it enables one to recognize the true worship of Creator God and to avoid idolatry. This unusual term (at least for the NT) appearing in Paul and Revelation in approximately the same sense and context clearly suggests intertextuality.¹²

In this context, it is difficult to miss the clear Pauline echo in Rev 14:12: “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ).” This phrase “the *faith of Jesus* (τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ)” is nearly identical to the phrase “the *faith of Jesus Christ* (πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ)” in Gal 2:16 and certainly echoes the verbal phrase “we have believed in Christ Jesus (ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν).” The ambiguity, however,

¹¹J. Behm, νοῦς, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, et. al., trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 958-960.

¹²Aune, 769, thinks that Rev 13:18 and 17:9 allude to Dan 12:10. It is possible that with the term *mind* the author of Revelation is trying to index the apocalyptic framework of Paul’s gospel.

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that beclouds the Pauline phrase—whether it is an objective or a subjective genitive—also beclouds John’s.¹³ This discussion, however, lies outside the scope of this essay. For our purpose, it suffices to say merely two things: (1) in Rev 14:12, the quintessential Pauline phrase “the faith of Jesus” appears together with the phrase “the commandments of God” as a direct object of the verb τηρεῖν (to keep); and (2) this unique and vague phrase appears nowhere else in the NT except in Paul and Rev 14:12. By using the phrase as the direct object of the verb *to keep* in conjunction with “the law of God,” Rev 14:12 appears to treat *the faith of Jesus*, like the law, as something to keep and to fulfill.¹⁴ A similar usage of faith is found in 2 Tim 4:7 (“I have kept the faith [τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα]).

These parallels seem to indicate that Revelation 14 is intentionally trying to engage Rom 1 in order to make a statement about Paul’s gospel. In Rev 14:6-12, the gospel has three basic characteristics: (1) divine judgment forms an integral part of the gospel (vv. 6b-7a); (2) the proper

¹³ For bibliography and summaries of positions taken on the issue, see Sigve Tonstad, “Πιστις Χριστοῦ: Reading Paul in a New Paradigm,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 40 (2002): 37-47. Tonstad argues for the subjective genitive on grounds that (1) Rom 3:21-26 represents an accurate reading of Hab 2:3-4, and (2) like Habakkuk’s concern, Paul’s concern in Rom 3:21-26 is theodicy (pp. 47-59). Tonstad’s thesis that the nature of Jesus’ faithfulness was “the ultimate rebuttal of the satanic misrepresentation” of God (p. 59) may perhaps be true for Revelation, but has little exegetical basis in Paul. Satan does not play a prominent role in Paul. See also Bruce W. Longenecker, “Defining the Faithful Character of the Covenant Community: Galatians 2:15-21 and Beyond,” in James D. G. Dunn, ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 75-97. For Tonstad’s detailed study of the phrase *the faith of Jesus* in the context of Revelation and theodicy, see *idem*, “Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of *Pistis Iesou* in the Cosmic Narrative of Revelation,” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 2004), 250-292. In the dissertation, Tonstad updates the bibliography and softens his views about the Pauline *pistis christou* (pp. 278-284). The objective-genitive reading will be adopted for both Revelation and Paul in this essay; when the term *faith* is used in this essay, it refers to the faith of the believer. It should be noted that Tonstad himself does not oppose this usage of the word *faith* (cf. pp. 288-289).

¹⁴ Tonstad’s argument that τηρεῖν means “to preserve” or “have” in Rev 14:12 seems forced; cf. *idem*, “God’s Reputation,” 250-278. The verb τηρεῖν is used in this sense mostly with personal objects; see Harald Riesenfeld, τηρεῖν, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, et. al., trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 142-146. When used with the law, it means keep or fulfill (*ibid.*, 143-145). I, however, accept the cosmic background of Paul’s concept of faith on grounds that Paul’s theology is largely apocalyptic in orientation. See Johan Christiaan Bekker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

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response to the proclamation of the gospel is fearing God and giving glory to him as the Creator of the world (v. 7b, 9-11);¹⁵ and (3) the law has an active role alongside faith in the life of a Christian (v. 12). The question is whether these notions are consistent with Paul's concept of the gospel, particularly as articulated in Romans. To determine this, I will examine Rom 2 in detail, below. I chose Rom 2 for two reasons. First, Rom 2 is the only extensive discussion on law and judgment in the entire Pauline corpus. Second, Rom 1-2 appears to form a single unit held together by the themes of divine impartiality¹⁶ and the wrath of God.¹⁷ As a continuation of ch. 1, Rom 2 offers an ideal setting from which to clarify the relations between Rom 1 and Rev 14.

Paul's Concept of Law and Judgment in Rom 2:1-29

In his article "The Law in Romans 2," which appears in James D. G. Dunn's *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, N. T. Wright calls Rom 2 "the Achilles heel of schemes on Paul and the law."¹⁸ Professor Wright states:

One commentary after another has set out the scheme, according to which the chapters [1-8] deal with human sin (1-3), the divine remedy in Christ, and justification by faith (3-4), and, one way or another, the new life the Christian enjoys (5-8). The epistle thus far, in other words, is imagined to follow and expound some sort of *ordo salutis*. Within this Romans 2

¹⁵ Aune, 827, rightly states concerning the response called for in 14:7a: "This is not the gospel of early Christianity but the message proclaimed by Hellenistic Judaism and taken over by early Christianity, reflections of which are found in the NT." It is therefore imperative to try to determine whether, or how far, Paul deviates from early Judaism. Tonstad, "God's Reputation," rightly places Rev 14:12 in a cosmic context. Rev 14:7b prescribes the church's proper response to the gospel in apocalyptic terms. It does not seem warranted, however, that there needs to be a sharp dichotomy between soteriology and theodicy, as Tonstad makes out (279-280).

¹⁶ Jouette M. Bassler, *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1982). On pp. 123-137, she gives five reasons why Rom 1:16-2:11 is a unit. (1) The language is similar throughout 1:18-2:11. (2) Almost all ancient Greek codices that have chapter divisions place a chapter division after 2:11. (3) Romans 2:6-11 has been carefully structured to reflect the measure-for-measure justice outlined in 1:22-32. (4) The formula "to the Jew first and also the Greek" found in 1:16 is repeated in 2:10 as a unit marker. (5) The wording of 2:9-10 closely resembles that of 1:18.

¹⁷ Jervell, 328.

¹⁸ N. T. Wright, "The Law in Romans 2" in James D. G. Dunn, ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001).

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has no business to be speaking either of how one is justified or of the results of justification.¹⁹

Needless to say, the law is not a salient feature of this *ordo salutis*. A believer moves from a life of sin to the remedy found in Christ through justification by faith, and the law does not have a significant role in the new life of a Christian. Romans 2 differs with this simplistic understanding of salvation.

The context of Rom 2 is the final judgment. In Rom 2:5, Paul warns his imaginary interlocutor who judges others that they are storing up wrath “against the day of wrath (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὀργῆς) and revelation of the righteous judgment (καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως δικαιοκρισίας)” (KJV). These direct references to the future judgment—namely “the wrath of God” and “the righteous judgment”—establish the futuristic orientation of Rom 2.²⁰ The same futuristic orientation is also evident in v. 12: “All who have sinned without the law *will also perish* (ἀπολοῦνται) without the law, and all who have sinned under the law *will be judged* (κριθήσονται) by the law” (v. 12; RSV). The future tense verbs—“will perish” and “will be judged”—unmistakably allude to the future “general” judgment.²¹ In this light, the categorical statement in v. 13 is also a reference to the final judgment:²² “It is. . . the doers of the law who *will be justified* (δικαιωθήσονται).” Verse 16 also makes an allusion to the final judgment:²³ “in the *day* when God will judge (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὅτε κρίνει ὁ θεός)” (NKJV; italics mine).

¹⁹ Ibid., 131.

²⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary, vols. 38a-b (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1988), 1:82.

²¹ Wright, “Romans 2,” 143-1; Bassler, 140. “Paul . . . focuses . . . on the impartiality that is ultimately effective at the final judgment.”

²² Dunn rightly notes the “eschatological dimension” of the future tense “will be justified”: Dunn, *Romans*, 97. See also Wright, “Romans 2,” 143. However, the notion in 2:13 that the *law* is the norm of the final judgment is unusual. Paul generally connects the condemnatory work of the law with Israel’s past and present predicaments rather than with the future universal judgment (cf. 2 Cor 3:7, 13-15; Rom 5:13-14, 20-21; Gal 3:10, 19, 23-24.)

²³ Dellling, “ἡμέρα,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, et. al., trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 952; Bassler, 147.

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In this context, Paul introduces the word *law* in 2:12, for the first time in Romans. He then uses it in rapid succession to the end of ch. 2 (vv. 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27) and continues to mention it in every chapter of Romans, all the way to ch. 13. The reason for this rather dramatic introduction and ensuing rapid-fire mention of the law in Rom 2 appears to be to establish a definition of the law for the rest of the letter. According to Rom 2, the law is the sole criterion of judgment in the final judgment, whose demand is for moral and ethical performance.²⁴ Yet this definition is not free of exegetical problems. For example, Paul's statement in 3:20 "that no human being will be justified (*δικαιωθήσεται*) . . . by works of the law" apparently contradicts 2:13 (that "the doers of the law . . . will be justified"). Another problem is 2:12, which states: "all who have sinned *without the law* will . . . perish *without the law*" (2:12). According to this verse, it appears that the law will not be allowed to serve as a criterion of judgment for those who did not have the law. Thus Wright states, wrongly, that "the law sets the standard by which Israel will be judged; Gentiles will be judged without reference to it."²⁵ Furthermore, according to 2:16, the standard of judgment is not the performance of the law but the gospel ("God shall judge . . . according to my gospel" [KJV]). In other words, the depiction of the final judgment in Rom 2, which has the law at its center, apparently collides with the rest of Romans, which depicts the centrality of Christ and the joy of acquittal and freedom that results from justification by faith. Wright describes the problem this way:

In Romans, as elsewhere in Paul, it is present justification, not future, that is closely correlated with faith. Future justification, acquittal at the last great Assize, always takes place on the basis of the totality of the life lived (e.g. Romans 14:11f; 2 Cor 5:10). *It is because the relation between the two has by no means always been understood . . . that exegetes have glossed uneasily over this passage [2:12-16], and have flattened it into a general treatment of the sinfulness of all humans beings*" (italics mine).²⁶

²⁴ Bassler, 141, rightly states: "Verse 13 established performance, not possession, as the decisive factor." 2 Corinthians 5:10 mentions the same criterion for the final judgment: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has *done* in the body." See Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 260-270.

²⁵ Wright, "Romans 2," 149.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 144. See also, Yinger, 6-16.

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One wonders, however, whether Romans 2:14-15 and 2:26-29, rather than being the source of the problem, might not be the key to the solution. These verses, particularly 2:14-15, contain detailed descriptions of how Gentiles keep the law (ἡ ἀκροβυστία τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσσει). If these Gentiles are Christians, then we may be half way to the solution because we would know from these verses how, according to Paul's thinking, believing Gentiles experience the dynamic of faith, law, and judgment in their lives. And on the basis of an analysis of this passage, we could derive an understanding about the relation between judgment by works and justification by faith. In fact, this is what I propose we do. But there is a problem. Scholarship is sharply divided about the identity of the Gentiles in these verses, whether they are pagan or Christian. Jouette Bassler and N. T. Wright have addressed this thorny question from opposite sides of the debate with greater creativity and thoroughness than anyone else has in the field in recent years. In my view, Wright, who argues that these verses refer to Gentile Christians, has the better argument. This actually represents a change of mind on my part because I began reading Wright's article with the opposite conviction. I will summarize Wright's arguments here,²⁷ not only because they represent my present position but

²⁷ For references and details, see Wright, "Romans 2," 134-139, 144-145. Bassler, 141-143, provides an excellent summary of both positions. In favor of the view that the Gentiles are not Christians, Bassler lists the following six arguments: (1) The phrase "not having the law (τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα)" in v. 14 cannot apply to Christians since, in the ultimate sense, Paul argues that Christians keep the law. (2) Ἕλληνας (Greeks) in 2:10 does not refer to Christians, and, consequently, cannot refer to the same body of people as ἔθνη (Gentiles) in 2:14. (3) φύσει (by nature) in 2:14 goes with the phrase that immediately follows and refers to the experience of the non-Christians. (4) The terminology of nature, law, and conscience belong to "the Greek concept of natural law." (5) A similar notion of natural law existed in Judaism, and, as such, φύσει does not specifically refer to Christian experience. (6) The theme of impartiality running through chapters 1 and 2 will be severely compromised if the Gentiles in 2:14-15 are read as Christians. This last argument seems a bit circular to me since her thesis is that Rom 1-2 center on the theme of divine impartiality. For a more succinct summary of the views and refutations, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 155-156. Commentators generally avoid detailed discussion of the issue. For example, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993). Fitzmyer, who rejects the "Gentile Christian" argument, presents basically only two arguments: (1) the context does not make

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because they for the most part constitute fresh evidence. Wright begins with 2:26-29.²⁸ (1) The language of Rom 2:29 (“real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal”) closely resembles that of Rom 7:6, 2 Cor 3:16, and Phil 3:3. These passages all contrast spirit and letter, or circumcision and spirit, to describe the Christian experience of the new life. Rom 2:29 should not be an exception. (2) The mention of the spirit in 2:29 uses the new covenant language of Ezek 36:24. Paul’s intention in 2:29 is to describe a complete transformation of the heart. (3) The term “reckon (λογισθήσεται)” refers to justification by faith because this is how the word is used throughout Romans. (4) Romans 2:25-26 is an interjection that anticipates a much fuller discussion that will appear later in the letter. Interjections of this type abound in Romans.

Then Wright offers six more weighty arguments in connection with 2:14-15.²⁹ The first three of these arguments concern the term φύσει (by nature), which is at the center of the debate. (1) φύσει in 2:14 modifies the preceding phrase “the Gentiles who have not the law (ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα).” The resultant phrase “the Gentiles who have not the law by nature” would then be referring to “those outside the covenant.” This however, still does not alleviate the problem that ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει still sounds awkward. (2) Wright points to τὸν ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει in Rom 14:1 (“as for the man who is weak in faith”) as evidence of how Paul is capable of placing a dative noun after the participle it modifies. Wright grants that ἔθνη φύσει τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα would have been more natural sounding. (3) If φύσει refers to the coincidental and occasional performance of the law by pagan Gentiles, then 2:14-15 would be only an aside inserted into the overall argument of Rom 2. But there is no clear indication in the text that Paul intends 2:14-15 as a mere

clear that Gentile Christians are meant here; and (2) φύσει (by nature) goes with the phrase that immediately follows (“do the things in the law”; NKJV). Dunn, *Romans*, 98, likewise also appeals to the less than clear notion of the “widespread sense of rightness and wrongness of certain conduct.” On the question of φύσει, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 45. Achtemeier argues that to take φύσει the way, for example, Fitzmyer suggests would make Jews inferior to Gentiles because the Jewish sense of rightness required a revelation. Commentators unfortunately overlook Achtemeier’s point.

²⁸ Wright, “Romans 2,” 134-139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 144-146.

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aside. (4) The phrase “the law written on their hearts (τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν)” is an allusion to Jeremiah 31:33. There is no satisfactory explanation why Paul should have chosen Jeremiah’s new covenant language to describe pagan Gentiles. (5) If 2:14 (“when Gentiles who have not the law”) is a continuation of the thought in v. 13 (“the doers of the law will be justified”), then it would mean that, unlike the Jews, the pagan Gentiles will be justified in the final judgment for their occasional and coincidental performance of some aspects of the law. This would be unfair. (6) If the Gentiles mentioned in 2:12-14 refer to pagan Gentiles, then the idea in v. 15 that the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts would be nonsense since these Gentiles will be destroyed anyway, without the law (v. 12; ἀνόμως καὶ ἀπολοῦνται).

Even after these arguments, difficulties and ambiguities remain, but no one has yet mounted equally compelling, fresh arguments to counter Wright’s evidence, and it is not possible to wait until every difficulty has been removed to begin working on a text. We will proceed on the assumption that the Gentiles in Rom 2:14-16 and 2:26-29 are Christian. According to v. 14, these Gentile Christians are able to perform what the law requires (τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν), and they are a law to themselves (οὗτοι . . . ἑαυτοῖς εἰσιν νόμος). How can this be? The new covenant motif in v. 15 explains the phenomena. These Gentile Christians are able to keep the law because “what the law requires is written on their hearts (ὃ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν).” And this eschatological experience takes place through a believer’s inner activity (τῆς συνειδήσεως) consisting of accusations and excuses made in response to the conflicting thoughts that arise in their consciences (μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων).³⁰ According to v.16, this decision-making process takes place in the secrecy of the heart

³⁰ See Bassler, 147. She notes that the words *συμμαρτυρούσης*, *κατηγορούντων*, and *ἀπολογουμένων* are legal terminologies. Mainly on the strength of this observation and on the basis the problematic nature of *ἐν ἡμέρᾳ* (as to which verb it goes with), she argues that the accusations and the excuses refer to the activities of the conscience that will appear as eschatological witnesses. Bassler, however, fails to consider the force of the present participle *συμμαρτυρούσης* that connects to the main verb *ἐνδείκνυται*, which is also in the present tense. On p. 149, she states that *ἐνδείκνυται* refers to “an ongoing present activity.” If this is true, then the activities denoted by *συμμαρτυρούσης*, *κατηγορούντων*, and *ἀπολογουμένων* also have to refer to “an ongoing present activity,” because a present participle generally denotes an action that coincides in time with the action of the main verb.

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(τὰ κρυπτὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων) while bearing in mind the final judgment (cf. ἐν ἡμέρᾳ).³¹ If the protasis of 2:26a (“if [ἐάν] a man who is uncircumcised keeps [φυλάσσει] the precepts of the law”³²) is a recap of these inner processes described in 2:14-16, then we have in this passage an unusually graphic description of the mechanics through which a Christian experiences and fulfills the new covenant in their lives. In other words, 2:14-16 is a description of faith experienced in relation to law and judgment. Before getting too far, however, we need to ask whether these ideas are consistent with Paul’s statements in the rest of Romans.

Law, Judgment, and Faith

According to Paul, one of the functions of the law is to cause humans to experience condemnation *before God*. Romans 3:19-20 clarifies this function of the law.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable *to God* (τῷ θεῷ). For no human being will be justified *in his sight* (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ) by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (3:19-20).

The problem of the Jews was not that they possessed the law or that they tried to keep it.³³ Rather, their problem was that the way they kept the law and reasoned about it prevented them from recognizing that they were in fact breaking the law and at the same time failing to experience the terror of God’s impartial judgment. When Paul makes statements like “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (3:20) or “the law came in to increase the trespass” (Rom 5:20), his intent is not to demean the law. His point, rather, is that, if the law had been allowed to function as originally intended by

³¹ I am taking ἐν to mean “in the presence of.” See under I, 3 in “ἐν,” BAG, 258. I am taking “the day” here in a personal rather than temporal sense (more below).

³² This protasis indicates *reality*: the Gentile Christians *are* indeed keeping the law. To use C. F. D. Moule’s language, the protasis of Rom 2:26 denotes a “recurrent or future condition, real”; see Moule, 148.

³³ Contra R. Bultmann. According to Bultmann, the effort to keep the law is in itself already sinful because it leads to boasting; Ruldolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Complete in One Volume*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, vol. 1 (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 264.

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God, it would have given the people the τῶ θεῶ (*before-God*)³⁴ experience described in 3:19-20, and this experience would have removed boasting from them, leaving them condemned before God without excuse (cf. 1:20; εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολογήτους). Therefore, Paul’s aim in Rom 1-3 is to explain the law in such a way that it is allowed to fulfill its intended function, which is to bring sinners before God, face to face, to receive condemnation. In this light, it is noteworthy how Paul creates an *inclusio* in 3:11 and 3:18 with quotations that define sin as a failure to seek God’s presence. In v. 11, he quotes from Ps 14: “no one understands, no one seeks for God.” This quotation would no doubt have caused an informed reader to recall the opening words of Ps 14: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (v. 1). A similar quote closes the catena of scriptural quotations that follow the opening charge: “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:18). The refusal to acknowledge God as God is the essence of sin. And it is in just such terms that Paul portrays human sinfulness in Rom 1-3. The pagan, the judgmental person in 2:1-11 (whoever they are), and the Jew—they all have in common their desire to depart from the presence of God and give glory to themselves. Therefore, a sinner can fulfill the law only by fulfilling its original intention, which is to stand *before God* (τῶ θεῶ) and face judgment.

Remarkably, Paul uses the same τῶ θεῶ language to describe faith. According to Rom 4:2, Abraham had nothing to boast about *before God* (οὐ πρὸς θεόν). Instead, he was justified because he had faith *in the presence God* (ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραάμ τῶ θεῶ; v. 3). Paul repeats the same point in v. 17: “God, *in whose presence* he believed (κατέναντι οὗ ἐπίστευσεν θεοῦ; my translation),” and in v. 20: “he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory *to God* (δοὺς δόξαν τῶ θεῶ).” Clearly, Abraham’s faith—the yardstick by which we are to measure our own—is consistently described in Rom 4 as a τῶ θεῶ experience—an experience of existing *in the presence of God*. In other words, faith and law have essentially the same spiritual structure. They both demand that we exist *before God the Creator*, whose judgment knows no partiality. Romans 6:11 states: “You also must consider yourselves dead to sin (τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) and alive *to God* (τῶ θεῶ) in Christ Jesus.” Here Paul uses the word *sin* in the same personal sense as

³⁴ I will use the Greek expression τῶ θεῶ in the rest of the paper because the English phrase *before God* fails to capture its full meaning.

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God. This is even clearer in v. 13: “Do not yield your members *to sin* (τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves *to God* (τῷ θεῷ).” As indicated by the precise juxtaposition of *to sin* and *to God* in these verses, the opposite of the presence of God is the presence of sin whose wicked whims control human existence. Faith³⁵ denotes the life of one who has been judged before the Judgment Seat of an impartial God and set free from the grips of sin to enjoy life in God’s presence. The τῷ θεῷ language appears again in 7:4: “we may bear fruit *to God* (καρποφορήσωμεν τῷ θεῷ).” This time, however, the contrast is between τῷ θεῷ and τῷ νόμῳ (the law): “you have died *to the law* (ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νόμῳ).” Then 7:6 further contrasts τῷ θεῷ with τῷ θανάτῳ (death): “our [bodily] members . . . bear fruit *for death* (εἰς τὸ καρποφορήσαι τῷ θανάτῳ).” The existence away from the presence of God described in Rom 6 and 7 may be given in a chart as follows. (I use the phrase “in the presence” to denote a general sense of environment or setting.)

6:10-11	In the presence of sin (τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ)
7:4	In the presence of the law (τῷ νόμῳ)
7:5	In the presence of death (τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ)

These depictions of sinful existence closely resemble the depictions of sin and human rebellion in chs 1-3. In chs. 6-7, the τῷ θεῷ language, used opposite the three modes of existence under sin, defines faith as a life lived *before God*.

In Rom 14, Paul again takes up the τῷ θεῷ language, as it were, in a grand finale. Paul declares in v. 6: “a person who eats *before the Lord* (κυρίῳ ἐσθίει), for they offer thanks *to God* (εὐχαριστεῖ γὰρ τῷ θεῷ; my translation).” The anarthrous κύριος (Lord) in this verse appears to reflect the translation of the tetragrammaton YHWH in the LXX.³⁶ Similar usages of the τῷ θεῷ language occur throughout the chapter (vv. 7, 8, 11, 10, 12), evoking the OT phrase יהוה לפני (before the Lord; cf. v. 11). In the

³⁵ Romans 6:8 explains the resurrection experience of a baptized person in confessional terms (πιστεύομεν ὅτι καὶ συζήσομεν αὐτῷ). Confession implies faith.

³⁶ Cf. Gottfried Quell, κύριος, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, et. al., trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 1058-1062.

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OT, the expression לפני יהוה (*before the Lord*) is used to designate the entirety of life lived before God, privately, collectively, and cultically.³⁷ Likewise, for Paul, living by faith means that we exist לפני יהוה, whether we eat, drink, or rest. The judgment language of Rom 14:10-12 highlights this meaning of faith: “we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (v. 10) and “each of us shall give account of himself [to God] (τω θεω; v. 12).”³⁸ These descriptions of faith as a life under judgment are remarkably similar to those that describe the life under the law. What is Paul’s point? Faith and law basically operate under the same spiritual principle in the life of a believer.³⁹ Both faith and law cause people to live and die *lipnê yhwh*, *before the Lord*. The prospect of judgment continues for those who live by faith, as for those who are under the law, not only as a future event but as a reality to be reckoned with on a daily, if not hourly, basis. The difference is that, acquitted, the people of faith boldly approach the throne of grace (cf. 5:1-2; τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν [τῇ πίστει] εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην). Jouette Bassler rightly notes: “The impartiality of the new dispensation of grace, which is open to all without distinction, is consistent with, even grounded in, the impartiality in judgment.”⁴⁰ The present tense verbs in 14:8 denote this on-going reality of divine judgment and acquittal in the life of a believer (τω κυρίω ζῶμεν . . . τω κυρίω ἀποθνήσκομεν). This understanding of faith seems to echo the Psalms that express an ardent desire to behold the face of God (cf. Ps 24:6; 27:8). In Rom 14:22-23, Paul ends the chapter on the note of faith, with a significant undertone of the τω θεω language. He writes: “Hast thou faith (σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις)? have *it* to thyself *before God* (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ)” (v. 22; KJV). This statement as

³⁷ H. Simian-Yofre, פני, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, et al., trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 610-611. See also Mervyn D. Fowler, “The Meaning of *lipnê YHWH* in the Old Testament,” *Zeitschrift des Alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft* 99 (1987): 384-390, who states that *lipnê YHWH* is used in the OT to “express the direct and personal communication between God and man” (p. 390) in addition to its usual local and cultic usage.

³⁸ Although the phrase “to God” in v. 12 is omitted in some manuscripts, major uncials include it, but even without it, the phrase “give account” implies judgment.

³⁹ Revelation 14:12 perhaps intends to make this point by designating both the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus as the direct objects of the verb *to keep* (οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ)—a verb that has a connotation of obedience; against Aune, 837.

⁴⁰ Bassler, 156.

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it were sums up the τῷ θεῷ principle of faith repeatedly outlined in chs 4, 6 and 7. There are only two ways to live a life, in the presence of God or away from it. Paul writes: “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (πάν ὃ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν)” (v. 23; RSV). Faith means a life intentionally lived in the presence of God. Conversely, the opposite of faith is forgetfulness that keeps the fear of God’s judgment out of one’s life and consciousness.

Therefore, I submit that the proper response to the gospel given in Rev 14:7 is a rather accurate summary of Paul’s understanding of faith expressed in Romans: Living by faith means: (a) to fear God and give glory to him who is an impartial Judge of all humankind⁴¹ and (b) to worship God, who is Creator of the world.

Objections and Conclusion

There will obviously be objections to and questions about my interpretation of Romans. Due to space, I will only deal with four of the objections, which are: (1) my concept of judgment is too individualistic; (2) my reading of Romans is too dependent on N. T. Wright’s argument according to which Rom 2:14-16 and 2:26-29 refer to Gentile Christians; (3) my reading will foster petty legalism and self-centered introspection; and (4) my reading takes away from the centrality of Christ and turns faith into human performance. I will take up these objections one at a time.

First, any discussion about judgment implies a cosmic, apocalyptic, and prophetic perspective that addresses issues like theodicy and justice. I do not wish to deny this. My intent in this essay has been simply to show that Paul’s concept of faith exists in inseparable relation to judgment, however one defines it.

Second, my reading of Romans is not as dependent on N. T. Wright’s argument as it might appear. The original draft of this essay was actually written on the premise that the Gentiles referred to in Rom 2 are primarily pagans. My original argument was that Paul is intentionally vague in Rom 2 in order to make clear that everyone—Jews, pagan Gentiles, and Christian Gentiles—will all face God’s impartial judgment on the basis of performance. In addition, the debate about the identity of the Gentiles in Rom 2 does not materially affect my more important argument that Paul

⁴¹ Aune, 827, rightly notes: “The phrase ‘the fear of God’ or ‘the fear of the Lord’ is often used in a way synonymous with true faith (Ps 34:11).”

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explains the experience of faith in relation to judgment and in terms that approximate the experience of the law.

Third, while it is true that my exposition of the gospel fosters introspection, it does not necessarily lead to petty legalism or self-centeredness. The “before-God” character of faith preempts the possibility of legalism in that no one needs to answer to anyone else, except to God, whether one has kept the law. Legalism is a product of judgmentalism that causes people to measure themselves against each other. Being no respecter of persons, God will judge everyone based on *his* standards.

As for introspection, for many, faith means saying goodbye to the feelings of uncertainty as something characterizing the existence under the law. Faith means an assurance of salvation free from all doubts. Paul would agree that faith does not breed doubts, but he would not agree that faith frees you from having to look inside yourself and at God’s judgment in trying to determine whether your *actions* are just, whether they accord with the will of God. This is clear from Rom 14:22-23, even if we leave Rom 2:14-16 out of the discussion. Paul writes: “Happy is he who has no reason to *judge himself for what he approves* (ὁ μὴ κρίνων ἑαυτὸν ἐν ᾧ δοκιμάζει). But he who has doubts is condemned” (Rom 14:22b-23a). According to this passage, a believer engages in private and personal judiciary activities that result in either approval or disapproval of their own actions.⁴² The experiences of inner conflict arising from these activities and the joyful experience of the gospel are necessarily coterminous. Faith that causes people to live *before God* also allows them to enjoy the power of personal agency to make even difficult ethical decisions by themselves. This is the new covenant. The notion that faith offers an assurance that precludes the fear of judgment and accountability is a gospel unknown to Paul.

In this light, Krister Stendahl’s charge that the notion of introspective conscience was introduced to Western Christianity by Augustine and Martin Luther needs a fresh examination.⁴³ Due to the scope of this paper, only a few brief comments are possible. Stendahl is probably right in his

⁴² Bassler, 163. These descriptions closely resemble the experience of the Gentiles in Rom 2:15.

⁴³ Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199-215, reprinted in Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78-96. The page numbers given in this essay correspond to those in *Paul among Jews*.

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observation that Paul had “a rather ‘robust’ conscience.”⁴⁴ At the same time, a robust conscience does not preclude introspection. The various Greek schools of philosophy were nothing if they were not about introspection. They were deeply involved in what Stanley Stowers calls “the technology of the self” through which they tried to carefully map out the inner workings of the human mind and body to foster self-improvement and perfection.⁴⁵ Stendahl is himself unduly influenced by Augustine and Luther when he equates introspection with a “troubled conscience.”⁴⁶ As we saw, for Paul, introspection is synonymous with the personal agency and accountability of the individual⁴⁷ expressing inwardness and freedom enjoyed under the new covenant.

Finally, my understanding of the gospel does not need to undermine the centrality of Christ. The law plays a hermeneutical role (by no means the only one it plays). One cannot understand the true meaning of faith without the belief that the law is the norm of judgment. Almost every mention of faith in Paul presupposes an understanding of law and judgment. Judgment by law based on performance is the default procedure by which one is

⁴⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁵ Stanley K. Stowers, “Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy?,” in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 81-102.

⁴⁶ Stendahl, 81, 84. Stendahl himself resorts to guilt when speaking on social and political issues: “how insignificant it is to the world that one little person repents, because his actions move on. And if that is true about such trivial things as pornography, how gruesomely true it is about our collective acts, our responsibilities as a nation and as human beings dirtying up this earth morally and ecologically. If the consequences last, is it really important that the individual or even the people repent? Yes, it is for them, for God, and perhaps for the future. *But the guilt lies heavy*” (pp. 104-105). What Stendahl despises is theological guilt, which for him is a mere “soul game.” His willingness to impose guilt on people for their bad social and political conduct simply means that, for him, sin as a theological category no longer functions as part of his reality. It is a mistake, however, to think that sin was not a stark reality for Paul. Paul writes: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith (Ἐαυτοὺς πειράζετε εἰ ἐστὲ ἐν τῇ πίστει). Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (2 Cor 13:5). If Paul felt no need of introspection for himself, he certainly did not hesitate to impose it on his Gentile congregations, albeit collectively.

⁴⁷ Yinger, 287, rightly notes: “Though collective aspects are not eliminated, it is particularly *individual* accountability which is now stressed most strongly” (italics original).

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declared righteous. Justification by faith is an exception made to this rule—an eschatological surprise.⁴⁸ The Cross graciously opened up the unexpected *kairos* of the opportunity for salvation (cf. 2 Cor 6:2; ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμέρα σωτηρίας). We cannot fully appreciate this unexpected nature of grace without the default of judgment by law.

Furthermore, the Pauline gospel does not preempt the need for human performance. A new covenant experience that excludes ethical responsibility is an oxymoron. N. T. Wright bifurcates when he states in the same breath that the keeping of the law is “in tune with Ezekiel 36” and that “it is a matter . . . [not] of ethics, but of status.”⁴⁹ As a new covenant experience, the gospel represents the higher expectation of righteousness articulated in the Sermon on the Mount and Paul’s own paraenesis. If the letters of Paul are any indication of his gospel, then we must say that the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6-16, offers a survey of the ways in which scholars have tried to explain the relation between justification by faith and judgment by works. To summarize Yinger: (1) As a vestigial remain of Jewish theology, Judgment by works cannot be reconciled with Paul’s theology of grace even though Paul often places the two side by side (Gillis Wetter). (2) Judgment by works is a subcategory of justification by faith; justification by faith guarantees the favorable verdict at the final judgment (Herbert Braun). (3) As polemic doctrines, judgment by works is aimed at the proud and justification by faith, at the legalists (Nigel Watson). (4) Paul wrote occasional letters, so there is no need to figure out the relation between judgment by works and justification by faith. Judgment should be considered by itself in the context of Paul’s Jewish eschatology and the present reprieve from its wrath that the believers enjoy (Calvin Roetzel). (5) Paul uses judgment by work only for a heuristic purpose (Ernst Synofzik). (6) Judgment by works deals with reward and justification by faith deals with salvation; judgment has no effect on salvation (D. E. Köhl). (7) Justification by faith is a free gift of salvation, but the extent to which the salvation can be claimed will be determined at the final judgment (Richard Devor). (8) There will be two judgments, one based on faith to separate the justified Christian from the rest and another one based on works to determine the reward of the justified (Luise Mattern). (9) Justification by faith allows the believer to live a sinless life, giving them confidence to face judgment (Floyd Filson). Yinger’s own position is that judgment by works *confirms* justification by faith (p. 290). My present view comes closest to Devor’s: justification by faith is an exception made to the default of judgment by works, but I hasten to add that the new covenant experience inaugurated and sustained in one’s life through justification by faith prepares one for the final judgment, which will be based on performance. Justification by faith, per se, does not guarantee salvation (cf. 1 Cor 9:27; “but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified”).

⁴⁹ Wright, “Romans 2,” 139; but see his affirmation on p. 137. My problem with Wright is not with his brilliant new covenant reading of Rom 2 but his attempts to limit the new covenant reality to status.

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gospel is just as much a demand for ethical purity and accountability as it is a proclamation of grace. To be judged according to the gospel (Rom 2:16) means to be judged according to the new covenant that promises and expects the law to be written on our hearts. In Rom 8:3-4, Paul states that, through Christ's death, the law is fulfilled in us (τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῆ ἐν ἡμῖν). In 13:8, Paul states that love fulfills the law (πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη). The two foci of accountability *before God* under the law—the fear of God's judgment and the worship of the Creator God—remain unchanged under faith. Certainly, salvation is by faith, but the fulfillment of the law is not optional for Christians; the business of being a Christian is about fulfilling the moral and ethical demands of the law before God and before our fellow humans.

In conclusion, then, the apocalyptic delineations of the gospel found in Rev 14:6-12 are consistent with Paul's concept of the gospel in Romans. And it appears that the third angel's message is indeed the message of righteousness by faith in verity.

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