

Justification in the Gospels

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There are a number of ways that the subject of justification in the Gospels could be approached. On the one hand, the discussion could be very brief since the word justification (δικαίωσις) never occurs in the Gospels and only twice in the rest of the New Testament (Rom 4:25; 5:18), a fact belying its great importance to Christian theology. On the other hand, the *concept* of justification, based not only on the verb δικαίω and other cognates¹ but also on similar terms,² is found comparatively frequently in the Gospels and is no less important. Another approach would be to look at various stories of people illustrative of the concept in some way, such as the paralytic (“Your sins are forgiven,” Mark 2:5), Zacchaeus (“Today salvation has come to this house,” Luke 19:9), and the woman caught in adultery (“Neither do I condemn you. . .,” John 8:11).³ Parables illustrative

¹ A total of 52 occurrences: δίκαιος (33 times), Matt 1:19; 5:45; 9:13; 10:41^{ter}; 13:17, 43, 49; 20:4; 23:28-29, 35^{bis}; 25:37, 46; 27:19; Mark 2:17; 6:20; Luke 1:6, 17; 2:25; 5:32; 12:57; 14:14; 15:7; 18:9; 20:20; 23:47, 50; John 5:30; 7:24; 17:25; δικαιοσύνη (10 times), Matt 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32; Luke 1:75; John 16:8, 10; δικαίω (7 times), Matt 11:19; 12:37; Luke 7:29, 35; 10:29; 16:15; 18:14; δικαίωμα, Luke 1:6; δικαίως, Luke 23:41, NA28-T in Accordance 10.3.3.

² The classic New Testament treatment by Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956) exploring important interrelated terms (redemption, covenant, the blood, propitiation, reconciliation, and justification) could serve as a useful starting point.

³ Unless specified otherwise, all translations of the Bible are from the NRSV.

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of the concept could also be examined.⁴ The inherent danger in a study of this kind is to read the Gospels through the eyes of Paul or, conversely, to find no commonality whatsoever between them.⁵ Despite the obvious attraction of a more wide-ranging study of the concept of justification, the approach taken here will be more limited, concentrating on the use in each Gospel of δικαιοῶ and related terms.⁶

Justification in Matthew

Matthew focuses not on the process of justification but on the result. Jesus is the righteous king and those who belong to his kingdom should have kingdom righteousness, which is most fully described in the Sermon on the Mount. It is a righteousness not like that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).⁷ This is interesting because later Jesus describes the Pharisees as being righteous (9:13). However, as Matthew makes clear, this is a righteousness that can even co-exist with lawlessness (ἀνομία) because it is only external (23:25-28; cf. 6:1). Kingdom righteousness, by contrast, internalizes the law, as the antitheses describe, by banishing anger, lust, virtually all divorce, and oaths, and by insisting on giving more than is required and loving one's enemies—in short exemplifying the ethical perfection of heaven (5:21-48).⁸ Thus reference is made in 6:33 to seeking *God's* righteousness, which is also described as doing the will of the Father

⁴ E.g., the triad of parables in Luke 15 of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

⁵ This danger is appropriately recognized by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Justification in Luke-Acts," in *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 106-25. In the end, however, Gaffin does not seem to be entirely successful in trying to avoid "Paulinizing" Luke.

⁶ I am grateful for the helpful suggestions made following the presentation of this paper at the Adventist Theological Society/Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting in Atlanta, GA, November 18, 2010.

⁷ Understood qualitatively rather than quantitatively: "Jesus is not talking about beating the scribes and Pharisees at their own game, but about a different level or concept of righteousness altogether" (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 189; similarly Norvald Yri, "Seek God's Righteousness: Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Right with God*, 96-105, here 98). See Hans Dieter Betz, *Sermon on the Mount* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 191-92 for a discussion.

⁸ Gerhard Maier, *Matthaus-Evangelium* (2 vols.; Bibel-Kommentar; Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1979-1980), 1:189, locates this righteousness in the OT standard of righteousness that is based on God himself, not on human performance (Lev 19:2; Deut 18:13).

(7:21). Kingdom righteousness impacts religious devotion because outward piety is meaningless. Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting should be done secretly because one's real reward is not on earth but in heaven and based on trust in the heavenly Father (6:1-32).

No human standard of righteousness can ever be the basis for entering the kingdom. Matthew's Jesus "points to a requirement that is impossible for us to achieve. Impossible though it may be for us to achieve it, it is nevertheless demanded."⁹ Within Matthew's Gospel, it becomes clear that this kingdom righteousness cannot be *achieved*; it can only be *received*.¹⁰ The work of Jesus, like that of John the Baptist, results in a division within Israel into believers and unbelievers, with believers largely coming from the disenfranchised,¹¹ including the proverbial "sinners" (tax collectors and prostitutes) who are successfully entering¹² the kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and elders who did not believe Jesus or John (21:31-32). This believing is connected with repentance in the immediate context¹³ and demonstrated by godly living, i.e., "the way of righteousness."¹⁴

On the other hand, references in Matthew to entering the kingdom are frequently to a future event (5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24). And several parables unique to Matthew place the separation between the believing and the unbelieving, the righteous and the unrighteous, at the final judgment

⁹ Yri, 99.

¹⁰ On righteousness in Matthew described as a gift, see, e.g., Gottlob Schrenk, "δική, δίκαιος, κτλ," *TDNT*, 2:178-225 here 198-99; Yri, 105.

¹¹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (3 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-1997), 3:172.

¹² So also Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (trans. David E. Green; Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1975), 412. The present tense is used in v. 31b (προάγουσιν), unusual in Matthew for entry into the kingdom (cf. future and aorist tenses in). However, judging from use of the present tense here and in 23:13, as well as references to the kingdom being already present (e.g., 4:17; 12:28; 13:38), its force should not be weakened to mean "being well along the path that leads into the kingdom rather than of having already entered the kingdom" as urged by John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 863.

¹³ Although μεταμέλομαι is used rather than μετανοέω both in the parable and in its application (21:29, 32), it is this application that should dictate the meaning rather than the parable. Cf. France, 803 that it approximates the meaning "repent" here.

¹⁴ As Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (SNTSM 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 95-96, points out, John's message and way of life cannot be separated.

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(13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50; 25:1-13, 31-46). There is even reference to justification in connection with this judgment: “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (12:36-37). While this fits the typical Jewish understanding of future justification, its connection in Matthew with a present justification corresponds more closely to Paul’s schema and to NT eschatology more generally.¹⁵ At the same time, it should not go unnoticed that the immediate context connects the acceptance of the kingdom proclamation of Jesus with repentance (12:41; cf. 11:20-21), paralleling the call to repentance given by John the Baptist.¹⁶ In other words, justification in Matthew closely parallels both the present and future aspects of entering the kingdom of God which comes through full acceptance of the proclamation of Jesus.

Justification in Mark

Besides the mention of Herod’s perception of John the Baptist as a righteous man (Mark 6:20), the only other occurrence of δίκαιος relevant for this study appears to be an ironic reference to the scribes and Pharisees as righteous.¹⁷ To the question of why he eats with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replies, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (2:17). The passage is significant in characterizing Jesus’ ministry as one directed at bringing outcasts back into fellowship within Israel, illustrating the theme of newness announced in 1:15 and further described in 2:18-22.¹⁸

In the structure of the chapter, forgiveness (2:1-12) precedes fellowship (2:13-17). The aphorism of Jesus reinforces this idea, drawing on a familiar proverb. Adopting the premise of his accusers for the sake of the rebuttal,

¹⁵ We enjoy the benefits of justification in the present (Rom 4:25; 5:1-5) while we await its consummation (5:18); cf. Schrenk, *TDNT* 2:208, 224.

¹⁶ See Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* (WUNT 2/185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 128-29.

¹⁷ Against the less likely possibility of granting to the critics a degree of righteousness that God could approve, see William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 105.

¹⁸ The five pronouncement stories in 2:1-3:6 form a concentric structure of three eating controversies framed by two healing miracles: A (2:1-12); B (2:13-17); C (2:18-22); B' (2:23-28); A' (3:1-6). See Joanna Dewey, “The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2,1-3,6,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 394-401.

the “sinners,” those who are sick, are the ones who need the physician’s “healing,” that is, forgiveness. This call or invitation of Jesus for sinners to enter the kingdom “suggests that the basis of table-fellowship was *messianic forgiveness*, and the meal itself was an anticipation of the messianic banquet.”¹⁹ Therefore, the implicit link between forgiveness and healing in the first story is here made more explicit. The story of the paralytic interprets the call of sinners to fellowship and vice-versa. In other words, Jesus’ healings comprehended not just physical restoration but also “a return to wholeness within Israel and a sign of the redemption that his kingdom proclamation offered.”²⁰ As so often in Mark, irony is utilized to make an important point:²¹ those who are *truly righteous* respond to the call of Jesus and thereby receive forgiveness, fellowship, and full restoration within the community of faith.

Justification in Luke

In Luke, Jesus calls sinners “to repentance” (εἰς μετάνοιαν, 5:32), a seemingly innocuous clarification until it is noticed that, in the announcement of the “new wine” ministry of Jesus that follows, only Luke includes the protest of some traditionalists that “the old is better” (5:39, author’s translation).²² Of the Synoptics, Luke alone identifies the “leaven of the Pharisees” as hypocrisy (12:1). He also mentions that the lawyer was “wanting to justify himself” with the question “Who is my neighbor?” (10:29), and so follows the parable of the Good Samaritan in which the priest and Levite pass by the half-dead man to preserve their ceremonial

¹⁹ Lane, 106 (italics his).

²⁰ Clinton Wahlen, “Healing,” *DJG* (ed. Joel B. Green et al.; 2d ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 365.

²¹ Cf. the use of intercalation to produce dramatized irony by which readers are confronted with issues arising from the stories in Tom Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories: Narration, Definition, Function* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 18; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).

²² On the translation of χρηστός as a comparative see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 28-28A; New York: Doubleday, 1981-1985), 1:602, pointing out that Luke sometimes uses the positive degree adjective as a comparative or even a superlative (9:48; 10:42), a usage which reflects the general tendency of Hellenistic Greek.

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purity.²³ Likewise, in the parable of the lost sheep, there is “more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (15:7) and the parable of the lost son is also about the self-righteous older brother whose response to his father’s love is left open (15:31-32).²⁴

Jewish piety appears prominently from the outset perhaps to appeal especially to other such “older brothers” in Israel that they might see in Jesus the fulfillment of their hopes. Zacharias prophesies that when finally delivered (ῥυσθέντας) from their enemies Israel would be able to serve God without fear ἐν ὁσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνη (1:74-75).²⁵ The angel Gabriel, announcing the fulfillment of Mal 4:5-6, indicates that part of John’s purpose in paving the way for Jesus would be to call “the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him” (1:17). “Righteous and devout” (δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβής) Simeon utters a similar prophecy when taking baby Jesus in his arms to bless him (2:25), that the child would bring God’s salvation (2:30).²⁶

One of the most poignant appeals for pharisaical Jews to comprehend the reason for Jesus’ attitude toward those with a sinful reputation is Luke’s account of the anointing of Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee. Responding to Simon’s unspoken doubts, Jesus defends the woman’s actions (in contrast to the host’s lack of hospitality toward him) as arising from her gratitude at being forgiven. Her much love demonstrates that she

²³ Further, see Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits*, 141-42 and the literature there cited.

²⁴ On this aspect of the parable, see esp. Kenneth Ewing Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 190-206: “The listening Pharisee is pressed to see himself in the older son and to respond by accepting reconciliation” (206).

²⁵ Such was the goal of the exodus from Egypt (Exod 7:16; Josh 24:14); cf. its single qualified use in the NT of Christians in Eph 4:24 (ἐν δικαιοσύνη καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας).

²⁶ Among the four Gospels, σωτηρία appears mostly in Luke (1:69, 71, 77; 19:9), but also in Mark 16:8 and John 4:22.

has been forgiven much.²⁷ Significantly, Jesus' assurance both to Simon and to the woman that her sins stand forgiven (ἀφέωνται) is in the perfect tense (vv. 47-48), indicating a "state of forgiveness, which Jesus recognizes and declares. . . . Jesus does not deny that her sins have been 'many,' but that she is no longer under the burden of them."²⁸ This is evident from his concluding words to her: "your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50). It is fitting that this story in Luke is introduced by the description of Jesus as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" and the affirmation that "wisdom is justified by all *her* children"²⁹ (7:34-35), suggesting a group different from Simon and the complaining children of v. 32. The meaning of ἐδικαιώθη in v. 35, as with ἐδικαίωσαν of v. 29, is "Show or pronounce to be righteous, declare or admit to be just."³⁰

Another passage, aimed even more directly at self-righteousness, is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14). According to Luke, Jesus "told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised everyone else" (v. 9, author's translation). The Pharisee in the parable distinguishes himself by his arrogant behavior: "he took up a prominent position"³¹ (σταθεὶς πρὸς ἑαυτόν) in order to pray; he thanks God that he is not like the rest of mankind; he then proceeds to spell out how bad everyone else is: "thieves, rogues, adulterers"; he is not "even like this tax collector"; next he enumerates his supererogation: fasting twice a week, tithing everything he gets (even the smallest herbs, 11:42). In dramatic contrast to this proud Pharisee is the self-abasing attitude of the tax collector: he stood at a distance; he did not venture³² even to lift his eyes to heaven but kept beating his breast ("or more

²⁷ Taking ὅτι as "'because' makes poor sense in the context where great loves shows great forgiveness but does not cause it. . . ; better, *considering that*" (Max Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* [trans., rev. and adapted by Mary Grosvenor; 3d rev. ed.; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988], 203).

²⁸ Fitzmyer, 1:692.

²⁹ Together with the verb, use of πᾶς matches v. 29; cf. Matt 11:19 "by her works" (cf. v. 2).

³⁰ Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (5th ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), 208. A similar meaning pertains to 10:29, where the lawyer wished to show himself in the right.

³¹ So Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (3d ed.; London: SCM, 1972), 140; cf. T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1957), 310: "stood by himself."

³² Jeremias, 141.

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accurately the heart, as the seat of sin”);³³ his prayer is short, simple, and straightforward: “Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (like the Pharisee also in a class by himself and yet not like him!). The prayer is a plea for propitiation and forgiveness (ἰλάσκομαι, again only in Heb 2:17).³⁴

The authoritative pronouncement by Jesus that the tax collector, not the Pharisee,³⁵ left justified, “*accounted* as righteous, accepted,”³⁶ is startling, because God has said “I will not justify the wicked” (Exod 23:7 NET; cf. 1QHa XXV.13). Yet such a surprise ending is typical of Jesus’ parables and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. The combination of δικαιοῦ with ἰλάσκομαι is so close to the use of the same verb with ἰλαστήριον in Rom 3:24-25 as to make comparison of the two contexts irresistible. That the terminology of being justified may be explicable to some extent by Pauline influence might be a reasonable supposition except that similar language is found already quite often at Qumran, albeit with somewhat different nuances.³⁷ To ask what sin the Pharisee had committed or what reparations the tax collector had made to prove his repentance misses the point as the focus here is on the inward attitude of the two worshipers which is evident from their words and even their body language (as well as the concluding proverb of v. 14b).³⁸ The tax collector even quotes the opening words of Psalm 51,³⁹ which repeatedly considers the inner condition of the penitent (vv. 6, 10, 17). Thus, the meaning of the perfect passive participle reflects a changed state inwardly as well as outwardly—a change attributable solely to God’s grace and which remains

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fitzmyer, 2:1188 notes the same meaning of ἰλάσκομαι in 2 Kgs 5:18 LXX, translating נָחַם: “will pardon.” It means to turn away wrath and extend forgiveness (see Morris, 125-60), just as the cognate noun ἰλαστήριον denotes “means of propitiation” (ibid., 167-74, cf. 140-41).

³⁵ Jeremias, 141-42.

³⁶ Plummer, 419 (italics his).

³⁷ See, e.g., 1QS III.3; XI.2, 5, 10, 12, 14; 1QSb IV.22; 1QHa V.34; IX.8; XV.31; XVII.14; XXV.15; 1Q35 1 2; 4Q257 III.4; 4Q264 1 1; 4Q525 10 5; 11Q5 XXIV.7.

³⁸ Cf. Luke 14:11. Considering the social location of each may be enlightening, but this cannot by itself explain the reason for the tax collector’s justification (*pace* Stephanie Harrison, “The Case of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector: Justification and Social Location in Luke’s Gospel,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 32/2 (2005).

³⁹ Jeremias, 144.

His justifying righteousness.⁴⁰ Justification in this sense can never be meritorious but is always purely God's gift.

Justification in John

Seldom does the Gospel of John mention righteousness or the like,⁴¹ but when it does it is almost always connected with judgment.⁴² The most important and yet obscure and controverted passage is John 16:8-11. The dominant interpretation of this passage is in an exclusively negative sense, as a forensic judicial prosecution of the world;⁴³ but such an interpretation overlooks the larger concerns of the Fourth Gospel, most notably its purpose to bring people to faith in Jesus (20:31) through the work of his disciples, which is modeled after the work of Jesus (17:18, 20). This is also the work of the Paraclete since he is the continued presence of Jesus in the world (14:16-18; 16:12-15).

Jesus is the true Light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world (1:9).⁴⁴ Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him (3:17). Light brings everyone to the point of decision, some loving darkness because their deeds are evil

⁴⁰ Cf. the typically Catholic formulation of "interior justification" by Ceslas Spicq, "which," he says, "is much more than a verdict of acquittal: God grants that this 'sinner' becomes just, he makes him just" (*TLNT*, 1:340).

⁴¹ This rare usage should not be considered an indication of the theme's unimportance as suggested by Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., "Justification in the Gospel of John," in *Right with God*, 126-45 here 127: "The very paucity of references to the *dikaio*-word-group makes it all the more important to examine them thoroughly, and the passages in which they occur, if we are to understand John's view of justification."

⁴² John 5:30; 7:24; 16:8; also 16:10; 17:25—δικαιοσύνη appears in 16:8, 10 and δίκαιος elsewhere.

⁴³ E.g., D. A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11," *JBL* 98 (1979): 547-66, followed in the main by Trotter; John Aloisi, "The Paraclete's Ministry of Conviction: Another Look at John 16:8-11," *JETS* 47 (2004): 55-69. Underlying this interpretation is the tendency to read the Gospel on two levels: the experience of the so-called Johannine community is superimposed upon and read through the historical events represented at the narrative level (see J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1968). Numerous and serious objections to this mirror-reading approach have been raised, not least of which is its distortion of the obvious message of the book which places persecution of the disciples in the future (e.g. John 16:2-3).

⁴⁴ The nearest antecedent, ἄνθρωπον, is also the most natural syntactically.

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while others come to the light (3:19-21). The latter include Samaritans who recognize in Jesus “the Savior of the world” (4:42), Jews recognizing him as “the Prophet” (6:14), the man born blind (9:17, 33, 38), apparently some Greeks (12:20-21), and even “the world.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind” (9:39). Since the Paraclete is to do a work similar to what Jesus had done, we should expect that the description of 16:8-11 would have differing outcomes in accordance with differing responses. A closer look at the passage supports this supposition.

The dominant meaning of the verb ἐλέγχω is “convict, convince,”⁴⁶ “to show someone his sin and to summon him to repentance.”⁴⁷ This meaning has its Jewish antecedents in God’s disciplining and educating human beings through convicting, chastising, testing, and judgment.⁴⁸ If this is the meaning here, then the Paraclete would convict the world: (1) of sin, because of their failure to believe (v. 9) and their need to believe in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29); (2) of righteousness, because, through the “Spirit of truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), Jesus sets people free from sin (8:31-36) and has ascended to the Father victorious to be their Advocate (20:17; 1 John 2:1);⁴⁹ (3) of judgment, because the ruler of this world is condemned and cast out through the

⁴⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:871 calls this “an unintended prophecy (cf. 11:51) of Gentiles turning to Jesus (12:20; cf. 11:48).”

⁴⁶ BDAG 315.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Büchsel, “ἐλέγχω, ἔλεγχις κτλ.,” *TDNT* 2:473-76 here 474.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 473-74. See LXX Gen 31:42; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 12:18; Ps 6:2; 37:2; Prov 3:11 (quoted in Heb 12:5); Wis 12:2; Sir 18:3; Isa 2:4; 11:3-4, etc. Qumran usage of פקח with God as subject often means “rebuke” not simply to prove the person wrong but to persuade him to change his mind. See A. R. C. Leaney, “The Johannine Paraclete and the Qumran Scrolls,” in *John and Qumran* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 38-61.

⁴⁹ Not exactly “in the forensic sense of justification or acquittal,” as urged by William H. P. Hatch, “The Meaning of John XVI, 8-11,” *HTR* 14 (1921): 103-5 here 104. The word δικαιοσύνη, used only here in John, always appears in the Johannine epistles with ποιέω in an ethical sense (1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10; cf. Rev 19:11; 22:11), an idea present also in John’s Gospel once its connection with light as the corresponding opposite of sin/darkness is recognized (3:19-21; cf. 5:14; 8:11).

judgment at the cross, by which Jesus will draw all people to himself (12:31-32).⁵⁰

The foregoing interpretation makes more sense of the “high priestly prayer” of John 17, where Jesus intercedes for the “Holy Father” to “keep” and “sanctify” the disciples (vv. 11, 15, 17) as well as those who will believe in him through their word (v. 20). In this context, Jesus also speaks of the Father as “righteous” and that He has made His name known to them in order that (ἵνα) “the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (vv. 25-26). This echoes the work of Jesus in John 5:30, whose judgment is righteous because it is based not on his own will but that of the Father (cf. 7:24).

That the convicting work of the Spirit is not exclusively negative but can be positive, depending on people’s response, is seen also in connection with Jesus’ words to Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God (3:3, 5). From the subsequent narrative, it seems clear that Nicodemus ultimately accepted this teaching, believed in Jesus, and experienced this birth “from above” (ἄνωθεν; cf. 7:50-51; 19:39) while others of the Jewish rulers believed but hid the fact because they “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (12:43 RSV).

Conclusion

The concept of justification, broadly considered in connection with δικαιοῦν and its cognates, is present to a greater or lesser degree in all four canonical Gospels. In Matthew, justification is correlated with the righteousness of the kingdom which alone is sufficient to enter it. This righteousness proclaimed by Jesus involves an internalization of the law. Since it is *God’s* righteousness it can never be *achieved* by human attempts at scrupulosity. It can only be *received* through an intimate acquaintance with the Father—in advance of and as an assurance of vindication in the final judgment. Justification in Mark includes the forgiveness available to sinners as they respond to the messianic invitation to kingdom fellowship and full restoration within Israel. Luke comes the closest to Paul’s concept of justification, highlighting the danger of self-righteousness and the need

⁵⁰ For a similar interpretation of John 16:8-11, see Jon Paulien, *John: Jesus Gives Life to a New Generation* (The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier; Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 240-41.

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for repentance in order to receive forgiveness, acquittal, and inner peace. It also involves an inward change that is manifested outwardly in humility, gratitude, and love to God for this gracious gift. John's Gospel views justification, as well as its negative aspect of condemnation, in terms of the cross—which, with the conviction brought about by the Spirit-Advocate working through the disciples, brings people to a point of decision. Being sanctified through the word and Spirit of truth involves such a complete change that it is pictured as a new birth, which is the means of entering the kingdom of God and experiencing unity with the Father and the Son.

In all four Gospels, justification is closely connected with the proclamation of the kingdom of God, and it is perhaps for this reason that we find both present and future aspects of justification in view. In Matthew the two aspects are fairly evenly balanced. The present aspect predominates in Mark and Luke, while a “perfective” element seems to pervade the Gospel of John whereby the decisive victory at the cross is made a reality through the Spirit, who brings conviction, faith, and transformation.

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