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**Hagios in Pauline Letters:
The Extrinsic Source of Christian Holiness**

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Introduction

The title of this article is not of my own creation but the exact wording of the assignment given. In a related e-mail the assignment was worded this way, “The ‘Alien Righteousness’ (Righteousness of Christ credited to us) in the Pauline letters.” While the title is clear, the wording of the assignment in the e-mail suggests that the task is broader than simply looking up “hagios” in Paul. Our concern is with the concept of holiness or righteousness that is credited to us and not simply with a particular term expressing that concept. The source of

¹ See www.CUL.edu for more. Prof. Eschelbach has published many articles and books, including these: “Malachi and Philippians,” *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009); *Study Notes for New Testament Introduction* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007); *Marriage and the Counsel of God* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007); *Called to be God’s People: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006); *Has Joab Foiled David? A Literary Study of the Importance of Joab’s Character in Relation to David* (Peter Lang publishers, 2005).

this condition is alien (“not from us”) but more specifically, Christ. A survey of the occurrences of “hagios” (holy) and “dikaios” (righteous) in Paul leaves the researcher suspicious that Paul has much more to say on the subject than these two words alone will reveal. Therefore, in order to be as thorough as possible on the subject, I read all of the Pauline letters with the question of alien righteousness in mind. While reading I kept notes on the various means by which Paul expresses this work of God. In the article to follow I will provide an overview of Paul’s use of “hagios” and “dikaios”, then a survey of the other terms that Paul uses to express imputed righteousness, then a survey of many other ways that Paul conveys imputed righteousness, followed by a summary of what these three kinds of evidence reveal.

A. “Hagios” and “Dikaios” in Paul

Paul uses four terms that share the “hagios” root: “hagios” (holy), “hagiadzo” (to make holy), “hagiosmos” (holiness), and “hagiosune” (holiness). The study to follow is based on an examination of every occurrence of these terms in Paul. The texts which mostly clearly express the meaning of the terms are provided with comment below.

“Hagios” occurs 233 times in the New Testament, 76 times in Paul’s writing. Perhaps the rationale for the assignment of this paper is already evident. While Paul is responsible for about one quarter of the NT, he uses the term “holy” almost one third of the time. In the majority of cases, the origin of the holiness of Paul’s audience is not explained. Paul routinely calls the members of the church “holy.”² Apparently we are holy, but how did we get that way? The *alien* nature of holiness in people is expressed in Romans 11:16 where Paul reveals this condition, “if the root is holy, so are the branches.” In other words, the holiness of the branch is not inherent, but provided by the root, which is Christ (John 15). In 1 Corinthians 7:14 the holiness of spouse and children are the product of union with the believing spouse/parent. Ephesians 1:4 reveals that holy people are so because God had chosen them in Christ.³ Later in Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul describes the activity of Christ by which He presents the church

² Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 1:1.

³ For a further discussion on election and predestination, see my article “Election in Ephesians 1: Individual or Corporate?” in this same publication.

to Himself as holy.⁴ The specific language of Christ's activity that renders the church so will be examined in the third part of this paper. Finally, Paul explained to Timothy that God "saved us and called us" or "saved us by calling us" with a holy calling.⁵ The call of God obviously originates outside the person, yet Paul goes on to emphasize this by excluding our works. Rather than "according to our works," this calling is based on God's own purposes and the grace given in Christ Jesus from ages ago.⁶

Paul's use of the verb "to make holy" parallels his use of the noun in frequency: just over one third of the time in the NT. What is significant here is that when people are the subject of this verb it is consistently passive. This is true throughout its occurrence in the NT, not just in Paul's letters.⁷ Paul describes the church as those who are sanctified "in" or perhaps "by" Christ Jesus in 1 Corinthians 1:2. Paul returns to that subject in 6:11 by using a string of passive verbs to describe how Christ changed the natural condition of people: washed, sanctified, justified. Even when Paul describes the holiness of unbelievers by familial relation, he does not use the active voice. The text does not say that the believing spouse sanctifies the unbelieving spouse. Paul wrote instead that the unbelieving spouse is sanctified (perfect passive) by the believer. Thus the extension of holiness from one person to another is not the prerogative of the saint, but a further act of imputation by God. Paul's counsel to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:5) is consistent with this observation. We cannot make anything in God's creation clean or unclean on our own, but only by the Word of God and prayer – God's action over our activity, if you will.

Last of all, Paul uses two terms which might both be translated as "holiness" or "sanctification" ("hagiosmos," "hagiosune"). Paul is responsible for all except two of the 13 occurrences of these words in the New Testament. These terms have to do with a condition that is the outcome or effect of some other preceding activity or cause.

⁴ Paul uses very similar language in Colossians 1:22.

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:9.

⁶ 1 Timothy 1:9.

⁷ For example: Jesus asks the Father to sanctify the disciples and sanctifies Himself (John 17:17, 19), but Matthew records that the gold is sanctified (passive) by the temple within which it rests. Hebrews contains six occurrences of the term. All of these occurrences highlight the activity of an outside agent who brings holiness about in someone or something else.

Members yielded to righteousness and spiritual liberation results in sanctification (Romans 6:19, 22). Paul proclaimed that God had made Christ become for us sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30). Sanctification is a condition which God desires for us, which is effected by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:4, 7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

The concept of “holiness” in Paul can hardly be considered without taking into account the related group of terms having to do with “righteousness.” This assertion is demonstrated by the alternative title given my assignment, as mentioned in the introduction. Three expressions of righteousness concern us here: righteous (“dikaios”); righteousness (“dikaiosune”), and the verb “to justify” (“dikaioo”). In contrast to “holiness” which is related only to God, “righteousness” may have various sources. However, only the righteousness of God by faith is able to help the human condition. Any other type of righteousness with any other source fails.

The term “dikaios” occurs 79 times in the NT, 17 of those in Paul, which is about as often as any other NT author uses the word. This term, unlike “dikaiosune,” almost always stands alone in the absolute and ideal sense of “right” or “just.”⁸ Paul uses the term to express the standard that human beings were meant to fulfill (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11), yet Paul says that the law was not given for the “just” (1 Timothy 1:9). Who, then, are these just people who do not need the law? The death of humans demonstrates that we lack the capacity to meet this ideal on our own. Our mortality constantly argues that there are, except for Jesus, no such righteous people.⁹ Finally, “dikaios” occurs twice in conjunction with the judgment of God. God and His judgment are always just!

The term “dikaiosune” occurs 92 times in the NT, 58 of those in Paul, exactly half of those in Romans. If Paul is not the authority on this subject, he is certainly the most persistent in discussing it. An examination of these occurrences reveals the following: first, there are several sources or types of righteousness. There is the righteousness of God (Romans 1:17), of faith (Romans 4:13, of the law (Romans 9:31, 10:3), and yours (2 Corinthians 9:10; Philippians 3:9). This last

⁸ Romans 2:13, Galatians 3:11, Philippians 4:8.

⁹ Paul emphasizes this point by quoting the Psalms in Romans 3:10-18.

type must be distinguished as either “yours” in the sense that God has given it to you and the fruit that flows from it or “your own” in stark contrast with the righteousness that God gives. The righteousness of the law is real but cannot help us because we cannot keep the law upon which it depends (Romans 10:3). Paul makes clear that the righteousness that saves is the work of God in us (Romans 3:26), is a gift (Romans 5:17), and is of faith (Romans 4:13, 10:10; Philippians 3:9). This righteousness of God is reckoned or imputed to us, its source being Christ, thus alien from us (Romans 3:26, 4:3). The connection between the alien righteousness of God imputed to us and our righteousness which bears fruit is explained in Titus 3:5. Paul explains that our own righteousness cannot save us because it isn’t, in fact, righteous. However, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, God creates in us a new man that acts in harmony with the righteousness of Christ already imputed.¹⁰

The term “dikaioo” occurs 39 times in the NT, 27 of those in Paul, 15 of those in Romans. Not surprisingly, God is the only subject of this verb in the active voice. When people are the subject the verb is always passive. Holiness or righteousness must be alien to us since only the “doers of the law” will be justified (Romans 2:13). But, there are no such people (Galatians 3:11). People who contend that the law proves they possess an innate righteousness must realize in stead that they are under a curse (Galatians 5:4). Even a person who is not aware of any personal unrighteousness is not justified by this lack of guilt, but only by God (1 Corinthians 4:4). God justifies the ungodly, justifies them by faith, and justifies all that have faith as a gift (Romans 3:24, 26, 4:5; Galatians 3:24).

B. Other Terms Used by Paul to Express Alien Holiness

The first term to consider is perhaps the most obvious, “to impute,” “reckon,” or “consider” (“logidzomai”). This verb occurs 40 times in the NT, 34 of those in Paul, 19 of those in Romans. What is surprising about this verb is how seldom it occurs with the terms holy or righteous. Paul concludes that God imputes the righteousness of

¹⁰ Here a distinction in natures is required. According to your human nature, generated in the image of Adam, there is no redeeming feature or activity (Romans 5:6-10). Yet according to our “new man” we are without sin (1 John 3:9). Paul’s description of the disharmony in the believer testifies to this dichotomy of natures and their characteristics (Romans 7:13-25; Galatians 5:16-26).

Christ to those who believe and thus considers them righteous apart from the works of the law (Romans 4:5-6, 11; Galatians 3:6). The alien nature of imputed righteousness is clearly integral to Paul's argument that only children of promise are genuine descendants of Abraham (Romans 9:8). No human being born of human generation can claim holiness but must rather be cast out (Galatians 4:21-31). If we want to further highlight the alien nature of this imputed righteousness, consider Paul's example of the uncircumcised who are reckoned righteous by God by faith (Romans 2:26).

Paul says that the faithful are called to be holy (Romans 1:7) and says that God calls those things which are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). If God calls us into existence from what we were not by nature, then this holiness which we possess must be alien. Indeed, Paul explains that Christ is "formed" in us (Galatians 4:19).

In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul argues that there is nothing which we have that we have not received. In Colossians 2:6 he expresses the imperative that we walk as Christ would, since we have received Him. Reception of Christ and the holiness which is part of His nature is therefore clearly outside of or alien to us. What is received must first be given, which is another term common in Paul's writing. God has given a promise (Galatians 3:22) and He has freely given that which is His own to us (1 Corinthians 2:13).¹¹ We are not sufficient or ourselves but our sufficiency is from God. Therefore, Paul refused to boast of himself (of those things intrinsic) but only of what God had given him (2 Corinthians 3:4-6, 12:5).

Even the determination for salvation comes from outside of people, individually and collectively. Paul argues that we were saved by God's own determination and grace which was given us in Christ (2 Timothy 1:9). The alien determination to save us is accomplished by a similarly alien means. The substitutionary atonement of Jesus consists of the exchange of our unrighteousness for His holiness. Jesus gave Himself on behalf of our sins and made Himself poor so that we might be made rich (Galatians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 8:9). God substituted Jesus for us, making Him who knew no sin to become sin for us (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:4).

¹¹ See also Jesus' proclamation of the same in John 16:13-15.

C. Other Ways Paul Uses to Express Alien Holiness

A survey of language that inherently speaks to the subject of alien righteousness is only the tip of the iceberg. Paul uses at least twelve other ways to express the same reality. For example, the term “gospel” unmistakably conveys the notion of holiness imputed. The gospel is the power of God because it reveals the righteousness of God (Romans 1:17). This is the righteousness, as seen above, which is provided to us as a gift. The extrinsic or alien feature of the gospel is again evident as Paul recalls the regenerative property of it (1 Corinthians 4:15).

A second and large number of texts speak to extrinsic holiness by revealing the activity of God in contrast to the absence of our own. Not only do we lack this activity, we lack the capacity to produce or even desire it. God rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 2:10). This is a rescue we would not anticipate the need for nor begin to imagine how to affect. God provides for our rescue by setting forth His own Son as a covering, substitute, and atoning sacrifice (Romans 3:25). The truth that we absolutely lacked any inherent ability to save ourselves demonstrates the absolute nature of the grace of God which provided the remedy for our condition in the gift of His Son (Romans 5:15). As much as we inherently lacked holiness, so much more absolutely does the Son of God possess holiness according to His divine nature. He gives it away to others because that activity is also an integral aspect of His nature and what it means to be holy. Paul argues that because God is the One who justifies (extrinsically) there is no one who can condemn us for the sin which is ours inherently (Romans 8:33). It is God who has made Christ become holiness for us (1 Corinthians 1:30).¹² God justifies the Gentiles by faith (Galatians 3:8). God justifies the unjust. This justification consists of an exchange: Christ takes the guilt that is intrinsic to us and provides His own righteousness in its place. The presence of this alien holiness is made evident by activity in our lives that only God could produce, commonly called “sanctification” (1 Corinthians 6:11). God put to death our inherent properties by drowning us in the living water of His Son’s Word, thus justifying us

¹² The language of this verse is almost clumsy in the way Paul “heaps up” the emphasis on God’s activity on our behalf, completely apart from, even in contrast to what we are doing on our own.

(Romans 6:7). This immersion in His Word also covers us with Christ as with a garment (Galatians 3:27). Christ presents us holy and blameless to Himself, no longer despicable because of any properties inherently ours (Colossians 1:22). Finally, God glorifies the people He justifies (Romans 8:30). God glorifies people by demonstrating that a work has taken place in them which could have no other source than Himself. If man were capable of this work, in even the least measure, it would be more common than foreign and the glorious aspect would thus be lost.

A third category of texts confirm the extrinsic nature of holiness by describing the relation of cause and effect. Paul explains that it is not the hearers of the law but the doers of the law that will be justified (Romans 2:13). His point is that we lack, by nature, the ability (cause) to obey the law (effect). For this reason God provides the substitute, the Son of Man who caused all things to be done to perfection, effectively fulfilling the law on our behalf. Paul says that the obedience of the uncircumcised renders such a person circumcised in God's reckoning (Romans 2:26). Such obedience and such a reckoning would have been unthinkable among the Jews. For them the effect does not match the cause but this is exactly what argues the case for extrinsic, imputed holiness. Paul says that the person who has died has been justified (Romans 6:7). Yet who could provide a death that renders a person alive? Who can recreate a person in a better condition than before except God? In fact, it was the death of Christ that has turned our own death into such liberation. Sanctification or a life of holiness flows from justification or having been declared holy (1 Corinthians 6:11). Having been set free by forces external to us, we serve righteousness, which is an activity equally foreign to our nature inherited from Adam (Romans 6:18). Man's intent to take credit for God's work is evident in many translations of Romans 10:10, "For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved" (RSV). The text actually says, "For with the heart it [the Word] is believed into righteousness and with the mouth it [the Word] is confessed into salvation." The point is not that man can and does believe and confess in order to render himself righteous. Rather, it is the Word which regenerates and inspires the individual to faith and a confession of that faith. This is a faith in God who provides, not a faith in ourselves.

A fourth category of texts reveal the relationship between the imputation of righteousness and regeneration. You cannot have one without the other and they are both equally foreign to and impossible for us by nature. The regenerative process which we experience biologically is remarkable, yet ultimately inadequate. We reproduce cells, replacing dead and dying with new. But the new cells are of the same dying nature as the previous. An enduring life for us depends on a regeneration which is provided from outside of ourselves. Paul reveals this when he says, “Through the gospel I have begotten you” (1 Corinthians 4:5). God grafts us into Christ so that what was wild and dying might become the opposite (Romans 6:5). Paul uses the necessity of life from an extrinsic source to attack the arrogance of Gentiles and to extend hope for apostate Jews (Romans 11:16-24). Imputation of the holiness of Christ is described as “being clothed” with Him and being “awash” (Galatians 3:26-29). Yet in that context Paul declares that these same people are now the legitimate children of both Abraham and Christ – imputation produces regeneration.

A fifth category of language that expresses extrinsic holiness has to do with activity in general. Paul argues the foreign nature of holiness by pointing out that the foreigners are accomplishing holiness while the “natural” people of God are not (Romans 2:13-24). In the same letter Paul uses himself as an example of an absence of inherent holiness. Not only does Paul fail to do what holiness requires, he fails even to understand why not (Romans 7:13-21). What we do or do not do reveals the forces at work in our lives (Ephesians 2:1-10). Left to ourselves we function as children of wrath, according to the course of this world, according to the spirit of disobedience. As the workmanship of God, we do those holy works that God has prepared beforehand.

Imperative language is a sixth category. Imperative language becomes necessary when something that should be happening is not. God commands us to be holy because we are not and would not be otherwise. Paul issues an abundance of imperatives for spiritual leaders and followers alike. Paul commanded Timothy to pursue righteousness as a man of God (1 Timothy 6:11). Paul also commanded him to give himself entirely to the scriptures for in so doing he would save himself and his listeners (1 Timothy 4:13-16). Similarly, Paul provides an abundance of imperatives to the simple

believer. Romans 12 is perhaps the best example of Paul's use of imperatival language. In these 21 verses, Paul issues 46 commands using every conceivable grammatical means of doing so. He begins the chapter by appealing to the mercies of God and the imputed righteousness already in place. These extrinsic sources of holiness are the energy and orientation for fulfilling the imperatives that follow. Nevertheless, the sheer number of imperatives and the fact that Paul needs to write them at all argues for the lack of inherent holiness in the individual.

A seventh indicator of extrinsic holiness is the function of prepositions. Prepositions describing connection ("with" and "in") and means ("through") are prominent. Connection is evident as Paul writes that we are crucified, blessed, and made alive WITH Christ (Galatians 2:19, Ephesians 1:13, 2:2). Paul wanted to be found IN Christ, not having a righteousness of his own but that of Christ (Philippians 3:8-9). Paul proclaims that we have redemption in Christ and that Christ is in us (Colossians 1:14, 27). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). The church is sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul claims that we receive grace and he received apostleship through Christ (Romans 1:5). Paul described to the Romans a righteousness of God apart from the law that comes to us through faith (3:21-22). Having been justified by His blood we are saved through Christ (Romans 5:9). Salvation comes through Christ so that grace might rule through righteousness (Romans 5:21). We fulfill the requirements of the law by dying under its condemnation through the body of Christ, vicariously (Romans 7:4).

An eighth way of expressing extrinsic holiness is the dative of means. By forming words in the dative case, Paul can make it clear that these words express the means by which God's purpose is accomplished. A word in the dative may be preceded by a preposition but does not require one to make its point. The person who is righteous BY FAITH will live (Romans 1:17). God justifies both Jew and Gentile by faith, apart from the works of the law (Galatians 2:16, 3:18). Paul repeats both positive and negative assertions in Galatians 2:16 in order to be conclusive about the alien, all sufficient, and exclusive nature of grace. The Gentiles are blessed by faith with

believing Abraham (Galatians 3:9). We have peace with God, having been justified by faith (Romans 5:1).

A ninth way to express imputed righteousness is with an adverbial phrase. Though Romans 1:17 has been considered already, this aspect has not been explored. The simple sentence here is “the righteous shall live.” What to do with the prepositional phrase is an issue of some debate. The phrase “by faith” could be adverbial, focused on how a person lives. On the other hand, as an adjective it would explain how the person came to be righteous. Either way, “by faith” means that what is needed to live is extrinsic to the person.

Repeated consideration of Romans 1:17 suggests the tenth means by which language indicates alien righteousness: the convergence and concentration of expressions. Romans 1:17 speaks of alien righteousness itself and of the means by which it is applied. The righteousness that saves is of God and the means of application, namely faith, is also of God. Romans 3:28 reads “for we consider a man to be justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” This one verse consists of four key expressions: “consider,” “justified,” “by faith,” and “apart from the works of the law.” All four expressions point away from what is inherent in a person. What is needed for a person to meet the holy requirements of the law comes from God. The following expressions are also found in various combinations: believing, promise, heir, righteousness of faith, seed, wisdom, and redemption (Romans 4:5, 13, 16, 9:8; 1 Corinthians 1:30). Romans 4:1-5 is in fact a watershed of language expressing the imputation of what is inherently lacking in fallen man so that righteousness and life might be restored.

An eleventh way of showing that holiness is extrinsic has to do with promising it. In the last paragraph the terms seed, heir, and promise were noted in convergence. Paul argues for the extrinsic nature of all that we need most by way of historical example. Abraham and Sarah could not, of themselves, produce an heir. In as much as they could not pass on their seed, their lives were over. God’s promise of a son not only proved that God would have to provide what Abraham and Sarah lacked, the promise ahead of time meant that what was received could not have come about by the effort of Abraham or Sarah. The notion of promised seed combines with the terms of imputation in Romans 9:8. “Children of promise” are

reckoned as seed in contrast to the “natural” born. Abraham and Sarah had to accept what they simply could not do. But even when people possess ability, like Abraham and Hagar, the product is no better than the source.¹³ Without holiness and righteousness a life cannot endure. God has provided that righteous life by means of promises that impute righteousness and cause divine regeneration.

The twelfth means of expression has to do with contrasts. At least twice Paul describes the contrast between what salvation requires and what we can supply. The righteousness of faith obtained salvation while works failed (Romans 9:30-31). Paul found it necessary to pray for Israel to be saved, not because they lacked zeal but because in seeking to establish their own righteousness they had refused to submit to the righteousness God freely provided in Christ (Romans 10:3). Paul spends the second half of Romans 5 comparing the condemnation of Adam that works out in the death of all people with the success of Christ that accomplished the justification of all. Finally, Paul often speaks of what “isn’t” the case or of something that is “excluded.” All Israel walked out of Egypt but only 2 adult men entered the promised land (1 Corinthians 10:2-6). Gentiles, in their determined perversion, refuse to know the righteousness of God (Romans 1:32). No flesh will be justified by works of the law (Romans 3:20). Boasting among people in the matter of holiness is excluded, since holiness that saves is imputed from an outside source (Romans 3:27). Good works flow naturally and necessarily from imputed righteousness, but can never precede it (Romans 4:10). The absence of awareness of one’s own guilt does not justify. It is God who justifies, therefore no one else can possibly condemn (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Summary of Evidence for the Extrinsic Nature of “Hagios” in Paul’s Letters

This has been a ground breaking study, not because it has broken new ground but because of the absolute consistency with which the data disallows any grounds for righteousness except the alien. This has been a ground breaking study, not because it has broken the ground beneath our feet, but because it has broken the grounds by

¹³ Paul makes this point exceedingly clear in Ephesians 4.

which we would claim to stand on our own two feet before the judgment seat of God. A study of the primary terms, “holiness” and “righteousness,” have demonstrated that only what Christ provides and God imputes is sufficient. The holiness or righteousness that we would claim as our own is wholly insufficient. If we look at ourselves with God’s standard of holiness we find only what is lacking, never what is adequate. Second, a study of related terms that Paul uses to convey extrinsic holiness was considered. These terms, without exception, also bear witness to the external nature of the righteousness that saves us. Third, a survey of 12 other ways in which Paul contends for alien righteousness rendered the same results. The evidence is not simply of a significant quantity nor only in the majority of instances. Without exception Paul argues that God alone can provide what the law requires. The required holiness or righteousness was accomplished by God’s design, through Christ, and imputed to the individual by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. “Alien” may typically illicit fear and apprehension, conjuring up images of menacing foreigners or monsters from other worlds. In the case of righteousness and holiness, there could be no more welcomed sight than what is foreign to us. We live because God has imputed to us the righteousness of Christ, the holiness that is properly His own.