

THE SUPERIORITY OF FAITH:  
*JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S EASTERN THEOLOGY OF JUSTIFICATION*

Bradley R. Cochran

It is one of the great ironies of history that John Calvin was so eager to translate, above all other Scripture commentaries or homilies by the Church Fathers, John Chrysostom's homilies on Romans.<sup>1</sup> Why this is so will become apparent as we notice that in matters most contentious during the Reformation period with regard to justification, Chrysostom represents a decidedly Eastern interpretation of Pauline theology.<sup>2</sup> For example, on the matter of grace and free will, Chrysostom is found as a fierce defender of the determinative role of the free will in the matter of justification. He explicitly and ubiquitously undermines notions of a merely forensic righteousness in justification, and views faith as the human's catalyst for grace and all the faith-based virtues that come with it which constitute justifying righteousness. Furthermore, Chrysostom believes that faith, by bringing grace, enables the fulfillment of the written Law and the law of nature *in* the life of the believer. Although he affirms "faith alone," he means by it something very different than the Protestant doctrine anathematized by Catholics at Trent, or even the recent Catholic ecumenical doctrine of justification with all its negotiated qualifications found in the *Joint Declaration*.<sup>3</sup> In Chrysostom faith

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<sup>1</sup> Najeeb George Awad, "The influence of John Chrysostom's hermeneutics on John Calvin's exegetical approach to Paul's Epistle to the Romans," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 4 (2010): 414-436. Some Reformers, out of their zeal for *sola scriptura*, voiced strong opposition to the translations of classic Christian secondary literature, but other Reformers—like Calvin—still believed secondary literature was a helpful aid in biblical interpretation. The humanist project *Ad fontes* included (for Calvin) the need to translate early authoritative Fathers like Chrysostom, so Calvin proposed to translate Chrysostom's homilies on Romans into French. As Awad argues, the reason Calvin preferred Chrysostom's exegesis is because of his so-called "plain meaning" interpretation of the biblical text characteristic of the Antiochian school. Awad makes a case for a methodological affinity between this method and John Calvin's biblical interpretation. For the purposes of my study, it should be noted that the affinity demonstrated by Awad is a methodological affinity, not an affinity of theological content. As Awad is keen to qualify, there is a "noticeable difference between their understanding of central theological issues, like free will, divine grace and the role of man in God's salvation." *Ibid.*, 427. The doctrine of justification in particular concerns these very issues, as we shall see.

<sup>2</sup> "Much of Chrysostom's exegetical tact is representative of the Eastern tradition of Pauline interpretation as a whole. He follows certain insights from predecessors such as Apollinarius, Theodore, Diodore, and especially Origen. Maurice F. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles in the Early Church* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 97-98. "St. John Chrysostom ... is without question the most dependable representative of the Christological and exegetical tradition of the 'School of Antioch.'" Boris Bobrinskoy, "The Indwelling of the Spirit in Christ: 'Pneumatic Christology' in the Cappadocian Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1984): 65. Chrysostom may be of the Antiochian school, but exactly what that means is often misunderstood, inasmuch as Chrysostom followed no strict pattern of "literal" interpretation: "We interpret some passages by the letter, others with a meaning different from the literal, others again as literal and figurative." Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Boston, Massachusetts: Brill Academic Publications, 2006), 171. I put "literal" in quotation marks because the notion itself is elusive. James Barr, "Literality," *Faith and Philosophy*, 6, no. 4 (1989): 412-428.

makes one worthy of the gift of justification; grace is given to those found worthy of it. The perennial question for Protestant heirs of the Reformation should not be why the Pauline theme of justification by faith fades away in most patristic literature,<sup>4</sup> for wherever Paul's epistle to the Romans is preached or commented on in any detail, there we find the Fathers teaching justification by faith alone—but *they mean by it something contrary to what came out of the Reformation*. Rather, the question for Protestants should be: How can the Reformation *version* of justification by faith alone be central to Christianity (and not just Protestantism) if it cannot be found in the Fathers of the Christian Church?

Although Chrysostom has often been used uncritically by Protestants as proof that the Reformation *sola fide* was taught prior to the Reformation, a critical examination of his homilies on Romans protects us from such isolated misreadings and reveals a distinctively Eastern theology of justification.<sup>5</sup> Many Protestants who have examined Chrysostom more cautiously have concluded that although he has an exemplary admiration for Paul, he nevertheless fails to understand Paul's theology.<sup>6</sup> Although patristic scholars like Maurice F. Wiles, who also take for granted a distinctly Protestant interpretation of Pauline justification, attempt a more nuanced and appreciative stance of the patristic corpus, his entire analysis ends in an anti-climactic way by concluding merely that patristic exegesis was not totally blind to Paul's message or "lost in the obscurity of a dark Pelagian world."<sup>7</sup> Although intended to be one, this is hardly a compliment. Wiles' restricted evaluations for the early Fathers of the Church, however, show that he has better grasped the immensity of difference in patristic literature beneath the shallow similarity of language with Reformation theology.<sup>8</sup> This is progress, and it is the intention of this Protestant author to examine Saint

<sup>3</sup> *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church*, English language edition (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Putting the question this way, as Eno does, can still be helpful in pointing out that prior to the Reformation the Pauline theme of justification was never prioritized *as a dogma*. Admittedly, this should be a profoundly humbling question for Protestants using the doctrine to demarcate true and false Christianity. Robert B. Eno, S.S. "Some Patristic Views on the Relationship of Faith and Works in Justification," in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, edited by H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 111.

<sup>5</sup> This distortion occurs in polemical anthologies where the aim of the Protestant author is to counter the Catholic accusation of novelty by providing "proof" that the Church always believed the Reformation doctrine of justification—although "proof" always amounts to little more than proof texts. A similar mistake also occurs in more ecumenically disposed works where the aim of the author is to give the impression that within the Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox tradition there is what could be called a "classic" doctrine of justification held in common, a thesis that could only be maintained from a superficial cut-and-paste method of similar language. For the former see, for example, George Stanley Faber, *The Primitive Doctrine of Justification Investigated: Relatively to the Several Definitions of the Church of Rome and the Church of England and With a Special Reference to The Opinions of the Late Mr. Knox As Published in His Remains* originally published by R. B. Seeley and W. Bunsie in 1837 (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008), 127-34; Nick Needham, "Justification in the Early Church Fathers," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 25-53. For the latter see, for example, Thomas C. Oden, *The Justification Reader* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 1, 44.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice F. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 139.

<sup>8</sup> When Wiles argues that "the majority of Protestant critics of the Fathers have only been able to see their teaching through Reformed and Lutheran spectacles" he is right, but this happens in at least two different ways and on a continuum. Either they superficially quote Chrysostom's language assuming a similar or same meaning as in the Protestant Tradition, or else they argue Chrysostom got it wrong to some greater or lesser extent. Wiles still falls into

Chrysostom's homilies on Romans with a decided prejudice (for bias is, after all, inescapable)—to see what differences of *substance* might lie underneath Chrysostom's affirmations of the same *language* of justification used in the Western discourse.

It is also my intention to explore the matrix of theological ideas surrounding Chrysostom's interpretation of Pauline justification in the hopes they will be more fully reckoned with in any future historiography on justification. Often Western theologians' summaries of the history of Christian dogmas are really just studies of Western dogmas, revealing a westocentric view of history in their authors. They either treat the Eastern Tradition superficially or leave the Eastern theologies entirely out of the historical trajectory due a preoccupation with the Catholic-Protestant dialectic.<sup>9</sup> It is true that the East never developed a theology or dogma of justification proper, but this should not excuse historians and theologians from allowing prominent figures such as Chrysostom—*who had a similar influence in the East as Augustine did in the West*<sup>10</sup>—to weigh in where they mention or treat the biblical language of justification, however undogmatically.<sup>11</sup>

This brief treatment will look at how Chrysostom understands the meaning and substance of Pauline justification.<sup>12</sup> Particular attention will be given to surrounding themes such as God's impartial judgment, the purpose of the Mosaic and natural law, faith and its role in justification, faith vs. works, and divine-human synergism. This will help us place Chrysostom in ongoing discussions on the doctrine of justification that remain unresolved in the West even after the unprecedented ecumenical achievements between Protestants and Catholics—for example, on the *type* and *location* of justifying righteousness.<sup>13</sup> Chrysostom's Eastern brand of synergism will also be explored in relation

this latter category, but on the lower end of the continuum. Even his qualified evaluation, intended to place the emphasis on what he believes the early Father *did* get right, still implies that ultimately they misread Paul. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 134; 139.

<sup>9</sup> I realize here that my own research in this paper is vulnerable to the same evaluation, since I'm examining an Eastern theologian's interpretation of justification, which is a Western dogma that has never been a key aspect of Eastern theology. However, my complaint is not that Western theologians only investigate what Eastern theologians have said about dogmatized Western themes, but that Western theologians often ignore Eastern theologians altogether in their overviews of Christian theology, interpret them superficially, or grossly misinterpret them.

<sup>10</sup> Citing page five of Mitchell's well respected study of Chrysostom, *Heavenly Trumpet*, Awad notes that Chrysostom's Pauline interpretation also influenced Western theologians such as Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Calvin, as well as Western humanists like Erasmus. Awad, "Chrysostom's influence on Calvin," 421. Margaret M. Mitchel, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 5. Furthermore, some scholars estimate that Ambrosiaster's commentaries and Chrysostom's homilies on Pauline literature constitute some of the most important instances in the history of the Pauline reception. Victor Manuel Morales Vasquez, *Contours of a Biblical Reception Theory: Studies in the Rezeptionsgeschichte of Romans 13.1-7* (Goettingen, Germany: V&R unipress GmbH: 2012), 184.

<sup>11</sup> Given the nature of the material we will be examining, it is only fair to warn that all attempts to ascertain what a particular father taught on a given topic inevitably require the historical theologian to systematize their findings. My presentation, therefore, of Chrysostom's teaching on justification will be setting forth his scattered and unsystematic comments on Paul's doctrine of justification in a fashion foreign to Chrysostom's homiletical style. Chrysostom certainly did not have a *systematic* or *dogmatic* position on justification *per se*, and yet he did interpret and elaborate on Paul's language of justification as he related it to Paul's broader discourse in Romans.

<sup>12</sup> I have avoided the question of whether Chrysostom has correctly interpreted the apostle Paul. As Babcock points out: "There is no simple, uncomplicated way to discriminate between what is and what is not to be reckoned genuinely Pauline." William S. Babcock, gen. ed., *Paul and the Legacies of Paul* (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University, 1990), xviii.

to what it reveals about how faith justifies. Finally, the conclusion will bring Chrysostom in dialogue with the most standard treatment on the history of the doctrine of justification in the English language by briefly underscoring one important implication of this study as it relates to Alister McGrath's critical historiography in *Iustitia Dei*.

### **Justification: Transformative and Forensic Elements**

Chrysostom treats the word *δικαιῶ* as *making* righteous, not as a *declaration* of forensic righteousness—it refers to a transformation from the power of sin to a life of righteousness. The righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith [δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν] is a righteousness Paul is exhorting his hearers to live by, not one he is declaring has been counted for them. Not only does Chrysostom not see a forensic emphasis in Paul's language here, but he argues that Paul's adding the word "righteousness" [δικαιοσύνη] in Romans 1:17 was precisely to keep his hearers from presuming a mere escape from penal consequences. "For since it is possible to be saved, yet now without shame (as many are saved of those, who by the royal humanity are released from punishment), *that no one may suspect this upon hearing of safety, he adds also righteousness.*"<sup>14</sup> The "gospel of God" [εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ] Chrysostom interprets in generic terms as Paul's rhetorical strategy for cheering his hearers at the outset, "for he came not with tidings to make the countenance sad, as did the prophets with their accusations, and charges, and reproofs" but rather with "countless treasures of abiding and unchangeable blessings."<sup>15</sup> He views the message of the εὐαγγέλιον not as a new message, but as a matter of primary emphasis. The prophets were sent with a message primarily of judgment, but Paul's message is primarily of blessings.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, he understands justifying righteousness fluidly, as referring to all the "gifts" that result from grace. He warns that the priority of the Jew in Paul's language, "to the Jew first, then also to the Greek" [Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρώτον καὶ Ἕλληνι], is not an advantage of "receiving greater righteousness, but is only honored in respect of his receiving it first. . . . Yet the first does not receive more than the second, nor he than the person after him, but all enjoy the same gifts. The 'first' then here is an honor in word, not a superiority in grace."<sup>17</sup> Here

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<sup>13</sup> By "type" I mean whether the righteousness is forensic or vital, declared *for* or indwelling *in* the one justified. By "location," I am referring to almost the same question just put in a different way, for if justifying righteousness is merely forensic it is located in the mind of God in the divine ledger, but if it is vital it would be located within the believer. Matthew Heckle helpfully refers to forensic righteousness as *extra nos* (outside of us) and vital righteousness as *in nobis* (inside of us). Matthew Heckle, "Is R.C. Sproul Wrong About Martin Luther? An Analysis of R.C. Sproul's *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* with Respect to Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Catholic Luther Scholarship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 no. 1 (2004): 89-120. Dawn DeVries rightly lists the location of justifying righteousness as one of the still contested issues on the doctrine of justification. DeVries, "Justification," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, eds. John Webster, et al, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 197-211.

<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, New Advent, <http://newadvent.org> (accessed 12.20.13): <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2102.htm>, §2.1.17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.1.1.

<sup>16</sup> Even where Paul talks about the gospel concerning the Son, Chrysostom emphasizes that it also concerns the Father. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §2.1.9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, §2.1.16.

Chrysostom uses “greater righteousness” and “superiority in grace” as rough equivalents. Elsewhere he explicitly argues that Paul calls the justifying righteousness that heals and transforms resulting from being born again and united to Christ’s body “‘superabundance’ of grace.”<sup>18</sup>

The overall point of the opening chapters of Romans in Chrysostom’s summary interpretations of Paul’s flow of thought is to downplay the importance of the Jews’ mere possession of the law and the “reasonings” [λογισμὸν] of the Greeks by exalting the superiority of faith—especially in that without faith one does not keep the law one possesses anyway. Paul’s warnings about the impartiality of God’s judgment, though concerning Jews and Gentiles “before Christ’s coming” when they had not yet “come to the times of grace,” are intended to show that the same impartiality is in play with regard to his message of the gospel.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of Paul’s diatribe concerning impartial judgment “according to works” [κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ] is to show that “the Gentile wants nothing appertaining to salvation if he be a doer of the Law.”<sup>20</sup> The intention of what follows 2:16 is to show the possession of the written Law *per se* actually creates a disadvantage for the Jew but only if that Jew does not observe the Law he possesses: “for [Paul] does not say [to the Jew] you do [the Law] but [you] know [the Law]; and approves, not followest and doest.”<sup>21</sup> Paul is attempting to humble proud Jews to help them see it is faith which brings grace that empowers one to keep the law and be righteous. In this context, faith is being exalted as the catalyst for true obedience or making righteous.

The only place Chrysostom sees the notion of *declaring* righteousness is not in Paul’s language of justification, but in the word ἔνδειξις [to evidence or indicate] but there God is not declaring the sinner or believer as righteous, but declaring his own righteousness *by making those filled with sin suddenly righteous*, an interesting case in which both the forensic and transformational notions of justification are combined.<sup>22</sup> A forensic notion of forgiveness and escape from punishment is not completely absent from Chrysostom’s understanding of justification, though he never envisions it as a “declaration” of righteousness. In the relative paucity of passages where he associates the ideas of escape from punishment and making righteous, his aim is usually to show that justification cannot be understood primarily or exclusively in terms of the former.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., §10.5.17.

<sup>19</sup> “What Jew does he here mean? Or about what Gentiles is he discoursing? It is of those before Christ’s coming. For his discourse had not hitherto come to the times of grace, but he was still dwelling upon the earlier times, so breaking down first from afar off and clearing away the separation between the Greek and the Jew, that when he should do this in the matter of grace, he might no more seem to be devising some new and degrading view.” Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §5.2.10. cf. Romans 2:16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., §6.2.17-18.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., §6.2.17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., §7.3.26. It could be noted also that whether Paul’s δικαίω is forensic or has forensic overtones as a legal metaphor does not answer the ultimate question of how Paul used it, for it is possible and fitting to the metaphor that God would consider and declare one as officially righteous *who is such*. In other words, a forensic declaration *per se* does not resolve the question of why the declaration is made.

<sup>23</sup> Chrysostom’s doctrine of justification is one example of why Needham’s assertion that “it would seem a minor strand of patristic teaching that sees justification as meaning moral transformation,” if by “moral” we take him to mean something pertaining to human actions as considered “right” or “wrong.” Justifying righteousness in Chrysostom is more than just a moral transformation regarding right and wrong action, but it is certainly nothing less. Needham exploits some of the forensic elements in Chrysostom’s teaching on justification and then races to this hasty and false conclusion. Needham, “Justification in the Early Church Fathers,” 28.

After that [Paul] shows that it was not that sin only was done away by the grace, but all the rest too, *and that it was not that the sins were done away only, but that righteousness was given.* ... If then death attained so great power from one offense, when it is found that certain received a grace and righteousness out of all proportion to that sin, how shall they still be liable to death? And for this cause, he does not say ‘grace,’ but ‘superabundance of grace.’ For it was not as much as we must have to do away the sin only, that we received of His grace, but even far more. *For we were at once freed from punishment, and put off all iniquity, and were also born again from above John 3:3 and rose again with the old man buried,* and were redeemed, justified, led up to adoption, sanctified, made brothers of the Only-begotten, and joint heirs and of one Body with Him, and counted for His Flesh, and even as a Body with the Head, so were we united unto Him! All these things then Paul calls a ‘superabundance’ of grace, showing that what *we received was not a medicine only to countervail the wound, but even health and comeliness, and honor, and glory and dignities far transcending our natural state.* .... *For it was not remission from punishment only that He gave us, but that from sins, and life also. As if any were not merely to free a man with a fever from his disease but to give him also beauty, and strength, and rank.* ... If then the latter (i.e. sin) armed death, it is plain enough that the righteousness destructive hereof, which by grace was introduced, *not only disarms death, but even destroys it, and undoes entirely the dominion thereof* ... by God and grace, and leading our life unto a goodlier estate, and to blessings unlimited. ... Doubt not then for your life if you have righteousness, for righteousness is greater than life as being the mother of it.<sup>24</sup>

For the purpose of His dying was not that He might hold us liable to punishment and in condemnation, but *that He might do good unto us.* For for this cause He both died and rose again, *that He might make us righteous.*<sup>25</sup>

For it is not the Law only that exhorts us, but grace too which also remitted our former sins, *and secures us against future ones.* ... And this he says in another passage also; ‘The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.’ 2 Corinthians 3:6 For the Law convinces of transgression, but *grace undoes transgression.* As then the former by convincing establishes sin so the latter by forgiving suffers us not to be under sin. *And so you are in two ways set free from this thralldom; both in your not being under the Law, and in your enjoying grace.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §10.5.16-17, 20-21, italics added. Cf. “That is to say, He has not only released us from our sins, but has also made us meet objects of His love. It is as though one were to take a leper, wasted by distemper, and disease, by age, and poverty, and famine, and were to turn him all at once into a graceful youth, surpassing all mankind in beauty, shedding a bright lustre from his cheeks, and eclipsing the sun-beams with the glances of his eyes; and then were to set him in the very flower of his age, and after that array him in purple and a diadem and all the attire of royalty. It is thus that God has arrayed and adorned this soul of ours, and clothed it with beauty, and rendered it an object of His delight and love.” John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, New Advent, <http://newadvent.org> (accessed 12.20.13): <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2301.htm>, §1.6. Passages like these bear resemblance to passages that come from the Reformation period concerning what has been called “The Great Exchange,” but whereas in Reformation theology the imagery illustrates a change in forensic status, Chrysostom’s language illustrates the relational and medicinal power of grace to change the identity and character of the justified.

<sup>25</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §9.4.25. Italics added.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, §11.6.14, italics added.

He does not say, it is God that forgave our sins, but what is much greater, “It is God that justifies.”<sup>27</sup>

Not only is the righteousness given by justifying grace not understood merely in forensic categories, but passages like these where the forensic notion is found are more often than not accompanied by an emphasis on the transforming and medicinal power of grace that imparts spiritual health and glory “transcending our natural state.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps here we can see the germ of what led to the prominence of the doctrine of deification in the East and why Chrysostom can be seen as a distinctly Eastern figure. He found Paul’s language of justification a window (however peripheral) into a kind of righteousness that glorifies and transcends human nature. This notion was eventually developed to the point of prominence in the East, although it remains relatively fluid and mysterious compared to the scholastic systemization of theology that developed in the West.<sup>29</sup> Chrysostom does not use the language of deification or theosis, but he does freely associate justifying righteousness with what could be considered godlike ontology: “glory transcending our natural state,” the new birth, union with Christ, “a change of habits,”<sup>30</sup> virtue, beauty, strength, rank, life, “blessings unlimited,” and “enjoying grace.”<sup>31</sup> Being made righteous by grace surely can be seen as integral to being made godlike: “For what the Only-begotten was by Nature, this they also have become by

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., §15.8.34

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., §10.5.20. Ambrosiaster, who wrote well known commentaries on the Pauline epistles around this same time, also taught that “natural righteousness gives only a *temporis justitia* and that faith must be added to give an *aeternitatis justitia*”—in other words, faith is what gives righteousness its higher and eternal aim, thereby elevating natural righteousness. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 112. This idea heavily influenced the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who structured his notions of virtue vs. theological virtue on similar grounds.

<sup>29</sup> Gavriilyuk notes concerning the doctrine of deification: “The dearth of dogmatic precision has contributed to the concept’s considerable fluidity.” Paul L. Gavriilyuk, “The Retrieval of Deification: How A Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum,” *Modern Theology* 25, no. 4 (2009): 648. For more on deification and its prominence in the Eastern Tradition, see: “Kallistos Ware, “God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence-Energies Distinction,” *Eastern Churches Review* 7, no. 2 (1975): 125-136; Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, ed. John Meyendorff (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983); Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987); Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006); Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic Press, 2007); Alexis Torrance, “Precedents for Palamas’ Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009), 47-70. Anna Marie Aagaard, “‘My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation.’ On Likeness to God and Deification in Patristic Theology,” *Religion & Theology* 17 (2010): 302-328.

<sup>30</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §10.6.3-4. Change *per se* may not be “godlike” in classic Christian theism due to the doctrine of impassibility, but inasmuch as the result of the change is a greater degree of or participation in godlikeness, perhaps the change that leads to godlike habits could be considered *in this way* godlike.

<sup>31</sup> In this respect, I find both moral and metaphysical overtones in Chrysostom’s language, not just moral as in David M. Rylaarsdam, “Interpretations of Paul in the Early Church,” in *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification*, gen. ed. David E. Aune (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 159. Rylaarsdam asserts that Chrysostom’s main soteriological image is one of union, understood in moral terms *rather than* metaphysical.

grace.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Origen, who bears heavy marks on Chrysostom’s Pauline interpretation, held that “as progress is made in virtue, the soul increasingly resembles the divine.”<sup>33</sup>

Another dynamic that makes Chrysostom’s theology of justification unique and Eastern is his insistence that justifying righteousness also brings about a superior pleasure and happiness *in this life* than what the pleasures of sin offer.<sup>34</sup> Although we find Chrysostom laying an emphasis on eschatological bliss, he is surprisingly bold in how much he is willing to say about the pleasure that is obtained and the benefit that accrues from grace-wrought righteousness in this life. “...[L]et us take up virtue and the pleasure which comes thereof. For so, both here and hereafter, shall we come to enjoy great delights, through the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup> Even when performing acts of selfless giving, it is inescapable that you simultaneously “work to your own advantage” because our good deeds do not benefit God in any way but “the whole gain accrues unto us.”<sup>36</sup> A key theme in Chrysostom’s discussion of godly living is peace, and the connection he makes between love, grace, and peace. Grace flows from God’s love and causes holiness, which in turn causes peace. His rationale for understanding grace as causing peace shows that his primary understanding of both grace and the grounds for peace is not forensic, but dynamic, relational, and transformative. Peace, which he interprets in unreserved categories of happiness, pleasure, and joy, is contingent on holiness.

*For he that holds on in the adoption, and keeps an exact watch upon his holiness, is much brighter and more happy even than he that is arrayed with the diadem itself, and has the purple; and has the delight of abundant peace in the present life and is nurtured up with goodly hopes, and has no ground for worry and disturbance, but enjoys constant pleasure; for as for good spirits and joy, it is not greatness of power, not abundance of wealth, not pomp of authority, not strength of body, not sumptuousness of the table, not adorning of dresses, nor any other of the things in man’s reach that ordinarily produces them, but spiritual success, and a good conscience alone. ... If then we wish to enjoy pleasure, above all things else let us shun wickedness, and follow after virtue; since it is not in the nature of things for one to have a share thereof on any other terms, even if we were mounted upon the king’s throne itself.*<sup>37</sup>

Although Chrysostom is not here using the word “righteousness,” both holiness and righteousness are used in his commentary on Romans as the grace-wrought alternatives to a life of sin. When

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<sup>32</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §15.8.29.

<sup>33</sup> David M. Rylaarsdam, “Interpretations of Paul in the Early Church,” 152.

<sup>34</sup> “In a ground-breaking study, *La divinization du chrétien d’après les pères grecs* (1938, English translation published in 2002), Jules Gross argued that in developing the doctrine of deification the Greek Fathers both drew upon the philosophical and religious resources of Hellenism and transcended their pagan context. The notion that human happiness consists in attaining likeness to God (*homoiosis theō*) was widely shared in late antiquity. But Christian theology transformed this common expectation by placing it in the context of Trinitarian metaphysics, by making the incarnation foundational for attaining divine likeness, and by insisting that, whatever else is meant by deification, the notion does not imply that a created being can become uncreated.” Gavrilyuk, “The Retrieval of Deification: How A Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum,” 649.

<sup>35</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §4.1.26-27.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.3.31.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.1.7. Italics added.



taking this into account, along with his primarily non-forensic interpretation of Pauline justifying righteousness, this would seem enough to conclude that when Chrysostom is speaking of “holiness” he is *not* speaking of something wholly distinct from the righteousness that justifies. We can see Chrysostom’s understanding of what grounds one’s confidence in receiving favor from God and to rid oneself of “worry and disturbance” concerning sin’s consequences—it is keeping an “exact watch” upon one’s holiness and following after virtue which produces “spiritual success, and a good conscience.” *This and this alone*, Chrysostom argues, gives one confidence before God. Whereas the role of giving peace to the believer is played by a forensic status in much Reformation theology, holiness alone plays this role in Chrysostom.<sup>38</sup> Finally, showing more certainly that the same holiness that constitutes the exclusive path to peace Chrysostom also understands in terms of justifying righteousness, he takes Paul’s verb ἔχομεν in Romans 5:1 as exhortative, which makes Paul’s logic something like “since God’s grace has made us righteous, we should therefore hold fast to peace/happiness.”<sup>39</sup> Chrysostom’s insistence on vital justifying righteousness that surpasses human nature as the only way to peace, along with his understanding of peace as encompassing happiness/pleasure in this life (not just in the next), makes his theology of justification uniquely Eastern.

### The Origin and Location of Justifying Righteousness

What is the origin and location of justifying righteousness? Here we find that while the origin of justifying righteousness is God, justifying righteousness itself resides *within* the justified. Chrysostom may not have preached of “the location of justifying righteousness” (such language is foreign to his homilies), nevertheless his assumption about where such righteousness is located is no less clear. Faith is what God considers as righteousness in the Pauline epistle and faith is within the believer.<sup>40</sup> How Chrysostom interprets Paul’s example of Abraham as one who was justified by faith indicates perhaps most clearly how he understands the location of justifying righteousness. The whole point of circumcision was to be a “sign of righteousness” for those who failed to imitate the goodness of Abraham’s soul and needed a physical sign to accommodate their spiritual blindness to Abraham’s good soul.

But he calls it a sign of the righteousness. ... “*And was it not possible,*” one might say, “*from his faith to learn the goodness of his soul?*” Yes, it was possible but you stood in need of this addition also. For since thou did not imitate the goodness of his soul, and were not able to see it, a

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<sup>38</sup> In his interpretation of Paul’s common apostolic greeting “grace and peace to you,” [χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη] he also interprets Paul’s fruits of the Spirit according to this schema, citing Galatians 5:22 which includes among them love, joy, and peace as the first three. He closes his first homily on Romans by encouraging his hearers to grow in this fruit “that we may be in the fruition of joy here, and may obtain the kingdom to come, by the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ...” Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §1.1.7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., §9.5.1. Romans 5:1: Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

<sup>40</sup> A recent Protestant theologian (unconcerned with patristic interpretations) has argued on grounds of biblical interpretation that Paul’s word λογίζομαι functions in Romans to *identify* faith with righteousness, not to make it the “instrument” of imputed righteousness as in Reformed theology (something he calls the “instrumental view” of λογίζομαι). Robert H. Gundry, “The Non-Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17-45.

sensible circumcision was given you, that, after having become accustomed to this of the body, you might little by little be led on to the true love of wisdom in the soul also, and that having with much seriousness received it as a very great privilege, you might be instructed to imitate and revere your ancestor. This object then had God not only in the circumcision, but in all the other rites, the sacrifices, I mean, and the Sabbath, and feasts. ... For this is then a sign, when the reality of which it is the sign is found with you, that is, faith; since if you have not this, the sign to you has no longer the power of a sign, for what is it to be the sign of? ... And so circumcision is ridiculous if there be no faith within. For if it be a sign of righteousness, but you have not righteousness, then you have no sign either. ... But this is not the only thing that circumcision proclaims, namely righteousness, but righteousness in even an uncircumcised man. Circumcision then does but proclaim, that there is no need of circumcision.<sup>41</sup>

The kind of righteousness, then, that justifies, is the kind that consists in the goodness of one's soul—namely, faith *within*. Chrysostom takes this even further by arguing that the whole point of *all* the Jewish rites, sacrifices, and feasts were to be signs of this kind of righteousness for the purpose of prodding and assisting others to seek this justifying righteousness. Since such righteousness is found within those who are not circumcised, circumcision points to the righteousness of those uncircumcised too, indicating that circumcision is not essential for righteousness. This also fits with Chrysostom's understanding of the overall objective of Paul's discourse on justification: to downplay the importance of Jewish distinctives ("the Law") and show how faith is superior to those distinctives—so superior that without it those distinctives become counterproductive.

It would be a post-Reformation prejudice to conclude, however, that because Chrysostom viewed justifying righteousness and justifying faith in terms of the goodness of the soul and understood its location as within the justified, that such righteousness is mere human virtue and not also the righteousness of God. In addition to other reasons (like the fact that this imposes, in Reformation fashion, a distinct and unnecessary dichotomy) Chrysostom should not be seen this way because he himself everywhere assigns the righteousness to God. Although it resides within and consists of the goodness of one's soul, it is not attained by autonomous human reasoning or labors but is a gift of God.

... [R]ighteousness, not your own, but that of God. ... For you do not achieve it by toilings and labors, but you receive it by a gift from above, contributing one thing only from your own store, 'believing.' Then since his statement did not seem credible, if the adulterer and effeminate person, and robber of graves, and magician, is not only to be suddenly freed from punishment, but to become just and just too with the highest righteousness; he confirms his assertion from the Old Testament.<sup>42</sup>

See by how many proofs he makes good what was said. First, from the worthiness of the person, for it is not a man who does these things, that He should be too weak for it, but God all-powerful. For it is to God, he says, that the righteousness belongs.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §8.4.14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, §2.1.17.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.3.24-25.

These passages not only reinforce my earlier points that Chrysostom interprets justification as “make righteous” rather than “declare as righteous” and places his emphases on the non-forensic aspect of justification (even while mentioning the forensic aspect of it), but introduce Chrysostom’s uniquely Eastern theology of synergism. The righteousness that justifies is God’s because it comes as a gift from God and humans cannot attain it on their own<sup>44</sup>—and yet they also cannot attain it without contributing something of their own: “believing.”<sup>45</sup> Before we look at Chrysostom’s synergism, which entails grasping the role of free will in faith, we must first consider Chrysostom’s fuller notion of faith and why justification happens by faith *alone*.

### The Contextual Meaning of *Faith Alone*

The language of *faith alone* can be found moderately sprinkled in a handful of places in Chrysostom’s homilies on Romans, but his meaning must be understood in light of the schema in which the language is used as well as the broader context of exegetical interpretation found in his homilies treating the Pauline doctrine of justification. Chrysostom understands faith to be a humble and empowering submission to God’s revelation that is unattainable through λογισμόν—autonomous human reasoning not humbly subordinated to faith.<sup>46</sup> When the language of *faith alone* is introduced faith is being sharply contrasted with the vice of curious questionings and scrupulously rational argumentation Chrysostom finds in Greek philosophy, where rational proofs are the required preconditions of belief; this Chrysostom clearly perceives as a prideful epistemology that leaves no room for faith, much less the place of superiority over human reason.<sup>47</sup> Justifying faith is

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<sup>44</sup> Chrysostom also holds that Jesus’ death was for the purpose of making us righteous. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §10.5.12; §9.4.25.

<sup>45</sup> Though biblical scholarship has been divided over the Pauline meaning of justification, perhaps owing to German Protestant biblical scholarship (e.g. Bultmann and H. Conzelmann) it is sometimes mistakenly assumed in biblical scholarship that if the θεου in δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is to be understood as a genitive of source and therefore as “gift” it must be equated with the later Protestant notions of “imputed” righteousness. Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 317. Although Schnelle sees δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as a “multidimensional concept” when he goes on to affirm “gift” as one of many characters the term bears in Paul, he seems to be equating it with the Protestant notion of imputed righteousness. As he puts it: “By faith, Jesus is the righteousness of God for all who believe.” *Ibid.*, 319. In Schnelle’s summary language the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is not just *through* or *from* faith in Jesus, but Jesus himself simply *is* the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. This fits better with the Protestant view that Jesus’ human righteous forensic status counts for others who are not righteous, but is by no means entailed the Greek construction.

<sup>46</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §1.1.5. What I call autonomous human reasoning Maurice F. Wiles calls *ratiocination* [λογισμοί]. Chrysostom, however, did believe human reasoning can assist faith, for he gives reason after reason why human reason cannot attain what faith can attain. It’s human reasoning *apart from faith* that is problematic for Chrysostom. Therefore, calling faith’s alternative *autonomous* human reasonings seems to better capture Chrysostom’s intention. Maurice F. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 123. Calhoun puts it this way: “the opposite of faith, then, is a meddling inquisitiveness (τὸ πολυπραγμονεῖν ἀκαίρωσ) and inappropriate thirst for knowledge.” Robert Matthew Calhoun, “John Chrysostom On ΕΚ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ ΕΙΣ ΠΙΣΤΙΝ in Rom 1:17: A Reply to Charles L. Quarles,” *Novum testamentum* 48, no. 2 (2006): 140. Elsewhere Calhoun contrasts Chrysostom’s faith with knowledge by arguing that Chrysostom “steers his audience away from the vain pursuit of heavenly γνῶσις and toward πίστις.” *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>47</sup> Chrysostom’s epistemological assumptions can be seen very clearly in his defense for viewing the bread and wine of the Eucharist as the body and blood of Jesus: “Let us then in everything believe God, and gain Him in nothing, though what is said seem to be contrary to our thoughts and senses, but let His word be of higher authority than both reasonings and sight. Thus let us do in the mysteries also, not looking at the things set before us, but keeping in mind His sayings. For His word cannot deceive, but our senses are easily beguiled. That has never failed, but this in

contrasted with “verbal disputations” and “questionings.”<sup>48</sup> Humility is central to faith and although love is the greatest virtue, humility is considered in Chrysostom as the “root of all virtue.”<sup>49</sup> The person who humbly submits to God’s revelation even when it has not been established by argument or supplemented by further explanation are contrasted to those with long beards who “puff forth great words,”<sup>50</sup> those who think they have to “know everything” and so have “ill-timed curiosity.”<sup>51</sup> Chrysostom argues explicitly that accepting what we do not understand is central to faith: “... [A]sk not then of me the counsel or mind of God. ... And if you know not the manner, take it not to heart: for *this is a main feature of faith*, even when in ignorance of the manner of the dispensation, to receive what is told us of His providence.”<sup>52</sup> This is a ubiquitous schema through which he interprets Paul’s argument for justification’s being *by faith* in Romans.<sup>53</sup> In the first occurrence of “faith *alone*,” the use of the term “alone” appears to have only the function of ruling out autonomous human “reasonings” (and here he has Greek philosophy in mind) as a way to vital righteousness, and elsewhere to emphasize faith’s advantage over mere or idle possession of the Law:

For his preaching is set forth to all alike, it knows no distinction of rank, no preeminence of nation, no other thing of the sort; *for faith alone does it require, and not reasonings*. Wherefore it is most worthy of admiration, not only because it is profitable and saving, but that it is readily admissible and easy (Sav. “lovable”), and comprehensible to all: which is a main object in the Providence of God, who sets forth His blessings to all in common.<sup>54</sup>

Paul is at great pains to show that faith is mighty to a degree which was never even fancied of the Law. For after he had said that God justifies man by faith, he grapples with the Law again. ... See he calls the faith also a law delighting to keep to the names, and so allay the seeming novelty. But what is the ‘law of faith?’ It is being saved by grace. Here he shows God’s power, in that He has not only saved, but has even justified, and led them to boasting, and this too

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most things goes wrong.” John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, §82.4. I discovered this quotation first in John R. Willis, S.J., ed. *The Teachings of the Church Fathers* (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2002), 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §2.1.8.

<sup>49</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, §9.4.1-3.

<sup>50</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §2.1.13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, §2.1.17.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, §2.1.13. Italics added.

<sup>53</sup> When Paul argues that God has made himself “known” to all people (Romans 1:19ff) Chrysostom stresses that this is “an assertion, not a proof,” and asserts that Paul does not make good on his claim with philosophical argumentation. In this way, Chrysostom is attempting to exalt Paul as an example of faith to imitate. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §3.1.19. This is how he interprets Paul’s discourse on sin that precedes his proposed solution as justification by faith. The heart of the heathen has become “darkened” because foolish men turned to their own reasoning: “And he names the cause through which they fell into such senselessness. What then is it? They trusted everything to their reasonings.” Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §3.1.21.

<sup>54</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §2.1.13. Italics added.

without needing works, but looking for *faith only*. ... *Do you see how great faith's preeminence is? How it has removed us from the former things, not even allowing us to boast of them?*<sup>55</sup>

Whether against the Jew or the Greek, Chrysostom vigorously makes a case for the superiority of faith in attaining true righteousness. Justification is by faith *alone* because true righteousness cannot be found *apart from* a humble submission to God's revelation. "Alone," in this *sola fide* is not designed to rule out all other virtues as constituting true righteousness. Rather, for the Greek this is because such divine revelation about things that transcend the natural world cannot be established by mere human reasoning; for the Jew this means mere possession of the Law is profoundly insufficient. Faith, which God considers true righteousness, is the catalyst virtue to God's blessings (the gospel) which makes the attaining of godly virtue easier and takes one beyond the realm of written law and rational morality.<sup>56</sup>

Far from viewing obedience as needing to be carefully distinguished from faith, Chrysostom everywhere associates faith with obedience, virtue, and power to do good works. Not only this, but faith's ability to empower for such obedience is precisely why it is necessary for justification.<sup>57</sup> In his long discourse on how faith saves, as he continues to contrast faith to autonomous human reason, he suddenly uses the word "obey only" where we would expect to see "faith only," treating the two as loosely interchangeable:

Do you see what a pit is that of *unbelief*? What a wall that of *faith*! For the one carried down endless thousands, the other not only saved a harlot, but made her the patroness of so numerous a people!... And one might find other instances besides these: by all which we learn, never to require a reason for God's injunctions, *but to yield and obey only*. But if it be dangerous to raise nice scruples about anything that He may enjoin, and extreme punishment is appointed for those who are curious questioners, what possible excuse shall they have who curiously question things far more secret and awful than these, as for instance, how He begot the Son, and in what fashion, and what His Essence is? Now as we know this, *let us with all kindness receive the mother of all blessings, faith*; that sailing as it were in a still harbor, we may at once keep our doctrines orthodox, and *by steering our life safely in a straight course, may attain those eternal blessings* by the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ...<sup>58</sup>

Several themes are characteristic of Chrysostom's words here: 1) his ubiquitous tendency to define faith by contrasting it to human reason and questioning, 2) his interpretation of faith as submissive obedience to God and 3) his logic of justification: faith at once makes one orthodox and places one on the "straight course" to obtain God's temporal and eternal blessings.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., §7.3.27. Italics added.

<sup>56</sup> Eno's assertion that Chrysostom was "generally a moralist as a preacher" should be reconsidered. If his homilies on Romans are any indication, this does not do justice to the way in which Chrysostom's theological framework reshaped traditional "morality" into something uniquely Christian and pregnant with theological significance. Eno, "Some Patristic Views," 119.

<sup>57</sup> Calhoun gives a penetrating analysis of how Chrysostom understands *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν* as rhetorical shorthand "to capture a whole host of narratives" comparable to Hebrews chapter 11 that chronicles the accomplishments of Israelite heroes "through faith." Calhoun, "John Chrysostom On *ΕΚ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ ΕΙΣ ΠΙΣΤΙΝ* in Rom 1:17," 136.

<sup>58</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §2.1.17. Italics added.

When understanding the further dichotomy Chrysostom sets up between faith on the one hand, and the labors or works of human reasoning on the other, Chrysostom's explanation of why justification is by faith alone *and not by works* also becomes more clear.

See the pertinacity of Paul. For since this discourse was about them that work and them that believe, he shows that *the believer works more than the other*, and requires more power, and great strength, and sustains no common degree of labor. *For they counted faith worthless, as having no labor in it.* Insisting then upon this, he shows that it is not only he that succeeds in temperance, or any other virtue of this sort, but *he that displays faith also who requires even greater power.* For as the one needs strength to beat off the reasonings of intemperance, so has the faithful also need of *a soul endued with power*, that he may thrust aside the suggestions of unbelief.<sup>60</sup>

Having said then, that he was justified by faith, he shows that he glorified God by that faith; ... Again, as works need power, so does faith. For in their case the body often shares the toil, but *in the faith the well-doing belongs to the soul alone.* *And so the labor is greater*, since it has no one to share the struggles with it. *Do you observe how he shows that all that belongs to works attached to faith in a far greater degree*, as having whereof to glory before God—requiring power and labor—and again, glorifying God?<sup>61</sup>

The superiority of faith over and against human reasonings and works can be seen by its power *to do and work* more. It is through this prism that Chrysostom sees Paul's emphasis on faith *as opposed to works*.<sup>62</sup> Faith is superior because it requires more power than the virtue demanded by human reasoning and also works more fervently than works resulting from such reasoning. "Works" in this sense is understood by Chrysostom as autonomous human reason's "works" *apart from faith* and therefore also apart from grace. It is *this* kind of "work" that will never attain true righteousness. His paradoxical understanding of justification by faith *as opposed to works* is similar to his paradoxical assertion that it only stands to "reason" that reason is not sufficient to attain true righteousness. In each case his rhetoric is aimed at establishing that faith is superior in every way when compared to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., §3.1.21.

<sup>60</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §8.4.20. Italics added. Faith is not vulnerable the way reasoning is because its foundation could never be undermined by any human reasonings or arguments whatsoever, argues Chrysostom, since it is not based on such reasonings in the first place: "How then did he become 'strong?' By trusting the matter, he replies, to faith and not to reasonings: *else he had fallen.* ... Abstaining then from curious questionings is glorifying God, as indulging in them is transgressing. ... *For such a thing is faith, it is clearer than the demonstration by reasons, and persuades more fully. For it is not possible for another reasoning succeeding to it to shake it afterwards.* He indeed that is persuaded with words may have his persuasion altered too by them. But he that stays himself upon faith, has henceforward fortified his hearing against words that may do hurt to it." Ibid., Italics added.

<sup>61</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies in Romans* §8.4.20-21. Italics added.

<sup>62</sup> This is one place where Chrysostom's tact differs greatly from Origen, who argued that faith was an inferior, secondary way of salvation condescending to humankind's failure. Where Paul speaks of the efficacy of faith, Origen brings in qualifications and limitations of faith. Chrysostom, rather than this, does just the opposite. He sees Pauline faith as something both more important than works, and yet receives part of its importance from the fact that it is the only true catalyst for an abundance of good works. Both theologians valued works as indispensable for salvation, but Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of works *by* emphasizing the importance of faith. On Origen, see Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 111-112. For a full treatment on Origen's doctrine of justification and its influence on later Christian theologians see Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 304pp.

the ways of righteousness that do not make it central (whether through possession and knowledge of the Law or through autonomous human reasonings and the labor or work of such human reasonings): human reasoning and works do not attain faith, but faith can attain an abundance of works without the need for or dependency on reasoning; reason and its works cannot attain true righteousness, but faith makes someone righteous instantly and causes one to receive all the divine blessings and work more fervently.

Similarly, the Law points to the way of true righteousness but does not empower one to fulfill its demands, but faith makes righteous and enables one to fulfill the Law and even move beyond it. Faith is “mightier” than the Law because it alone establishes true obedience to the Law. Faith “is not opposed to [the Law], but friendly and allied to it.”<sup>63</sup>

For here he shows that the faith, so far from doing any disparagement to the ‘Law,’ even assists it, as it on the other hand paved the way for faith. For as the Law itself before bore witness to it (for he says, ‘*being witnessed by the Law and Prophets*’), so here this establishes that, now that it is unnerved. And how did it establish? He would say. What was the object of the Law and what the scope of all its enactments? Why, to make man righteous. But this it had no power to do. ‘*For all*,’ it says, ‘have sinned,’ but faith when it came accomplished it. For when a man is once a believer, he is straightway justified. The intention then of the Law it did establish, and what all its enactments aim after, this has it brought to a consummation. Consequently it has not disannulled, but perfected it. Here then ... he has demonstrated ... that without the Law it is possible to be justified; ... [faith] is even in close alliance and cooperation with [the Law], which was what they especially longed to hear proved.”<sup>64</sup>

Chrysostom expands on three notions of law—there is the natural law of the Gentiles, the Jewish written Law, and the law of actions.<sup>65</sup> “Of this third there is need, for the sake of which also those two exists, both the natural and the written.”<sup>66</sup> Likewise, there are two circumcisions—one of the flesh and the other from the will or the mind, “which St. Paul requires above all.”<sup>67</sup> It is the law of action and the circumcision of the will that Chrysostom associates with faith. As circumcision was supposed to be a “sign” pointing to true the righteousness of faith, so the entire scope of the Law was to make clear the way to virtue, but true virtue and true righteousness come only by faith.<sup>68</sup> Since the purpose of law was to make a person righteous, once faith comes there is no longer need of the law—“the need of it was temporary and not absolute or imperative. And this he says also to

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<sup>63</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §8.4.14.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.3.31.

<sup>65</sup> Chrysostom understands “Law” in a generic sense to refer to the entire Old Testament. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §7.3.19. Eno, on the other hand, understands Chrysostom’s use of “Law” to refer primarily to those parts rejected by Christians, which goes against Chrysostom’s explicit qualification concerning how he understands Paul’s usage. Eno, “Some Patristic Views,” 119-120.

<sup>66</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §6.2.25. Gentiles by their faith are able to surpass the Jews and “came short in nothing” where the Jews in possession of the written law but not having faith could not obey it. *Ibid.*, 7.3.30.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, §6.2.25-27.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, §6.2.21. This gave Jews an advantage of not having to labor with reasonings and arguments to figure out the right path (even though their disobedience turns this advantage into a disadvantage by making them all the more culpable for their sins against it). Cf. *Ibid.*, §6.2.25; §6.3.1-2.; §6.2.17-20.

the Galatians, showing the very same thing another way.”<sup>69</sup> Chrysostom understands Paul to be pessimistic about humankind’s capacity for obedience to divine law apart from grace, but optimistic about faith’s ability to bring in grace and establish true obedience to divine law *and more*.<sup>70</sup> The view that law is always a temporary sign helping point the way to virtue, along with the belief that the most mature form of faith takes one beyond fulfillment of the law to a yet higher plane of spirituality, is another way we can see a distinctly Eastern view influencing Chrysostom’s theology of justification.<sup>71</sup>

Confirming that Chrysostom’s use of the language “faith alone” is intended only to rule out justification by human reasoning or mere possession of the written Law and *not* used to rule out the “works” of faith, when Chrysostom considers justification at the final judgment, he offers a linguistic contradiction: “Here also he awakens those who had drawn back during the trials, and shows that *it is not right to trust in faith only*. For it is deeds also into which that tribunal will enquire.”<sup>72</sup> In the same context he also offers a contradictory *sola*: “the doers of the Law *alone* are justified” at the final tribunal.<sup>73</sup> One is made righteous inwardly by faith, but justifying righteousness, at least at the final tribunal, encompasses faith’s expression also in righteous deeds. Chrysostom does not go out of his way here to reconcile his expressions that *only* faith justifies with his other affirmations that trusting only in faith is “not right” since the doer of the law *alone* is justified at the final tribunal,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., §10.5.20. Here we can see that Chrysostom understands the message in Romans to be more-or-less the same message Paul gives to the Galatians, “showing the very same thing” even if “in a different way.”

<sup>70</sup> As Eno points out, to claim justification through the law is, for Chrysostom, to claim justification apart from grace. He wanted the Jews to know that apart from grace, nobody can really keep the law. Eno, “Some Patristic Views,” 119. But when Eno argues that the law was intended to drive its possessors to despair so as to seek justification by faith, this can be very misleading for at least two reasons: 1) for Chrysostom, unlike Protestant theology, the ultimate purpose of the law was to make righteous, so the purpose of driving those who are not made righteous by it to despair and seek help is really penultimate and subordinate to this more ultimate purpose of making righteous (not merely being forensically declared righteous) which is accomplished only by faith bringing in grace, and 2) Chrysostom does not understand this despair in the same way Protestants have envisioned it where the despair is at the human capacity for obedience *even with the assistance of grace*. For Chrysostom the despair is only at the human ability to obey the divine law apart from grace, because with grace one not only fulfills the law, but goes beyond it.

<sup>71</sup> This view of law was common in the early Fathers, but especially in the Eastern Greek theological tradition where the concept was further developed. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 128. Origen, for example, taught that moral precepts of the law are “adapted to people at the different states of their advancement along the road to perfection.” Rylaarsdam, “Interpretations of Paul in the Early Church,” 154.

<sup>72</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §5.2.7. Justification and especially salvation as a whole depend on works although in the case of the former the role is less pronounced because of the Pauline emphasis on faith and the linguistic dichotomy between faith and works. Eno, however, inaccurately asserts that in Chrysostom no works are necessary for the obtaining of salvation. Eno, “Some Patristic Views,” 119. Cf. also “*Is it then enough, says one, ‘to believe in the Son, that one may have eternal life?’* By no means. And hear Christ Himself declaring this, and saying, ‘*Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*’ Matthew 7:21; and the blasphemy against the Spirit is enough of itself to cast a man into hell. But why speak I of a portion of doctrine? Though a man believe rightly on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, yet if he lead not a right life, his faith will avail nothing towards his salvation. Therefore when He says, ‘*This is life eternal, that they may know You the only true God*’ John 17:3, let us not suppose that the (knowledge) spoken of is sufficient for our salvation; we need besides this a most exact life and conversation. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on The Gospel of St. John*, New Advent, <http://newadvent.org> (accessed 12.20.13): <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2401.htm>, §31.1. I first discovered this quotation from Willis, *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, 292.

<sup>73</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §5.2.12. Cf. “But wherefore has He chosen us? That we should be holy and without a blemish before Him. That you may not then, when you hear that He has chosen us, imagine that faith alone is sufficient, he proceeds to add life and conduct.” Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, §1.1.4.



but given Chrysostom's theology it should not be difficult to see how this might be the case: 1) Chrysostom considers faith's works as a part of faith when arguing for faith's superiority over the "works" of reasonings, which is the most important reason why he champions justification by faith over justification by works (faith works harder than "works"), 2) faith makes one instantly righteous, but as surely as cause and effect have a necessary relationship, so the faith which makes righteous and the righteous deeds that flow from it are, in the end, viewed together as what constitutes true justification such that it is not right to trust in faith alone for justification. It is best, therefore, to see "faith alone" and the faith-works dualism in Chrysostom functioning to champion faith as the *key to* or *necessary condition of* true righteousness (only when faith is central can one be made righteous), but not as functioning to rule out virtue, obedience, and faith-empowered-works as different aspects or expressions of faith's true justifying righteousness. Only faith makes righteous (not possession of the Law or reasonings) *partly because* only faith issues in the abundance of truly righteous works.

Yet another important reason faith is superior to works is this: faith indicates a greater degree of love and affection toward God than any mere physical act *per se* or abstinence from sinful deeds.

For to abstain from stealing and murdering is trifling sort of acquirement, but to believe that it is possible for God to do things impossible requires a soul of no mean stature, and earnestly affected towards Him: *for this is a sign of sincere love*. For he indeed honors God, who fulfils the commandments, but he does so in a much greater degree who thus follows wisdom (φιλοσοφῶ) by his faith. The former obeys Him, but the latter receives that opinion of Him which is fitting, and glorifies Him, and feels wonder at Him *more than that evinced by works*. ... for he who is a believer glories again, not only because he loves God in sincerity, but also because he has enjoyed great honor and love from him. For as he shows his love to Him by having great thoughts about Him, (*for this is a proof of love*), so does God also love him, though deserving to suffer for countless sins, not in freeing him from punishment only, but even by making him righteous. He then has whereof to glory, as having been counted worthy of mighty love."<sup>74</sup>

Faith is an indication of sincere love to God and is also always a response of enjoyment to God's love. Justification results from God's love toward a sinner who deserves to suffer, but instead is freed from punishment and made righteous. Adding this type of affection to the concept of faith shows most clearly that although at times Chrysostom may use the word "faith" primarily to communicate an acceptance of dogma, it is a mistake when scholars reduce his notion of justifying faith to a merely intellectualist one.<sup>75</sup> There are at least three reasons for this. First, as we have already seen, faith is dynamic. It resides within the believer causing the fulfillment of the written and natural law; it empowers the believer to do more and greater works than those following "reasonings" apart from and unsubordinated to faith. Second, doctrine for Chrysostom includes "living aright."<sup>76</sup> Third, faith is caught in a reciprocal exchange of love between God and the justified. At least from

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<sup>74</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §8.4.1-3. Italics added. If humility is the root of virtue in Chrysostom, love is the chief virtue. Eno, "Some Patristic Views," 121. Love more than any other virtue brings one especially close to God and is the queen and chief of all virtues. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 160.

<sup>75</sup> Wiles complains that Chrysostom's notion of faith is alien to Paul because it lacks "the sense of personal union with Christ" and gives it a more "intellectualist" spin, equating it with the "acceptance of basic dogma." Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 124.

<sup>76</sup> "But what is the form of doctrine? It is living aright, and in conformity with the best conversation." Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §11.6.17.

the human side, this entails deep affection, trust, enjoyment of and admiration for, God. The righteousness of God whereby a believer is justified is not to be understood in Chrysostom merely as some strict moral or ethical achievement, but as grace inviting human faith in terms of a reciprocal relationship of divine and human love initiated by God in which grace responds to and assists human faith, issuing in right living. Although Chrysostom does not use the same language as Origen, for whom faith was identified with the adoption of the Christian virtues, he does see the chief virtue—charity (love of God)—as somehow implied by faith, in addition to viewing faith itself as a gateway virtue into all other grace-wrought virtues.<sup>77</sup>

### The Role of Grace in Justification

Once we understand that Chrysostom believes faith accomplishes such impressive spiritual feats by the power of grace, we get to the root of power and dynamism. Although faith is considered to be so powerful and mighty a virtue, this power must be seen in light of its dependence on grace. Faith and grace are so closely associated in Chrysostom's theology he uses them almost interchangeably, but when he ventures to explain their relation faith appears to be sail that catches the wind of grace:

For he that clings to the law, as if of saving force, does disparagement to faith's power; and so he says, 'faith is made void,' that is, there is no need of salvation by grace. For then it cannot show forth its own proper power.<sup>78</sup>

But what is the 'law of faith?' It is being saved by grace.<sup>79</sup>

[Paul] laid low their conceit, that being brought to a consideration of their own sins, and having emptied out the whole of their unreasonableness, and seen themselves in danger of the last extremity, they might with much earnestness run unto Him Who offered them the remission of their sins, and accept grace through faith.<sup>80</sup>

What then happens? *Faith comes, drawing on it the grace*, so that the promise comes into effect. For where grace is, there is a remitting, and where remitting is, there is no punishment. Punishment then being removed, *and righteousness succeeding from faith*, there is no obstacle to our becoming heirs of the promise.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Rylaarsdam argues that unlike Origen, Chrysostom does not present faith as “automatically entailing the adoption of Christ's virtues.” Rylaarsdam, “Interpretations of Paul,” 160. But the virtue of faith, as in Origen, does bring in the other Christian virtues through grace, and since Chrysostom holds that in justification one is made righteous immediately, his view is very similar to (if not the same as) Origen's.

<sup>78</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §8.4.14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.3.27.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.3.19.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, §8.4.15. Italics added.

Salvation in general and justification in particular are by faith because faith is the catalyst that receives, accepts, and “draws” grace. The acceptance of grace includes accepting God’s forgiveness (being freed from punishment) but also God’s empowering and righteousness. Grace reinforces faith and empowers the life of the believer in cooperation with faith.

Though faith and grace are woven together in Chrysostom’s theology in many ways, the *initial* act of faith is something uniquely belonging to the human person as their sole contribution to justification *in direct distinction from grace*. This is Chrysostom’s way of protecting the notion of free will in spite of what he acknowledged to be an apparent overemphasis in Paul on God’s grace for pastoral reasons: namely, to encourage the right religious attitude in his hearers.<sup>82</sup> However unqualified Paul’s stress on grace may be, “the words are really to be understood comparatively rather than absolutely.”<sup>83</sup> Although Chrysostom still holds the “main part” [τό πλέον] of justification issues from grace, not everything issues sufficiently from grace only.<sup>84</sup> The summaries of Maurice Wiles are helpful:

[In the end] divine grace and human freedom are in some mysterious way combined. ... [As with Origin, in Chrysostom] there is an essential initial element however small which lies within man’s power; this although inadequate in itself to achieve its goal, will be effectively reinforced by the grace of God. ... [T]he correct balance involves explicit mention of both human achievement and divine working. ... [Chrysostom] sees Paul not as a scholar concerned to propound a precise and systematic theology, but as a missionary and pastor anxious to inculcate truly religious attitudes in the lives of his people. It is to this motive that Paul’s vigorous stress on the divine initiative is to be traced. The systematic theologian will have to re-express some of his assertions in a more cautious and balanced form. But even then the grace of God is the dominant theme.<sup>85</sup>

Although divine grace strengthens and supplements human faith, Chrysostom believes that if grace is seen as the “all-sufficient cause” then “there is nothing to prevent the automatic salvation of all” since God desires most earnestly (with the “first will”) that all be saved.<sup>86</sup> Eno summarizes this well:

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., §1.1.5-7.

<sup>83</sup> Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 96. Here we can see Wilken’s truth that the early Fathers “did not follow Paul blindly. They read him critically, that is, in light of ideas and beliefs they consider reasonable and true.” Robert Wilken, “Free Choice and Divine Will in Greek Christian Commentaries,” in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, 139. In Ancient hermeneutics in general and patristic hermeneutics in particular whatever the interpreter understood as the “spirit” of the scripture always trumped the “letter.”

<sup>84</sup> Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 96. Calhoun, in his analysis of how Chrysostom understands the Pauline phrase ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, argues that Chrysostom is trying to encapsulate (by his use of ἐκ and εἰς) “the range of moral character exemplified by a range of Israelite heroes prior to their justification” to demonstrate the power of faith to save the best and the worst of people. Calhoun, “John Chrysostom On ΕΚ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ ΕΙΣ ΠΙΣΤΙΝ in Rom 1:17,” 137-38. We must be careful, however, to put Calhoun’s analysis in the context of Chrysostom’s overall theology of justification. While the range of moral character varies before one’s justification, at the moment they choose faith by their free will, this notable and virtuous act of faith becomes a catalyst for Christian virtues and the sinner is made righteous instantly by grace. Thus the range of moral character in the unjustified is not parallel to the range of the moral character of the justified. Once justified, one’s character may still vary, but only on a continuum of righteousness.

<sup>85</sup> Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 105, 107-108.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 108. Cf. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, §1.1.5.

“We cannot save ourselves, but grace cannot save us either unless we are willing.”<sup>87</sup> For this reason also predestination must be seen as based on God’s foreknowledge.<sup>88</sup> But the divine initiative and priority is not merely temporal via foreknowledge, as Wiles concludes, but one also of comparative grandeur.<sup>89</sup> While the decisive act is reserved for the free will of the human so as to protect the *imago Dei* in human nature which makes human free, this decisive act is only made once God has already done the greater act of love for all humankind, sent Christ to suffer and conquer on the cross and even sent out messengers to announce the good news. In light of all God has done, an act of embracing this, along with the aid and assistance of the Spirit to live a life of holiness, by no means makes the free will of the human recipient the priority, but only the decisive hinge on which this grace turns.<sup>90</sup> It is largely because grace cannot save apart from the free will’s choice that justification and salvation are contingent on faith, but for Chrysostom this is to protect the freedom he perceives as a part of the image of God in human nature, not to glorify the freedom of the human will. The alternative to reserving a place for the will to move without such movement being

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<sup>87</sup> Eno, “Some Patristic Views,” 120.

<sup>88</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §9.22-24. “But in saying, *which He had afore prepared unto glory*, he does not mean that all is God’s doing. Since if this were so, there were nothing to hinder all men from being saved. But he is setting forth again His foreknowledge, and doing away with the difference between the Jews and the Gentiles.” Cf. *Ibid.*, §16.9.10.

<sup>89</sup> Wiles argues that in Chrysostom’s theology “the divine priority may be maintained in terms of temporal sequence by the concept of foreknowledge, but if the divine will is determined or even guided by that which it foreknows, namely the self-determined character of man, then the real logical priority seems lodged firmly with man and not with God.” Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 103. This language of “logical priority” was used in the Medieval period to distinguish between two acts that are thought to be simultaneous in time but not by chance—that is, one of the acts is thought to be logically dependent on the other. Logical priority, however, can be considered in at least two ways. If we are considering human nature and what logically comes first between faith and grace, we can still say that Chrysostom allows for a kind of grace that precedes the humans free choice of grace and is *logically* dependent on that grace, as Christ’s incarnation and the Church that preaches his gospel before the hearer ever even hears it precede this choice and make it logically possible. But since this grace comes first *temporally* and beckons without forcing the will, it is not decisive. Once this grace is in the equation, the determinative role is assigned to the free choice of the human person. From this perspective, the determinative priority is indeed “lodged” in the free choice of the human person to protect the *imago Dei* in humanity, without which Chrysostom does not appear aware of any way a human person could be considered culpable, praiseworthy, or blameworthy for their choice. But to help put this into perspective, if grace were not in the equation as a given, the free choice of the human person would not be determinative for justification, since such righteousness is beyond the powers of human persons. For Chrysostom both the free will and the grace of God are equally determinative for justification in that both are equally necessary to justify, but the reason why free will is determinative in the theology of the Eastern fathers is because grace is already taken for granted in the temporal equation. Were the situation reversed, and the free will of persons could be taken for granted to already have freely chosen grace prior to that grace being made available, God’s grace would be considered determinative, as the free will choice alone would not be sufficient for justification, but once the grace was made available this would immediately justify. If only two conditions are necessary and sufficient for an event but cannot be met at the same time, the determinative role will appear to fall on whichever condition is met second in sequence as something of an accident of temporal sequence.

<sup>90</sup> Wiles, though believing Chrysostom is misinterpreting Paul here, argues he was following the Tradition in which he stood at this point. He also points out the Eastern understanding of the *imago Dei* relieved some of the tension between divine grace and free will. Presumably this is because if human freedom itself is godlike, even the exercise of freedom could be considered a gift. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 135-136. Rylaarsdam argues that Chrysostom believes that the human contribution to justification is more “wonderful” part of Christ’s work “because it is easier to accomplish an act that that lies in one’s own power than an act that requires the free cooperation of others.” He also puts it this way: “Putting it anachronistically, cooperative grace, Chrysostom implies, is a greater grace than operative grace.” Rylaarsdam, “Interpretations of Paul,” 160.

wholly caused by grace is to undermine the notion of free will and human responsibility by introducing free will's opposite: "necessity." This would've given further cause for blasphemy to those already accusing Christianity of determinism.<sup>91</sup> Eastern theology was forever shaped by this concern more than the Western Tradition so heavily influenced by Saint Augustine.

In Chrysostom's commentary on Romans we get a glimpse of this Eastern emphasis. The human race has always had free will, for "God made man independent, so as to be able to choose virtue and to avoid vice."<sup>92</sup> Christ "came not to destroy our nature, but to set our free choice aright."<sup>93</sup> Because for Chrysostom the very notion of obedience implies free will, and because Paul's justification discourse often mentions obedience *to* either righteousness or unrighteousness, he sees Paul placing an emphasis on free will in places where such language is used.<sup>94</sup> Paul's language of "from the heart" is understood by Chrysostom almost synonymously with "from the free will."<sup>95</sup> Chrysostom protects the notion of free will also in his understanding of God's ultimate judgment by asserting that the strictness of his judgment varies depending on the "measures proportioned to [human] power."<sup>96</sup> That some virtue or well done deed is attributed to grace in Paul's writings indicates that such virtue or deeds were accomplished by the influence of grace.<sup>97</sup> Attributing them *wholly* to grace to the exclusion of free will would be to mistake Paul's rhetorical exaggeration for the sake of effect as a denial of free will.<sup>98</sup> This, in Chrysostom's hermeneutical sensitivity, would be to interpret a few passages where Paul's pastoral emphasis seems to deny the role of free will against the larger portion of divine revelation that everywhere affirms it. The spirit of revelation trumps the letter for Chrysostom.

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<sup>91</sup> This dichotomy can be seen in the way Chrysostom formulates the options in several contexts. For example: Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §5.2.8; 11.6.12. On how Gnostic determinism shaped Eastern theology read Robert Wilken, "Free Choice and the Divine Will in Greek Christian Commentaries," in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, 123-140.

<sup>92</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §5.2.16.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, §11.6.12.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, §5.2.8. cf. "And he does not say, who are 'compelled by,' 'lorded over by,' but who 'obey unrighteousness,' that one may learn that the fall is one of free choice, the crime not of necessity." Chrysostom even argues that the Jews needed grace more than the Gentiles because the Jews thought they could be justified by their possession of the Law, which explains why Paul places so great an emphasis on grace where he addresses them. *Ibid.*, §5.2.12.

<sup>95</sup> "And he well says, '*You have obeyed from the heart.*' You were neither forced nor pressed, but you came over of your own accord, with willing mind ... For the obedience from the heart shows the free will." Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §11.6.17.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, §5.2.9.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, §2.1.11. Chrysostom at times appears to equate this influence specifically with "the assistance of the Spirit." *Ibid.*, §2.1.9. For an overview of the role the Spirit plays in soteriology of the Eastern tradition in which Chrysostom stood see Bobrinskoy, "The Indwelling of the Spirit in Christ: 'Pneumatic Christology' in the Cappadocian Fathers," 49-65.

<sup>98</sup> This is why it is inaccurate to say of Chrysostom's theology: "Divine grace and human cooperation are never read in opposition to one another or viewed as mutually exclusive," and perhaps misleading to say that for Chrysostom "faith is both a divine gift and the free response of the human person." Bradley Nassif, "Are Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism Compatible? Yes," in *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, James J. Stamoolis, gen. ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 74.

Although grace plays the greater role in Chrysostom's synergism in many ways, this initial act of faith that belongs uniquely to man's free will is still no small achievement, and even when grace is assisting it does not do all the work, for some continuous element must be reserved for free will.<sup>99</sup> Chrysostom attributes the decisive cause for both sin *and* justification to free will, the importance of which can be seen by its determinative role for human destiny in Chrysostom's conception of synergism. Culpability (for either praise or blame) is inseparably and closely tied to Chrysostom's notion of free will. When applied to sin this seems uncontroversial: if someone were forced or compelled to become a sinner against their will, they would not deserve punishment.<sup>100</sup> But when applied to merit this raises the question—does Chrysostom view grace as something that can be deserved? Does God give grace to the justified and not the unjustified based on the praiseworthiness of their free will or the blameworthiness of the same? Although in Western theology the notion of deserving grace would be for most an oxymoron, it fits comfortably within Chrysostom's theological framework that ties free will to faith.

Having said then, that he was justified by faith, he shows that he glorified God by that faith. ... [A]s believing belongs to a lofty and high-born soul, so disbelieving does to a most unreasonable and worthless one.<sup>101</sup>

Then that no one should say, How are we to be saved without contributing anything at all to the object in view? He shows that we also offer no small matter toward this, I mean our faith. Therefore after saying, 'the righteousness of God,' he adds straightway, 'by faith unto all and upon all that believe.'<sup>102</sup>

...he shows farther that Abraham's faith was deserving of the gift, that you may not suppose him to have been honored without reason.<sup>103</sup>

Abraham's faith—which in context of Paul's letter to the Romans Chrysostom understands as Paul's chief example of how everyone is justified before God—is not only honored by God, but even “deserving of the gift.”<sup>104</sup> This is not Pelagianism, but it certainly is a far cry from the utter

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<sup>99</sup> “Here then he says there are two mortifyings, and two deaths, and that one is done by Christ in Baptism, and the other it is our duty to effect by earnestness afterwards. For that our former sins were buried, came of His gift. But the remaining dead to sin after baptism must be the work of our own earnestness, however much we find God here also giving us large help. For this is not the only thing Baptism has the power to do, to obliterate our former transgressions; for it also secures against subsequent ones.” Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §11.4.5.

<sup>100</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §10.5.19.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, §8.4.20.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.3.21-22.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, §8.4.17.

<sup>104</sup> Salvation (as distinguished from justification in particular) is also based on who is good and who is worthy of it: “For ‘the children,’ he says, ‘being not yet born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, it was said unto her that the elder shall serve the younger:’ for this was a sign of foreknowledge, that they were chosen from the very birth. That the election made according to foreknowledge, might be manifestly of God, from the first day He at once saw and proclaimed which was good and which not. Do not then tell me that you have read the Law (he means) and the Prophets, and hast been a servant for such a long time. For He that knows how to assay the soul, knows which is worthy of being saved.” Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §16.9.10.

dichotomy between deserts and grace found in Reformation theology, and even Catholic theology that has been heavily influenced by Augustinian views of grace. Here we can see more unmistakably the full Eastern flavor of Chrysostom's theology of justification.

An Eastern perspective on justification would be incomplete without mention of baptism. Although there is not an equal emphasis in Chrysostom's theology of justification on baptism as on faith, nevertheless it must be remembered that the Fathers thought of baptism as faith's first tangible act and did not think of baptism as a "work" to be contrasted to faith, but as itself the first act of faith.<sup>105</sup> For this reason we see Chrysostom assigning everything to baptism that, given his theology of justification outline above, we would expect him to assign to faith. The Fathers unanimously taught that justification happens at baptism, and Chrysostom is no exception.<sup>106</sup> In one of his summary statements on justification, he seems to use "through baptism" where we might expect him to say "through faith."

And let me beg you to consider how he everywhere sets down these two points; His part, and our part. On His part, however, there be things varied and numerous and diverse. For He died for us, and farther reconciled us, and brought us to Himself, and gave us grace unspeakable. But we brought *faith only* as our contribution. And so he says, 'by faith, unto this grace.' What grace is this? Tell me. It is the being counted worthy of the knowledge of God, the being forced from error, the coming to a knowledge of the Truth, the obtaining of all *the blessings that come through Baptism*. For the end of His bringing us near was that we might receive these gifts. For it was not only that we might have simple remission of sins, that we were reconciled; but that we might receive also countless benefits.<sup>107</sup>

Here once again we see much of what Chrysostom believes about justification summed up. It is a being made righteous by grace in response to the initial act of human faith uniquely belonging to the human's free will. Justifying faith, located within the believer, humbly submitting to God's revelation, is counted "worthy" of the knowledge of God and results in the assistance of divine grace, the fulfillment of divine law, the attainment of God's righteousness, the remission of sins and the receiving of "countless benefits" that place the human in reciprocal love relationship with God, transcend human nature, and therefore transform the human more into God's likeness. And this, to Chrysostom, is one way of summing up Paul's message of the gospel in his letter to the Romans.

### Critical Historiographical Implications

Protestant historians such as Alister E. McGrath who are disposed favorably to the Reformation tradition but have managed to look more critically at the pre-Reformation corpus have argued outright the Reformation doctrine of justification that came to see justification primarily or

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<sup>105</sup> Schnelle argues that Paul "quite intentionally integrates a baptismal tradition" into his overall theology in Romans and weaves "terminology with ritual overtones" into his theology of justification. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul*, 319-20.

<sup>106</sup> And this is in spite of the fact that Chrysostom believes that once a person believes she is *immediately* justified, as we have already observed.

<sup>107</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, §9.5.2. Italics added.

exclusively in forensic terms was genuine theological *novum*—no historical precedents exist.<sup>108</sup> Such a thesis is progressive only because Protestants have long viewed similar language of justification in pre-Reformation theology as confirmation of such historical precedents, but this reads Reformation theology back *into* the Fathers—theology they would've arguably rejected given the context of theological ideas in which the language is found.<sup>109</sup> Such a biased position is not credible in the field of patristics where confessional commitments are methodologically restrained for the purpose of critical inquiry. The Reformers themselves who initially thought they were defending the doctrine of Augustine eventually realized that not even Augustine's theology of justification was fully acceptable, implicitly admitting (if ever so reluctantly) their version of *sola fide* was in fact, as McGrath puts it, theological *novum*.<sup>110</sup> It is no mere coincidence that it is McGrath also who has generated the most critically respectable answer to this Protestant dilemma. Since the publication of McGrath's tome *Iustitia Dei* it has been commonplace among Protestants to view the Latin language and culture as the prime culprit for the Catholic Church's going astray on the doctrine of justification, and this due chiefly to the ignorance of Saint Augustine who translated the Greek word *δικαιώω* as "to make righteous" instead of the more forensic "to declare righteous."<sup>111</sup> This argument can credibly be seen as McGrath's attempt to shift the culpability from the Reformers (who could be accused of novelty and contradicting the Christian Tradition) to the heavily Latinized pre-Reformation Church of the West for mistranslating the word *δικαιώω* and thereby prejudicing the entire Western Tradition to view justification in non-forensic categories. The German and French Reformers finally saw the true forensic meaning in Paul's Greek, and it was just a tragedy that the preceding Christian Tradition had misunderstood the term or were otherwise prejudiced to view it as Augustine improperly translated it and likewise improperly expounded on it theologically.

This part of McGrath's narrative is, if nothing else, a misleading historiographical oversimplification. His treatment of the "Christian" doctrine of justification suspiciously devotes less than seven pages to the pre-Augustinian tradition, hurrying along to Augustine and passing by Eastern theologians like John Chrysostom.<sup>112</sup> McGrath's explanation about why Paul's "true" meaning was missed by the early Church is also problematic on other grounds. Chrysostom was a

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<sup>108</sup> Alister E. McGrath, "Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification" *Harvard Theological Review*, 75 no. 2 (1982), 219-242.

<sup>109</sup> Such theological *novum* was decisively rejected by both Catholics and Eastern Orthodox precisely on grounds of being faithful to the Christian Tradition and thus not introducing something that would contradict the anthology of patristic and medieval teaching. The Western rejection of such ideas is well known from The Council of Trent, but the Eastern rejection of Protestant notion was equally decisive. See George Mastrantonis, trans., *Augsburg and Constantinople: The Correspondence between the Tübingen Theologians and Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople on the Augsburg Confession*, The Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources, gen. ed. N.M. Vaporis (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982).

<sup>110</sup> Heckle investigates ways the Reformers came to terms with this: Heckle, "Is R.C. Sproul Wrong About Martin Luther?," 89-120.

<sup>111</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (reprint, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

<sup>112</sup> Babcock laments that patristic studies on Pauline interpretation have "tended to fall into a distressingly stereotyped pattern," including the notion that only with Augustine did the Fathers come to a "recovery of the genuinely central motifs in Pauline thought and, in particular, a true sense for the great Pauline theme of justification by grace and faith apart from works." It has also led to the notion "that the Greek Christian tradition never did—before or after Augustine—achieve an apt appreciation of Paul and thus, whatever its other theological attainments, remained fundamentally deficient in its understanding of human salvation." Babcock, *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, xiii.



*Greek* Father and read Romans with no intermediary translation. Furthermore, Chrysostom's social location in the East prevented him from preoccupation with the Pelagian controversy. Although Augustine quotes from Chrysostom's commentary on Romans, demonstrating that he had access to it (perhaps even an early Latin translation), nowhere do we find Chrysostom quoting Augustine's *Spirit and the Letter* or other such works treating the doctrine of justification in Western fashion.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, although Chrysostom was a rough contemporary of Augustine, his homilies on Romans (written before AD 397) were not likely to have been shaped by this largely Western controversy or by Saint Augustine's doctrine of justification in particular.<sup>114</sup> Rather, they were clearly shaped by the controversies prominent in East against Gnostic determinism and antinomianism.<sup>115</sup> Chrysostom's views on divine grace and human freedom, furthermore, are in line with the tradition of Greek theology in which he stood—a major tradition neglected in McGrath's study.<sup>116</sup>

Not only this, but Chrysostom's death preceded the first publications of Augustine's polemical writings against the Pelagians by approximately 5 years, and much more did Chrysostom's homilies on Romans precede the rise in prominence of Augustine's theology of justification in the Western Tradition.<sup>117</sup> If Augustine's poor Latin translation of Paul's Greek were the source of the Catholic Church's ontological interpretation of *δικαίωω*, how does one explain why the Eastern *Greek* theological tradition also interpreted Paul's language in similar terms *before* Augustine's influence?<sup>118</sup> If anything, Augustine's (possibly Latin) reading of Chrysostom's homilies on Romans would've only confirmed his understanding of the Greek *δικαίωω* as "to make righteous," along with a chiefly ontological understanding of the location of justifying righteousness, for it must be

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<sup>113</sup> Eno, "Some Patristic Views," 119.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Wiles points out that the fear of Gnostic determinism definitely played a role in tempering statements about divine grace with an equal emphasis on human freedom and responsibility. "Gnostic determinism was something to be denounced at every opportunity." Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 134. Wilken notes that "by the time Christianity had begun to set its roots down in the Mediterranean world, there had been a long tradition of reflection on these issues," but the early church was quickly put to the test when the God of scripture appeared to place them in the camp of determinism. Thus "Christian thinkers enter the discussion on the defensive" because "outsiders thought Christians expounded a new form of determinism." Robert Wilken, "Free Choice and the Divine Will in Greek Christian Commentaries," 125. Eno also points out that "the Apologists, stung by pagan accusations of Christian libertinism, made a point of stressing Christian moral uprightness." Eno, "Some Patristic Views," 111.

<sup>116</sup> Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 94-97. It is undeniable, for example, that the importance of moral development, virtue, and the freedom of the will are shared emphases in both Origen and Chrysostom's Pauline interpretation, in spite of the fact that the schools they represent are typically contrasted—that is, the Antiochian school and the Alexandrian school. Cf. David M. Rylaarsdam, "Interpretations of Paul in the Early Church," 155.

<sup>117</sup> Up to the time of John Chrysostom's death in 407, Augustine had focused his polemical energy against the Donatists and the Manicheans. His *On Faith and Works* and *Spirit and the Letter*, for example, where he focuses sharply on Paul's meaning of justification wasn't published until 412. From 412 on he began to publish writings against the Pelagians such as *On Merit and Forgiveness*.

<sup>118</sup> As Wiles points out, Chrysostom's exegetical tact in regards to how God saves humans is representative of the whole tradition of Greek theology. He follows certain insights from his predecessors such as Apollinarius, Theodore, Diodore, and especially Origen. "With only minor alterations of detail the same exposition could serve as the description of a basic element in the thought of almost any of the early Eastern theologians. In particular a number of the most distinctive points in Chrysostom's exegesis can be traced back to Origen." Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, 97-98. It should also be kept in mind that Origen's interpretation of Paul was heavily influenced "in response to philosophical determinism, particularly to Gnostic appropriation of the Apostle." Rylaarsdam, "Interpretations of Paul in the Early Church," 148.

obvious that such meanings are not gathered merely by the way a single word and its cognates are translated into another language, but by the surrounding context of ideas in which the word is used.

The critical study of the way religious language is used reveals something crucial about both biblical interpretation and linguistics: naked language is ambiguous, especially biblical language and patristic language where a singular phrase such as “justification by faith” can potentially be inclusive of contradictory notions even when interpreted within the same biblical context. This demonstrates the determinative power of cultural and pastoral concerns and the flexibility of biblical language to be aimed in different, even contradictory directions. It seems only inevitable that Paul’s language, adopted by such different cultures, each with their own concerns, would come to bear what those cultures deemed most sacred.<sup>119</sup> If New Testament scholarship has established the truism that “it is not correct to assume that the same word carries the same meaning in every New Testament book,” then much more is it true that not every word—or even combination of words—bears the same meaning in every theologian or theological Tradition.<sup>120</sup>

The question for critical study should never be whether a Father taught “justification by faith” or “salvation by grace,” but rather how such language was understood. Finding the famed Reformation *sola* attached to such language in the patristic theology of justification should not lead scholars or theologians to rush to hasty conclusions. Even when used in conjunction with “justification by faith” or “through grace,” the *sola* is itself ambiguous apart from the ideological/theological context in which it is used. Even the same theologian may vary the uses to which she puts such language depending on such influences as: the context of biblical language, the theologian’s polemical agenda, theological genre in which it is used, cultural context, ecclesiastical context, etc.

As Rylaarsdam points out, recent scholarship has indeed advanced our understanding, correcting false conceptions. We know now that 1) there was never a singular interpretation of Paul, but a diversity from the beginning, 2) Paul was by no means a marginal figure in the early church (for orthodox and unorthodox), even before the Marcion controversy, and 3) the Greek Christian Tradition’s perspective on Paul cannot be considered “deficient” (or “Pelagian”) without such judgments involving prejudice.<sup>121</sup> From this study we can add the following: 1) Augustine was not the first theologian to contribute a significant theological understanding of justification.<sup>122</sup> 2)

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<sup>119</sup> In the West, Augustine’s concern about Pelagianism led him to focus on the doctrine of justification where he found a Pauline emphasis on grace. Pauline privilege, widespread Augustinianism and Augustinian language that happened to be the default language of the medieval church which deeply shaped the religious world from which the Reformers sprang, and the language of justification in the feudal social and legal order all came together to help give the doctrine of justification a promotion in Western theology to the status of dogma. Since Augustine’s polemics against Pelagianism determined much of his aim when teaching on justification, Western theology has always had a stream of thought where pessimism concerning human free will dictates the sort of redemption envisioned. But in the East this pessimism was not shared, and rather than Pelagianism it was Gnostic determinism, antinomianism, and later Western creedal innovation that concerned the Eastern Fathers of the Church. The predominant teaching of the Eastern Fathers remained more closely tied to early creedal theology that developed outside the rubric of justification categories. As Rusch explains, “the fact that ‘justification’ became the language of debate was determined by some specific historical circumstances.” Rusch, “How the Eastern Fathers Understood What the Western Church Meant by Justification,” in *Justification by Faith*, 131-134. Rusch argues that the language of deification that developed to a place of prominence in the East also came to bear contradictory notions on details. *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>120</sup> Rusch, “How the Eastern Fathers Understood,” 133.

<sup>121</sup> Most of these come from Rylaarsdam, “Interpretations of Paul in the Early Church,” 146-48.

<sup>122</sup> Although Western theologians for so long scorned the doctrine of deification, recent ecumenical dialogues between Protestants and Eastern Orthodox have often agreed that different historical experiences have led the traditions

Augustine’s Latin works cannot be the reason why justification was understood as “make righteous” in the patristic corpus as a whole (in both pre-Augustinian Fathers and contemporary Eastern Fathers like Chrysostom). 3) If Chrysostom’s Pauline interpretation is any indication, the Pauline language of justification by faith and grace was, far from being overlooked, taken very seriously by, and deeply integrated in, the soteriology of the Eastern Tradition, even if the language of justification never became the prominent category that captured it.<sup>123</sup> 4) Although the Reformation brought a much higher profile to the language of *sola fide*, such theological language was used before the Reformation and therefore the *theological novum* of Reformation theology must be understood in terms of *how* this language was used. Finally, 5) John Chrysostom in particular offers a substantial, pre-Augustinian and uniquely Eastern contribution to any historical treatment of the development of the doctrine of justification that should provide one of the tale-tale signs of Western bias when treated superficially in historical theology or being ignored or left out of historiographies altogether—especially in light of his historical position of power and influence in the East and his continuing influence in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition.<sup>124</sup>

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to “accentuate distinctive features of the biblical tradition” and call for “joint theological work toward the integration of” both the Eastern doctrine of deification and the Western doctrine of justification. John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias, eds., *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 17, 83. Cf. Ross Aden, “Justification and Sanctification: A Conversation Between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1994): 87-109. Such ecumenical dialogues are long overdue, but it would be more interesting to see a *resourcement* within the Eastern Orthodox tradition of their own theology on justification, one that pulled carefully from early sources like Chrysostom *before* the doctrine became the battle cry of the Reformation. This would parallel the Western theologians’ attempt to recover their own tradition’s teaching about deification. Gavrilyuk, “The Retrieval of Deification: How A Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum,” 647-659.

<sup>123</sup> I strongly disagree with biased Western Protestant writers like Stephen Neill cited by Donegan that depreciate Chrysostom’s understanding of grace, justification, and redemption as shallow. Susan Donegan, “St. John Chrysostom: An Argument for a Greater Appreciation of His Theology of Salvation,” *Diakonia*, 23, no. 1 (1990): 22.

<sup>124</sup> To see to what extent the Eastern Tradition retained the emphases found in Chrysostom right up to the Reformation period, see for example: Mastrantonis, *Augsburg and Constantinople*.

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