

Judgment according to Works in Romans: The Meaning and Function of Divine Judgment in Paul's Most Important Letter. By Kevin W. McFadden. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013, xvi + 196 pp., \$59.00 paper.

God justifies the ungodly by faith (Rom 4:5) and will judge people by their deeds (Rom 14:12). How do these truths cohere? Especially since the Protestant Reformation, many readers have found tension here in Paul's thought, even a conundrum. McFadden's revised doctoral dissertation, originally supervised by Thomas R. Schreiner and accepted in 2011 by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY), centers on Paul's epistle to the Romans, his greatest treatise on the gospel. McFadden concentrates on the motif of judgment according to works, specifically on the rhetorical function of each passage containing it. He concludes that the sole ground of justification, both now and on the last day, is God's saving work in Christ, grasped by faith. Christian obedience follows as fruit and evidence of the believer's union with Christ, a fact God will confirm at the last assize.

Chapters 1 and 9 ("Introduction" and "Conclusion") define the problem and survey proposals. Was the idea of judgment by deeds a relic of Jewish nomism that Paul never purged from his system despite its clash with justification by faith? Will the future judgment of believers determine only their rewards, their salvation having been secure from the moment they were first justified? Does justification put away prebaptismal sins, leaving postconversion sins to be dealt with at the judgment? Or did the Reformers falsely oppose faith to works in justification, heedless that Paul's polemic against "works of the law" was aimed primarily at Jewish eth-

nocentricity, not at human disobedience in general? McFadden gives sound reasons to reject all these solutions. In the first chapter he shows himself inclined to endorse the Reformed maxim that, while good works invariably manifest faith and will fittingly serve as corroborating evidence on the last day, they form no part of the ground on which people are saved (pp. 15–17). This theologoumenon returns as the grand conclusion of the study (pp. 161–63).

Chapters 2–6 provide exegetical underpinnings. Each chapter covers a Romans passage that mentions deeds as the criterion by which God will judge people: 1:18–32; 2:1–29; 3:1–8; 3:9–20; and 14:1–23. To each passage McFadden puts the same heuristic questions. Who judges (the “agent”)? Who is judged (the “object”)? What is the criterion (the “ground”)? What does judging involve (the “action”)? The answers, worked out in dialogue with secondary literature, feed into an overarching question: For what rhetorical purpose did Paul bring judgment by deeds into his argument? The first four passages belong to the opening section of Romans (1:18–3:20), where Paul sets forth God’s universal indictment of the human race without exception. In Romans 14 the coming judgment of believers backs up Paul’s exhortation to church members not to criticize one another, for all will answer directly to God. Throughout these chapters McFadden proves himself a sensitive, penetrating, and sober exegete.

Chapter 7 reviews the train of thought of the whole of Romans to determine the relationship between present justification and future judgment. The looming tribunal belongs to the worldview within which Paul’s preaching of justification is meaningful. For Paul, to pursue righteousness by works of the law and to seek it by faith are mutually exclusive alternatives. People can only be justified by faith in Christ’s cross-work (Rom 3:25–26). This holds for final as well as present justification (Rom 5:1–11, 12–21; 8:1–4, 31–39), since even where good deeds of believers are on exhibit it will ultimately be God who makes them stand (Rom 14:3–4). For Christians the cross does not replace the last judgment, but it guarantees a positive verdict. Their works will be “a necessary and significant factor” (pp. 136, 137, 138; cf. pp. 113, 152, 153, 156, 162), but not the “ground.”

One verse sticks in the craw of this thesis. Paul’s first use in the epistle of the word “justify” occurs in a description of the judgment (Rom 2:5–16) where Paul affirms, “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13). This clause caps a crescendo of parallel phrases in the preceding context, namely, that those who are patient in doing good will receive eternal life (2:7) and that glory and honor and peace will accrue to those who do good (2:10). A natural reading sees moral good done as at least part of the basis for the happy verdict, as McFadden recognizes: “The positive recompense of the final judgment is ... God’s justifying judgment of life” (p. 47), and “The ground of the positive recompense is the doing of good works” (p. 49). So McFadden’s eighth chapter has to make sense of Romans 2.

Protestant commentators have resolved the difficulty either by understanding performance of the law as a standard that no actual person meets, making 2:13b conditional or hypothetical; or else by supposing Paul hints proleptically at the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of new covenant believers, a reality he develops later in chapters 6–8, 12–15. McFadden finds both tactics inadequate. The hypothetical

approach misses the unity of the indicatives in 2:6, (7, 10) 13 and cannot account for the outcrop of new covenant terminology in 2:25–29; the view that Paul has Christians in mind fails to explain how 2:5–16 helps to consign all human beings to God’s wrath (1:18) and condemnation (3:19). So McFadden combines them. “Doers of the law” are indeed a null set, and that is Paul’s main point to which he is driving (3:20); but Paul envisages obedient Gentile Christians at this early stage of the argument (most clearly in 2:25–29) to move Jewish compatriots to jealousy and repentance.

To evaluate: In spite of McFadden’s carefully nuanced handling of the Greek text in chapters 2–6 and 8, there is an unwarranted leap from the rather modest conclusions about the rhetorical functions of Paul’s language (accusatory, hortatory) to the theological result in chapters 7 and 9. True, only Christ satisfied God’s requirement of perfect righteousness (Gal 3:10; 5:3; cf. p. 52) and opened the way for the gift of the Spirit (Gal 3:13–14; Rom 5:1–5), and so Christ’s work is the indispensable basis of justification. When God first declares believers “righteous,” that predicate is founded in Christ and not in them. Yet on the last day, when they will have done actual good by the Spirit’s enablement (pp. 147–48), will the adjective still describe exclusively what God sees in Christ and not also what Christ’s Spirit has wrought in them? Is the Spirit’s fruit only “evidence” pointing to their participation in Christ’s righteousness? Are not good deeds of Christians, on McFadden’s own showing, instances of righteousness in their own right? As exegete, McFadden avers that deeds are the “ground” of “God’s justifying judgment of life” (pp. 49–53); as theologian, he denies it (pp. 134–38, 161–63).

McFadden is well aware of the distinction between humanity fallen and humanity revived in Christ, between nature and grace. Since Paul sums up Romans 1–5 using his Adam/Christ typology—in a passage that reverberates of judgment (5:12–21)—why not use this polarity to solve the dilemma in chapter 2? That doers of the law will be justified is simply true (Exod 23:7; Prov 17:15). Applied to humanity incorporated in Adam, the category “doers of what the law demands” most certainly comes up an empty set; but applied to the new humanity in Christ, it fills up with all Christ’s members. Cannot Rom 2:13 function in either sphere, whether to support 3:20 (concerning those in Adam), or to inform 2:7, 10; 14:4, 17–18 (those in Christ)? Need these implications of a single truth be incompatible (p. 145)?

Concerning Rom 2:13 McFadden himself states, “Both one’s status before God *and* one’s individual character are in view. Those who are ethically righteous ... will be declared to be righteous at the final judgment” (p. 124). Why then fudge on “according to (*kata*) works” (McFadden: “this preposition [in 2:6] leaves room for a variety of ways in which works function as the norm of the final verdict,” p. 49)—unless to assert, from theological commitments outside the study’s focus, and in the teeth of the data, that works are “necessary” but “not the ground” of a justifying judgment in 8:1–2 (p. 136) and in 14:1–23 (p. 114)? Such keen analysis of these texts bolsters a quite different construct from the one pressed.

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