Christian history shows that outside influences have frequently determined the shape of theology and doctrinal outcomes. For example Aristotle and Plato have been genuine rivals to the apostle Paul in shaping doctrine to the extent that what many consider Pauline theology would be unrecognizable to Paul himself. One example is how Aristotle and Plato have influenced theology through the writings of Calvin.

In his 1532 commentary on Seneca's De Clementia, which was published before he accept the Protestant faith, Calvin was citing Aristotle and teaching Aristotle’s fatalism. After he became a Protestant he discovered that Augustine who had been influenced by Plato taught fatalism in a theist format and he made Augustine’s theistic fatalism his own and somehow imagined that he discovered it in the Scriptures.

David Furley says; (From Aristotle to Augustine) “Augustine … one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity … was radically influenced by Platonic doctrines.” What we have is this. Calvin originally got his understanding of fatalism from Aristotle and later got a “Christian” version of it from Augustine (who originally got it from Plato) and he made fatalism his fundamental hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture. In this way Aristotle and Plato entered the church through Augustine and Calvin. Which means the original draft for Calvin's contribution to the reformation was written by Aristotle and Plato, since Calvin’s predestination thesis was theirs long before it was his.

I have no interest in these matters from a purely academic point of view but when the church replaces the Word of God with something else it invariably replaces God with something else. A false gospel is much more than false teaching because it is always based on telling lies about Jesus and that is as bad as it gets.

Very early the original meaning of Hebrew words became lost and alien concepts were imposed on the biblical text. The key to interpreting Hebrew is its pictorial imagery which requires at least the entire sentence and sometimes the entire paragraph to interpret the meaning of the text. Hebrew is a picture language which relies on big picture imagery to capture the contextual meanings of a particular word.

Biblical language is best described as conversational Hebrew and Greek. And in that context the Old Testament definition of righteousness before God is obeying the will of God by righteous living.

“When you make your neighbour a loan of any sort, you shall not enter his house to take his pledge. You shall remain outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. ... When the sun goes down you shall return the pledge to him, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it will be righteousness for you before Yahweh your God.” (Deuteronomy 24:13)

In the situation outlined by Moses an expression of social justice becomes “righteousness before Yahweh your God.” In Deuteronomy 24:13 “righteousness before God” is a status with an existential premise that arises out of fulfilling of the obligations of Leviticus 19:18; “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This means righteousness before God is an actual righteousness not an imaginary imputed righteousness.

Obedience as “righteousness before God” arises out of faith but Old Testament faith takes the concrete form of faithfulness (emunnah). Faithfulness is the existential form in which faith in God exists. In this understanding obedience is not something in addition to faith rather obedience is faiths visible manifestation. In Hebrew thinking the instinct to trust God necessarily asserts itself in concrete action.
It is the instinct of self abandonment to God in an attitude of trust and unconditional surrender and not mere external obedience that counts as righteousness. Righteousness by faith as the Old Testament explains it is faithfulness (emuwnah) which is a moral alignment with God based on deep affection and trust. “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

## Wilenski

The biblical models for righteousness by faith are taken from the real world where God and humanity daily confront each other. So if it is true that “in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28) then it is equally true that how “we live and move and exist” is very much the focus of our status before God.

In the Old Testament righteousness before God involved personal encounter in a moral interaction between the believer and God based on doing the will of God. “It will be righteousness (tsēdaqah) for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God as He commanded us.” In this context righteousness before God involves a behavioural acknowledgment that God exists. (Deut. 6:25)

In the Old Testament the individual's relationship to God is not premised on lifestyle in terms of obeying rules and regulations but on the primary instinct of loyalty to God based on His loyalty to us. Just as God reaches out to us with kind intention so we respond to Him and obey from the heart out of true affection.

“Listen obediently to My commandments ... and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul ...”

“This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have today declared the Lord to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice.” (Deuteronomy 11:13-14, 26:16-17)

Only those who “listen to His voice” within the context of a personal relationship are “righteous.” Their righteousness is the spontaneous response “to love Yahweh your God and to serve Him with all your heart and soul.” There are rules and guidelines in the relationship but these rules are at the boundaries of the relationship and not at the center. The motive for true obedience is the call to “listen to His voice.”

Walther Eichrodt tells it straight; “Post exilic prophecy leaves no doubt that on man's side an inner turning of the whole being away from sin, and a sincere turning to the personal God, are the indispensable prerequisites of the forgiveness of sins.” (Theology of the Old Testament SCM 1967 Vol.2 p.473)

In Genesis 18:23-32 God told Abraham; “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, I will spare the whole place on their account.” Jeremiah 5:1 says; “Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem ... if there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, then I will pardon [Jerusalem.]” The reference to individuals shows that God personalizes all His relationships. It means that He determines who is righteous, or otherwise, on a one on one basis, and not by indifferent wholesale reckoning. There is no such thing as universal forgiveness in which the individual becomes indistinguishable from the group.

“When God’s righteous judgment is revealed! He will give to each one according to his works: eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works ... but wrath and anger to those who live in selfish ambition and do not obey the truth but follow unrighteousness. There will be affliction and distress on everyone who does evil ... but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.” (Romans 2:5-10)

## Christensen

When Paul declared God “will reward each one according to his works: eternal life to those who practice good works” he was repeating the testimony of Jesus; “if you wish to enter into [eternal] life, keep the
commandments.” (Matthew 19:17) However, keeping the commandments in itself does not provide access to heaven. The function of obedience is to provide a medium of communication with a Holy God.

What Jesus and Paul are saying is if you want to receive eternal life you must be loyal to God. If you want to get from one city to the next you must travel on the right road. In Hebrew thinking if you want God’s blessing you must follow the path He has outlined, being on the right path has nothing to do with merit.

“Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.” “My steps have held fast to Your paths My feet have not slipped.” Make me know Your ways Lord; teach me Your paths.” “Teach me Your way, Lord and lead me in a level path.” “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” “Many people will and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord .... that we may walk in His paths.” “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.” (Psalms 119:35, 17:5, 25:4, 27:11,119:105, Isaiah 2:3, Jer. 6:16) The idea of obedience as walking in the right path has no connection to a vertical concept of merit. Righteous is the quality of our response to God’s initiative when He seeks to make us His people. In this context the divine offer always precedes the human response so that no ethical basis for merit can exist. Deuteronomy 6:25 explains what righteousness before God means. “It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, as He commanded us.” “Not the hearers of the Law are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law will be righteous.”(Romans 2:13)

In the Scriptures obedience and disobedience have consequences that have nothing to do with the historical debate over the relationship between justification and merit. Consequences are like gravity they are part of the order of things. If I throw a rock into the air I am not the cause of it coming down. In the same way my obedience does not cause the consequences that are attached to it. God alone is in charge of the consequences and I am merely on the receiving end and if I obey I get a benefit that I did not cause.

There is no meritorious outcome for walking in right “path” there are only consequences determined by our choices. God said He will bless those who obey Him and punish those who disobey. Our choices are not about rigorously keeping rules but about making a decision for or against God. The Torah is not static law but represents personal will; therefore obedience becomes a moral issue that has consequences.

Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21) At the same time it is just as Paul said, righteousness is “apart from the law.” (Rom. 3:21) This means obedience is necessary for righteousness but not the cause of righteousness, is necessary for the reason God says it is necessary. Obedience that is necessary because God says it is necessary can be necessary without in any way being meritorious.

Luther pointed out in that the realm of ethics a thing can be “necessary” without being meritorious. “We maintain contrition does not merit the forgiveness of sins. It is indeed necessary for the forgiveness of sins, but it is not the cause. Many things are necessary which are not causes.” (LW Vol. 34 p.171)

Wilenski

The doctrine that limits righteousness by faith exclusively to the elimination of forensic guilt is the greatest delusion in the history of religion. When you see “universal” “forensic” and “unconditional” headlining the gospel you are reading heretical doctrine. Jesus said; “if you would enter life keep the commandments.” I fail to see how anybody can call Jesus’ salvation doctrine forensic. (“Matthew 19:17)

Historically Protestantism has been inclined to interpret faith (pistis) as a passive cognitive concept. However, the words for faith in Hebrew (‘aman /emwunah) have distinct existential meanings in the
sense that emuwnah is an obedience invested with all the properties of trust in God. For Paul saving faith is becoming “obedient from the heart” (Romans 6:17) which is the Hebrew concept of emuwnah.

In many contexts emuwnah is identified as the equivalent of tsedaqah meaning that tsedaqah is not imputed to an individual on account of faith but rather that emuwnah is “righteousness” all by itself.

In the Old Testament Israel was saved by God’s faithfulness (emuwnah) which in numerous places is the equivalent of His righteousness (tsedaqah). “I do not hide Your righteousness (tsedaqah) in my heart; I speak of Your faithfulness (emuwnah) and Your saving help.” “Your faithfulness (emuwnah) reaches to the skies. Your righteousness (tsedaqah) is like the mountains of God.” “Answer me in Your faithfulness, (emuwnah) in Your righteousness (tsedaqah).” (Psalms 40:10, 36:5, 143:1)

If God’s emuwnah is His righteousness the believer’s emuwnah is their righteousness. That is how Paul explains it in Galatians 3:9 (ASV). “So then they that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” A reading of Romans 4:5 with a Hebrew accent would read, “faithfulness is counted as righteousness.” Faithfulness has no merit it is the bonding agent in a personal relationship between God and the believer.

The people of God are people of emuwahh; “to the faithful you show Yourself faithful.” (Psalm 18:25) Protestantism wrongly teaches that Jesus’ earthly obedience is imputed for “righteousness.” However, in Scripture it is the believer’s own faithfulness that is counted as “righteousness.” “To the one who does not work, but trusts in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faithfulness is credited as righteousness.”(Rom 4:5)

In his citation of Genesis 15:6 Paul is quoting from the LXX which employs the phrase logizomai eis for “reckoned to him as righteousness.” However the Hebrew behind the LXX is the phrase hashab l’r. The meaning of hashab l’r is “to consider a thing to be true” meaning emuwahh/faithfulness constitutes “true” righteousness. Gerhard Von Rad points out (The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other p.125) that hashab l’r in Hebrew “refers to the value of an object” meaning emunah in itself constitutes “righteousness.”

Proof that pistes in Romans 4:5 represents the Hebrew word emuwnah and means “faithfulness” is found in Galatians 3:9 (ASV) where we are told, “they that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” If faithful Abraham is the prototype of all who are found righteousness before God of necessity an identical faithfulness is the fundamental existential requirement for all who participate in Abraham’s blessing.

The apocryphal writings are not inspired but they do contain standard and accurate biblical formulas. “Was not Abraham found faithful ... and it was imputed to him for righteousness?”(1 Maccabees 2:52)

At its center ‘emuwnah is an activity or moral response that is engineered by a deep-seated commitment to God. The apostle John defined ‘emuwnah as faith in action. “Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers.” (3 John 1:5)

If we take 3 John 1:5 as a biblical definition then faith saves as emuwnah or faith “acting faithfully.” Justification by faith “acting faithfully” is not justification by “works” but justification by a faith which works. As the brother of Jesus put it; “faith was working with [Abraham’s] works, as a result ... faith was teleioō” or brought to completion. Faith and works merge into one constitutes emuwnah. (James 2:22)

Christensen

The error in forensic justification based on the imputed obedience of Christ is that the imputation of Jesus’ personal holiness is intended to make the sinner worthy of the forgiveness of sins so that no real forgiveness takes place. In the forensic gospel forgiveness is a reward for having kept the law perfectly in Christ. Such a forensic forgiveness is not based on free grace but on imputed righteousness by works.
The biblical teaching that faithfulness or *emuwnah* represents “righteousness before God” is not a performance-based concept. The reason is *emuwnah* itself is not an act but a disposition of the heart which fulfils the divine requirements spelled out in Deuteronomy 11:22; “to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him.” It is the one who gives their heart to God who is “righteous.”

In the New Testament righteousness before God is based on receiving Jesus and participating in His death and resurrection by being joined to Him in the Spirit. Salvation is about becoming “one Spirit with Him.” (1Cor.6:17) The resurrected Jesus constitutes a new humanity and when He is received in His heavenly mode as the “Spirit of Christ” we are joined to Him in such a way we receive His identity before God.

Galatians 2:16 with a Hebrew accent produces the following; “A man is not righteous (*tsadaq*) by the works of the Law but through *the faithfulness (emuwnah) of Christ Jesus*, we have trusted (*aman*) in Christ Jesus, so that we may be righteous (*tsadaq*) by *the faithfulness (emuwnah) of Christ*.”

In Paul's teachings Jesus “faithfulness” or righteousness is not imputed to us in forensic terms rather our earthly existence becomes a replay of Jesus’ earthly existence. “It is no longer *I* who live, but *Christ* lives *in me*. So the life I now live ... I live because of *the faithfulness* of the Son of God.” (Galatians 2:20 NET)

Righteousness by faith is participating in “the faithfulness of the Son of God” and “carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (2Corinthians 4:10)

The central element in Jesus faithfulness is His death on the cross so accepting Jesus as our faithfulness exalts the cross. Believing in salvation by Jesus faithfulness is the only thing that gives the cross its meaning. Receiving Jesus as *Spirit* who registers His faithfulness in us is God’s only method of salvation.

Paul draws attention to the faithfulness of Christ at two distinct levels. Jesus’ faith or faithfulness is His obedience to God that controlled His entire earthly existence and led Him to willingly submit to the cross. Secondly, the faith/faithfulness of Christ's is the basis of the believer's new existence made possible by having Christ dwell in them. In this way the faith/faithfulness of Christ is the energy that made salvation possible and at the same time the energy that enables the sinner to enter into a faith relationship with God.

When Paul writes about “the faithfulness (emuwnah) of Christ Jesus” he is referring to *an inward reaching out for God* which permeates all the volitional faculties and which constituted the bedrock of the man Jesus’ relationship to God. When we receive Jesus the righteous energy that permeated His humanity is transferred to us and with Christ dwelling in us that is how we live by the faithfulness of Christ.

According to Paul when a believer is joined to Jesus they enter into an existential sympathy with His earthly history by continuously “carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (2Corinthians 4:10) In this experience what once took place in the life of Christ is now actualized in them by having Jesus as “Spirit” dwelling in them as their Higher Self.

When it says in Revelation 2:10 “be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” we have already done that in Jesus and *so the promise given to the faithful is ours*. “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness.” Jesus’ faithfulness becomes our faithfulness. (1Samuel 26:23)

Wilenski

According to Paul “justification” is not something acquired by “imputed righteousness” but by union with Christ in the Spirit. “For by *one Spirit* we were all baptized into one body” [by] “the Lord is the Spirit.”
“Now the Lord is the Spirit ... we all ... are being transformed ... [by] the Lord, the Spirit.” (1Corinthians 6:17, 12:13, 2Corinthians 3:17-18)

Paul also wrote; “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”(Romans 8:9)

So you can see that union with the living Jesus received as the “Spirit of Christ” is the only medium of righteousness before God. Jesus’ death on the cross as an isolated event justifies no one. It is only when we receive Jesus Himself that He becomes our alter ego before for God. Righteousness by faith is a participation in His spirit of faithfulness so that in Him we constitute a humanity that is faithful to God.

How do we receive Jesus? We “put him on” and are “clothed” with Him; “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”1 “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”2 This model requires a participation in Jesus that the concept of “imputed righteousness” does not cater for. The reason for that is in this model union with Jesus is an existential union that takes place on earth. (1Rom. 13:14 2Gal. 3:27)

The historical faithfulness of Jesus continues on in the life of the church. “Jesus death is an act of faithfulness that simultaneously reconciles humanity to God and establishes a new reality in which we have set free from the power of sin, able to conform to the pattern of His life. … the faith(fullness) of Jesus Christ becomes the animating force in our life.” (Richard Hays, The Faith of Jesus Christ p.32)

The idea righteousness by faith is a one off forensic heavenly reckoning has no support in Scripture. “The Lord will repay each man for his righteousness and his faithfulness.”3 “David ... walked before you in faithfulness in righteousness.”4 He who “keeps my rules by acting faithfully - he is righteous.” 5 “David ... was faithful to you and righteous.”6 (1Samuel 26:23, 21Kings 3:6, 3 Ezekiel 18:9, 41Kings 3:6)

In the context of a personal relationship emunah (faithfulness) is the practical (non meritorious) requirement for being righteous (tsĕdaqah). To a holy God “sin” is not mere human failure it is the rebellion of rational creatures and an intended or indifferent repudiation of His cosmic authority. According to the specific conditions set by God no one can be “righteous” who deliberately practices sin.

If only the faithful are declared righteous there can be no deliberate sin. “If we deliberately keep sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” (Hebrews 10:26)

Habakkuk demonstrated what ‘emuwnah is when he wrote; “Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to go on the heights.”

Another example of ‘emuwnah identical to Habakkuk is found in Psalm 27:3 David declares, “Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.” In these examples ‘emuwnah is not a cognitive conviction that a thing is true but an act of the will. At its center ‘emuwnah is an activity or moral response that is engineered by a deep-seated commitment to God.

We are saved by the faithfulness of Christ as Jesus revealed it in His life and then manifests it in our life.

Christensen

The Protestant teaching that we are saved by the imputation of Jesus’ earthly obedience which allows God to imagine that somehow we perfectly kept the law is totally unsupported by the biblical evidence. Biblical righteousness is an existential (actual) “righteousness” and not merely an imputed forensic status.
A clear definition of *a concrete righteousness by faithfulness* is found in Psalms 106:30-31. “Phinehas stood up and interposed ... and *it* was reckoned to him for righteousness.” Phinehas’ righteousness was not something imputed because of his faith, it was the exact opposite, *'emuwnah was* his righteousness.

Righteousness before God is what it says, it is *living righteously* before God; “This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. *You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.*” “It will be righteousness *(tsēdaqah)* for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God as He commanded us.” (Deuteronomy 11:14, 6:25)

Jesus did not subscribe to the doctrine of salvation by “faith only.” “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”¹ “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”² “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”³ (Matthew 7:21, 19:17, Luke 13:24)

In the biblical doctrine of righteousness by faithfulness *'emuwnah is not salvation by doing good works.* It as an existential environment in which *'emuwnah is the expression of a deep-seated reaching out for God. In fact at its very center 'emuwnah is not a human activity at all is a work of the Spirit of Christ drawing the believer out of themselves into fellowship in the Spirit and into a life of authentic righteousness.

In Paul's writings the expression “righteousness by works” has a technical meaning. It refers not to *what* is done but to the *motive* for doing it. There is no special category of “righteousness by works.” Anything and everything can be righteousness by works. It can be shown that the doctrine of righteousness by faith only is a form of righteousness by works and that the forensic gospel is actually based on legalism.

The engine driving righteousness by faithfulness is unconditional submission to God based on genuine affection for God. Righteousness by faithfulness is not a human work it is something God causes to happen. In truth *'emuwnah is God's gift to us. “I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”* (Ezekiel 36:26)

Entry into faithfulness is God’s work in us. “I will pour out ... the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10)

The faithfulness by which we become righteousness before God had its beginnings in the man Jesus whose faithfulness to God led Him to the cross. And this faithfulness of Jesus by which we are accounted righteous before God is only ours because Jesus dwells in us manifesting His faithfulness through us.

In Galatians 3:20 (NET) Paul says “the life I *now live in the body*” is a manifestation of “the faithfulness of the Son of God.” He writes, “I have been crucified with Christ, *it is no longer I who live,* but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God.”

Becoming “righteous” before God on account of Jesus faithfulness in us is not righteousness by works. Our participation in Jesus’ faithfulness by having Him dwell us is a participation in the life of God. Righteousness by Jesus’ faithfulness in us is God's method of establishing the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus faithfulness in the people merely registers Jesus presence in the people and that is what counts.