

Gathercole begins his work by summarizing how recent contributors to the debate over preexistence have seen it as a latecomer to the NT or have accounted for it in terms of a Wisdom Christology that may not entail actual prior existence.

Gathercole responds to the consensus in four stages. First he argues (from Paul, Hebrews, and Jude) that the pre-AD 70 evidence overwhelmingly indicates that Christians widely accepted the doctrine of preexistence. It would be strange, then, if the Synoptic Evangelists were either not aware of this doctrine or did not also hold to it. Indeed, an initial survey of the Synoptics establishes that Jesus is portrayed as “transcending normal human limitations,” so preexistence seems a natural corollary.

Gathercole’s second step is the heart of his argument and also his original contribution to the debate. Here he focuses on the “I have come” (*ἦλθον/ἦκα*) sayings in the Synoptics as the best evidence for preexistence Christology in these works. While some exegetes have explained these as indicating merely prophetic or messianic aspects of Jesus’ ministry, Gathercole contends that they must be taken as indicating Jesus’ purpose for His entire life (not just one event or activity in His ministry) and that the “coming” of which Jesus speaks is thus a coming from heaven to earth. For support, Gathercole adduces a multitude of parallels from early Jewish literature where angels use the same formula to state the purpose for their visit.

Third, Gathercole attempts to show that the idea of Wisdom Christology, sometimes used to argue for and explain preexistence in the Synoptics, is a “blind alley” unsupported by the texts themselves. Fourth, Gathercole concludes his argument by discussing whether the titles commonly applied to Jesus in the Synoptics (Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Lord) constitute evidence for preexistence. He tentatively determines that each of these titles might possibly have connotations of preexistence, especially the “Son of Man” title, which is often linked with a “coming” motif. He does not, however, think that this is as strong an argument as the numerous *ἦλθον* sayings. In a final chapter Gathercole addresses modern theological concerns with the concept of preexistence.

Gathercole is to be commended for producing an engaging and very well-researched work. In my criticisms, I will focus on Gathercole’s primary contention, namely that Jesus’ “I have come” sayings in the Synoptics indicate his preexistence. Gathercole’s logic is this: Jesus’ formula sums up his whole life and ministry and states that he has come from one place to another place for this purpose. Because his whole life and ministry is in view, he must be claiming to have come to earth from heaven where he preexisted. It appears to me that this line of argumentation has several flaws. First, none of the sayings explicitly states that Jesus’ whole life is in view, from birth to death. Why not take the *ἦλθον* sayings as a reference to Jesus’ relatively brief ministry? On this reading Jesus would be claiming no more than to have come from God to Israel on a prophetic mission. The idea of coming from God in no way requires preexistence; in the OT, prophets routinely come from God (the “divine council”) to their own homeland on a mission.

Second, even if we accept that the *ἦλθον* sayings speak of Jesus’ coming into the world, must we necessarily understand this as indicating anything other than His birth (commonly referred to in Jewish literature as “coming into the world”)? In this regard, John 6:14 is relevant, for the crowds expected a prophet “who is to come into the world.” It is highly unlikely that they expected this prophet to be preexistent, yet they used the phraseology which, Gathercole claims, entails preexistence. Were they really expecting anything more than that this prophet will be born? Similarly, John 18:37 seems to identify “coming into the world” with “being born” when it uses the two phrases in parallelism: “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into

the world, to testify to the truth.” Further evidence is John 1:6–7, where John the Baptist is said in v. 6 to have been “sent from God,” which is subsequently restated in v. 7 as, “he came to testify.” Shall we then deduce John’s heavenly preexistence as well?

Third, Gathercole argues that preexistence is the only possible explanation for the *ἦλθον* sayings. He does not address, however, the problem that no character in the Synoptic Gospels ever gives any indication that he or she takes it this way. Indeed, Gathercole fails to respond (p. 158) to H. Arens’s position that the sayings in their original *Sitz* did not imply preexistence but only came to do so when they were incorporated into the Gospels much later, by which time preexistence had become a presupposition. If Jesus’ original audience could understand the *ἦλθον* sayings without recourse to a concept of preexistence, then it seems Gathercole’s argument is substantially weakened.

In spite of these criticisms, I found Gathercole’s work helpful in many respects. He provides a succinct and insightful overview of the current debate over preexistence and his exegesis of the numerous relevant passages is thorough and insightful. Especially welcome is his critique of the Synoptic Wisdom Christology hypothesis, which, as he ably shows, is a hybrid of very speculative source-critical theories and maximalist exegesis. Furthermore, his chapter-length treatment of Matt 23:37 does demonstrate the presence of a preexistence concept in this pericope. One might only wish he had made that and similar passages the cornerstone of his argument, instead of the *ἦλθον* sayings.

Gathercole is yet another voice in a rising scholarly chorus (see, e.g. recent work by Bauckham, Hurtado, and Hengel) asserting that a high Christology developed very early on and was not the result of a Hellenized misunderstanding of Jewish teaching (Bousset’s long-accepted theory). For this trend, and Gathercole’s contribution to it, evangelicals can be thankful.

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Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Imputation. By Brian Vickers. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006, 254 pp., \$14.99, paper.

Anyone who has been paying attention to evangelical theology in North America knows that the doctrine of justification has become quite a hot topic. Not only has the New Perspective on Paul offered a challenge to the traditional Protestant formulation (e.g. James Dunn, N. T. Wright), but so have some dissenting voices from within the conservative sector of the evangelical fold (e.g. Robert Gundry).

In 1999, when *Christianity Today* published “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,” Robert Gundry responded by saying, “the doctrine that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believing sinners needs to be abandoned,” and, “that doctrine of imputation is not even biblical.” The opinion that Gundry expressed has become somewhat of a standard view among scholars of the NT, and this departure has caused no little controversy among evangelicals who continue to regard the doctrine of imputation as a crucial biblical teaching (see the exchange between Gundry and Thomas Oden in *Books & Culture* as well as the essays by Gundry and Carson in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates?*).

Brian Vickers enters this fray with *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation*. Vickers is a NT scholar by training, but he goes against the tide of his guild by defending the traditional Protestant formulation of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, though he does so in a way that interprets key Pauline texts in a non-traditional way.

After a brief introduction, chapter 1 introduces the reader to the history of interpretation of the key texts—a history that begins with Martin Luther and traces through the modern day. Chapters 2 through 4 consists of Vickers's exegesis of three Pauline texts that have had a central place in discussions of imputation: Romans 4; 5:19; and 2 Cor 5:21. In each of these texts, Vickers contends that there is a subject, an action, and a result.

	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Result</u>
Rom 4:3	Abraham	Faith	Reckoned righteousness
Rom 5:19	Christ	Obedience	Made righteous
2 Cor 5:21	God	Made Christ sin	Became righteousness

Though the subjects and actions are different, all of these texts result in righteousness to the sinner. Chapter 5 synthesizes the Pauline teaching with respect to imputation and answers objections to the traditional formulation of the doctrine. Chapter 6 concludes with a summary of the book's arguments and a recapitulation of the book's thesis that Paul teaches Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer.

I noted above that Vickers argues for imputation in a non-traditional way. What I mean is that he comes to his conclusions through an exegesis that is decidedly non-traditional. Vickers writes, "No single text contains or develops all the 'ingredients' of imputation . . . Taken alone, not one of the 'key' texts that have played such an integral role in the historical discussion [of imputation] argues decisively, or explicitly, for a full-orbed doctrine of imputation" (pp. 18, 235). For Vickers, not even Romans 4 (in which *logizomai* figures so prominently) teaches the full-blown doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Thus, even though traditionalists may like Vickers's theological conclusion affirming imputation, they may chafe at some of his readings of particular texts. But Vickers's approach to these Pauline texts should not diminish the fact that his argument taken as a whole comprises a thoroughgoing defense of the traditional view. Vickers is showing that even though Christ's righteousness is never explicitly named as that which is imputed (as Gundry charges), the doctrine is the necessary correlation of a synthesis of Paul's teaching.

Traditionalists will continue to debate Vickers's description of the imputation of Christ's active obedience. In traditional formulations, Christ's active obedience refers to the life of obedience to God's law that Christ rendered in His incarnation. Such obedience to God's law is the obligation of every person, but no person ever achieves it. Vickers thinks that Paul does not necessarily have this total obedience to the law in mind when speaking of Christ's obedience in Rom 5:19. Rather, Paul has in mind Christ's obedience to the point of death on the cross. This obedience cannot be neatly separated from Christ's total obedience to God's law, but this singular act of obedience on the cross is nevertheless the focus in Paul. Thus, Vickers suggests a redefinition of Christ's active obedience (pp. 196, 198, 226–28) that may not fulfill the so-called "covenant of works" (which is a central feature in covenant theology).

Vickers has done a masterful job in *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*. Not only is it an indispensable introduction to the issues at stake in the current debate, it also offers a compelling interpretation of Paul that affirms the traditional formulation of imputation. Pastors, professors, and seminary students stand to gain much from

Jesus' Blood and Righteousness. There are very few books like this one, and anyone who is concerned about biblical theology should give this volume careful consideration.

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Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity. By William S. Campbell. London/New York: T & T Clark, 2006, 224 pp., \$120.00, cloth.

In *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, William S. Campbell, Reader in Biblical Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter, has produced a wide-ranging and insightful work on Paul's role in the formation of Christian identity in the earliest period of the Christ-movement. He interacts with the concept of universal Christian identity and concludes this concept is not sufficiently nuanced and argues that particularized identity is more reflective of the realities of the early Christ-movement. The book is well structured and readable and provides a nice overview of Pauline scholarship as it relates to Paul's mission and strategy while providing scholars with the necessary material for furthering the discussion. Campbell, editor of the *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, has reflected and written on the topic of identity formation since the early 1990s in, for example, his monograph *Paul's Gospel in Inter-Cultural Context*. His insights are reflective of a seasoned scholar who does not attempt to overreach in his conclusions but allows the strength of his arguments and the biblical material to direct the reader to a more precise understanding concerning the nature of early Christ-follower identity.

The main text of the book is without typographical errors, though I did note a few omissions in the bibliography. These, however, are extremely minor quibbles in an otherwise well-researched and well-written book that fills a void in the current literature on identity formation.

Campbell immediately narrows the focus of this book to the identity of Jewish people in the first century of the Common Era. He begins by interacting with the constructivist approaches to ethnicity of Jonathan Hall, Fredrick Barth, and Philip Esler, while finding much to commend in their work he opts for a stronger component for the "primordial aspects of ethnicity" (p. 5) when reconstructing Jewish identity because of their status as a minority group and the constitutive role that Roman imperial ideology played on their self-understanding. Campbell understands Paul to be an individual who was not looking to eradicate ethnic distinctions or encouraging Gentiles to become Jews. His strategy and mission, however, required "a transformation in the symbolic universe of these peoples in the light of the Christ-event." (p. 8) This was a proposition, sadly, that was ultimately rejected and that rejection led to two very different paths throughout history. Campbell sees Paul as establishing community within the context of difference. He questions the scholarly consensus concerning equality and the elimination of difference in Christ. Building on the work of Iris Young, the author calls for an approach that emphasizes "the politics of difference in the contextuality of existence" which ultimately produces "a paradigm very different from historic Paulinism." (p. 10) This is an apt description of what Campbell is attempting to do in *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*. His aim "is not only to consider historical and social aspects of identity, ethnicity, and difference in the first century but to include, in