'The "New Perspective" at Twenty-Five"

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Justification and Variegated Nomism

Volume II

The Paradoxes of Paul

edited by

D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid

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1. The “New Perspective” at Twenty-Five

by

STEPHEN WESTERHOLM

“Even a child,” the Good Book tells us, “is known by his doings.” The “new perspective on Paul” is hardly still in its childhood: a quarter century has passed since it came to birth through the labors of E. P. Sanders, and nearly as long since it was christened by James D. G. Dunn. Yet to this day scholars cannot agree whether its appearance was a Good Thing. For the moment, at least, a survey of scholarly responses can only document diversity.

Any survey must make some attempt at categorizing the material under review while acknowledging that classifications based on other criteria would result in the inclusion of different studies and in different alignments of those considered. In what follows I will, after a brief review of Sanders’s work, begin with those who agree with him both that the “Judaism” of Paul’s day was not “legalistic” and that Paul did not think it so, though they may disagree on whether, or in what way, Paul found fault with his ancestral faith. From these generally positive responses I will move on to those who insist that Paul did criticize (at least some) contemporary Jews, or see the shortcomings of “Judaism,” in terms of a misplaced dependence on human endeavors. Such is the broad sweep of the survey. But though I have necessarily begun by placing scholars in (very rough) categories, my primary concern has been to convey their views fairly (if concisely) rather than to justify a particular taxonomy of the debate.

1 In a reworked and updated version of my Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), viz. Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), I have discussed a few of the more significant contributions to the debate in greater detail. Here brief treatment is given to a wider range of scholars, though no one who knows the field will mistake my efforts for an exhaustive survey. To impose some boundaries on the task, I have decided to treat only scholars who have published monographs on Paul that show significant dependence on, or that interact in significant ways with, Sanders’s understanding of Judaism and Paul.

Worth noting is that the current preoccupation with the “new perspective on Paul” seems mostly confined to scholarship in English-speaking lands (cf. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Die paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre in der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion,” in Worum geht es in der Rechtfertigungslehre? Das biblische Fundament der “Gemeinsamen
I. Paul as Sanders Sees Him

1. The conviction most central to the "new perspective on Paul" pertains in the first place to Judaism, not Paul. In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, E. P. Sanders set out "to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which [at the time of his writing, he could claim] is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship" (xii): a view that saw Judaism as a religion of legalistic works-righteousness (33) in which "one must earn salvation by compiling more good works (‘merits’), whether on his own or from the excess of someone else, than he has transgressions" (38). Such an understanding was thought to lead people either to a despairing uncertainty about their salvation or to a self-righteous boasting in its achievement (45). In Sanders's view, only a massive misconstrual of the nature and intent of rabbinic sources could yield such a description of Jewish soteriology.

In his own treatment of the literature of Palestinian Judaism and the letters of Paul, Sanders's interest was in the "pattern of religion" they evidence rather than in individual motifs. (The "pattern" of a religion, for Sanders, is the way in which the religion admits and retains its members, or "how getting in and staying in are understood" [17].) It is among Sanders's most important conclusions that a fundamental unity (a single "pattern of religion") underlies nearly every witness we possess to the Judaism of the period "from around 200 b.c.e. to around 200 c.e." (422–3). Sanders describes the unifying concept as "covenantal nomism": the notion that a Jew's standing before God is secured by God's election of Israel as his covenant people (this, then, is how "getting in" was understood in Judaism), and that obedience to the law is the appropriate response to God's initial act of grace (75). While a Jew's intention to obey the law is thought necessary if the relationship with God is to be maintained (this, then, is how "staying in" was understood), it does not follow that salvation is "earned" or regarded as a reward for human achievements. To put the matter provocatively (and in this art Sanders has demonstrated unique gifts), the relationship between grace and works is the same in Palestinian Judaism as in the letters of Paul: "salvation is by grace . . . ; works are the condition of remaining 'in', but they do not earn salvation" (543).

Why, then, did Paul reject Judaism? Sanders insists that, though Paul provided a variety of arguments for doing so, his real reason was rooted in his exclusivist soteriology: God had provided salvation in Christ, so "no one may follow any other way whatsoever" (519); or, to quote Sanders's best known epigram, "This is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity" (552). A further factor, still rooted in one of Paul's "primary convictions," is allowed as well: "the salvation of the Gentiles is essential to Paul's preaching; and with it falls the law; for, as Paul says simply, Gentiles cannot live by the law (Gal. 2.14)" (496).

Believing Christ to be God's solution, (Sanders's) Paul set out to define a plait. The very diversity that characterizes Paul's portrayals of the human dilemma proves that his thinking began, not with a perceived plait needing a solution, but with a solution that required a plait (474). To be underlined here is perhaps only Sanders's emphatic denial that Paul rejected the Jewish law because its observance led to self-righteousness and boasting. The only Jewish "boasting" to which Paul objects is that which exults over the divine privileges granted to Israel and fails to acknowledge that God, in Christ, has now opened the door of salvation to Gentiles. A major thrust of Sanders's work, then, is that Paul's rejection of Judaism was not triggered by, nor did it trigger, a substantial critique of his former faith. In the wake of his work, some scholars have gone further, concluding that Paul had no critique of Judaism. Others agree with Sanders that Paul's critique was not a matter of substance. Still others make more of the "further factor" that Sanders did allow and see in Paul a critique of Judaism for its alleged ethnocentricity.

Erklärung: von katholischer Kirche und Lutherischem Weltbund (ed. Thomas Söding; Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 106–30, here 107; Peter Stuhlmacher, Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments. I. Grundlegung. Von Jesus zu Paulus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 241. (Finland, however, should be added to the list, owing to Heikki Räisänen's early entry into the discussion and the domestic debate it has provoked.) Scholars elsewhere have not uniformly ignored the discussion; they tend to mention it, however, without invoking comparisons with Copernicus, and, while interacting with Sanders on points of detail, have not seen a need either to rethink or defend everything they have learned about Paul in response to his work. Hence a survey such as this is inevitably dominated by English-language scholarship.

5 This seems an obvious implication of Sanders's claim that Judaism's fault, in Paul's eyes, lay in not being Christianity -- and many have so construed it, as Sanders himself recognizes ("others have taken me to mean that Paul had no substantial critique of his native faith"). Without addressing the issue of the "substantiality" of the critique, Sanders notes that Paul did criticize Judaism on the two points alluded to above: "the lack of faith in Christ and the lack of equality for the Gentiles" (*Law*, 154–5).
2. Paul Finds No Flaw in Judaism

2. For Neil Elliott, Sanders has definitively refuted the illusion that Judaism was “devoted to fulfilling the ‘works of the Law’ as a means of attaining God’s favor”; but the illusion was not one under which Paul himself suffered (146; cf. 212). That Romans attacks Jewish “works-righteousness” is a misunderstanding fostered under the “Lutheran captivity” of the epistle (292). Paul’s aim in the opening chapters of the letter was not to refute Judaism, but to underline the (very Jewish) understanding that no human being is exempt from God’s righteous requirements, but that all are accountable to God (133–4, 198). Thus, when Paul highlights Jewish sins in 2:17–29, it is not because the latter are peculiarly the target of his indictment; rather, inasmuch as Jews might be thought to be exempt from God’s judgment, Paul cites their liability as paradigmatic of the truth (3:9) that judgment falls equally on all sinners (135, 141; cf. 145). Moreover, Paul declares that justification is “apart from law” only because, in principle, the demands of God’s law might be misconstrued as providing a basis for humans to claim the merit of fulfilling them: “the point of [Rom] 3.20 is that not even in the Law (where one might mistakenly expect to find it) is there any ground for boasting against God, therefore nowhere” (215; cf. 149). But, Elliott notes, though such a misunderstanding is “possible,” it is not one that Paul “explicitly ascribed to the Jews, or to anyone else for that matter” (155; cf. 149 n. 2). Indeed, since Paul is writing to the Roman Christians, he must intend that they take seriously his message and guard against presuming on God’s grace (126; cf. 185). The danger to which Paul responds in Romans lies in the Hellenistic-Christian doctrine of justification by faith, where “freedom from the Law” was not sufficiently tied to the requirement of obedience (294). The theology of Romans thus opposes, not Judaism, but the Hellenistic-Christian kerygma (295).

3. Lloyd Gaston’s studies of Paul2 assume that E. P. Sanders has accurately depicted Judaism and that “Paul knew at least as much about ‘covenantal nomism’ and Jewish ‘soteriology’ as does E. P. Sanders” (65). With Judaism itself, (Gaston’s) Paul has no quarrel (14). Certainly he does not believe that Jews need Jesus to be saved: Jesus is not, for Paul, the Messiah, but “the new act of the righteousness of God,” bringing the salvation already enjoyed by Jews to the Gentiles as well (7). Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners, but, through its covenant, “Israel has always had cultic means of expiation.” Now “God has presented Christ Jesus as such a means for the Gentiles, apart from or alongside his covenant with Israel” (122). The only Jewish failure that Paul

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1 Paul and the Torah (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987).
accumulation of gentile sins could be forgiven” (205). Once they are “in Christ,” Gentiles too experience freedom from desires and passions through the Spirit (252). But for Stowers’s (as for Gaston’s) Paul, Christ provides for Gentiles what Israel already enjoyed through her covenant (129, 190).

3. A Paul Whose Critique Is Not of Substance

Or perhaps we should say that Paul does develop a critique of Judaism, but merely as a reflex required by his christological convictions or missionary strategies.

5. Citing as his predecessors F. C. Baur, Krister Stendahl, W. D. Davies, and (above all) E. P. Sanders, Francis Watson sees his Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach8 as a further contribution to the scholarly task of “delutheranizing Paul” (18). Paul did not believe in salvation sola gratia, nor did he criticize Jews for attempting to “earn” their salvation. In fact, Watson suggests, the Jews whom Paul attacks in Romans 2 held a doctrine of sola gratia which led them to “live by the maxims, pecca fortiter” (112); moreover, in Romans 6, “it is precisely the notion of sola gratia that Paul excludes” (148).

For Watson, the attempt to define a theological basis for Paul’s attacks on Judaism and Jewish Christianity is itself misguided: a sociological explanation is needed. Paul initially conducted a mission to non-Christian Jews, but met with limited success. Concluding that God had hardened Jewish hearts, Paul redirected his energies toward a Gentile mission. To prevent a repeat of the earlier debacle, however, Paul made the strategic decision to eliminate from his Christian message the requirement to conform to the laws of Torah that offended Gentile sensibilities. The move had the effect of cutting off Paul and the Pauline communities from further fellowship with the Jewish synagogue, thus transforming Christianity from a reform movement within Judaism to a sect now severed from its Jewish roots (36–38). It also, inevitably, sparked criticism. Paul’s theological reasoning on the subject thus represents a secondary attempt to legitimate a procedure adopted on other grounds. What is essentially at issue in Galatians and Philippians is not whether one must “do good works in order to be accepted by God,” but whether the church should “be a reform-movement within the Jewish community or a sect outside it” (80). As for the Roman Christians, they were divided into two communities, one of Jewish Christians who maintained their ties with the synagogue (thus remaining a “reform-movement” within Judaism), the other of “sectarian” Christians (97). Paul’s letter to the Romans

is best seen as an attempt to persuade “the Jewish congregation to separate themselves finally from the non-Christian Jewish community, and recognize the legitimacy of the Pauline congregation, which based itself on the premises of freedom from the law and separation from the synagogue” (123).

6. Reinhold Liebers9 concludes from the first part of his study that only exegesis bearing the stamp of the Reformation could find in Paul a critique of righteousness based on works and human merit (238): where Paul rejects “works of law,” the accent is in fact on “law,” not on “works” (41–54, 92). In the second part Liebers claims that what Paul in effect attacks is a Jewish understanding of Torah (identified with Wisdom) as mediator, not only of creation, but also of salvation: Jews saw Torah as the expression of God’s grace, transforming the heart as well as guiding the steps of God’s people (240–41). It follows that the understanding of Torah rejected by Paul – because he made the same claims for Christ – was one in which the law served as gospel (244).

7. Mikael Winninge10 expresses broad approval of the “new perspective on Paul” (213) and, in particular, of Sanders’s insistence that Paul’s depiction of the human plight developed out of his belief in “the indispensability of salvation in Christ” (309). Universal sinfulness is acknowledged throughout early Jewish materials (Winninge’s study focuses primarily on the Psalms of Solomon). Nonetheless, the “righteous” (or, more aptly, the “sinfully righteous”) are consistently distinguished from stubbornly disobedient “sinners.” Paul simply claims that there are no righteous persons whatsoever, because all Jews and Gentiles are sinners from the outset. This is something entirely new within Judaism . . . Paul’s classification of all Jews as sinners along with the Gentiles was incomprehensible from a Jewish perspective, because forgiveness was considered as a covenantal privilege, unless the border was crossed in outright apostasy” (264). The explanation, Winninge believes, is to be found in “Paul’s conviction that Jesus Christ was the saviour of all . . . Since universal sinfulness was not enough to explain the need of salvation, Paul was forced to ‘make’ sin more dangerous . . . It is Paul’s experience of Christ that is the source for his reflection on the dangerousness of sin” (305).

8. A student of Heikki Räisänen, Kari Kuula has published a monograph11 that leaves no doubt about its academic paternity.12 Like Räisänen, Kuula

8 Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986.


12 Räisänen’s work is treated briefly below.
finds in Sanders’s portrayal of Judaism a reason to reexamine Paul’s polemic against the Jewish law and its practitioners; and, again like Räisänen, he finds Paul’s positions strained and untenable. It is clear for Kuula (as, of course, for Sanders) that Paul rejected the law and the Jewish covenant because he believed that salvation is only to be found in Christ (206-7). From the perspective of Paul’s apocalyptic dualism, what was outside Christ was necessarily under the power of sin; Judaism thus became “one of the false religions of his time” (207). Difficulties arose for Paul because he nonetheless wanted to retain a measure of continuity with his Jewish past, a venture that led to dubious argumentative strategies, forced interpretations of Scripture, and artificial suggestions about the law’s place in God’s salvific plan (208). Not that Paul was a “poor thinker”; the dilemma at the root of his problems lay in the very “foundations of his theology” (209).

9. This is perhaps the least inappropriate place to introduce the important work of Terence L. Donaldson,14 though Paul’s “critique” of Judaism is not its focus. Donaldson accepts Sanders’s portrayal of first-century Judaism as characterized by “covenantal nomism”; and methodologically, Donaldson adopts and refines Sanders’s distinction between Paul’s “arguments” in favor of a particular position and his real “reasons” for holding it. In regard to Paul’s Gentile mission, however, Donaldson finds unconvincing Sanders’s suggestions for its roots (i.e., that Paul thought that the time for the “eschatological pilgrimage” of Gentiles had come, and that it was the task of his mission to promote it [12-13, 187-97]).

We cannot here consider the numerous alternative proposals that Donaldson considers only to reject them — other than to note that he, like other proponents of the “new perspective,” dismisses any suggestion that Paul’s mission was rooted either in a newly won conviction that salvation is by faith, not works, or that Christianity provided, as Judaism did not, an answer to the universality of human sin. How, then, does Donaldson account for Paul’s mission to the Gentiles? Prior to his Damascus experience, Paul was among those Jews who believed that Gentiles could share in God’s salvation only if they became proselytes, submitting to Torah and becoming incorporated in the people of Israel. Paul himself encouraged Gentiles to do so (he “preached circumcision,” Gal 5:11). At the same time, he perceived that faith in Jesus as Messiah and adherence to Torah were rival ways of defining the people of God. Then, as a result of his Damascus experience, Paul became convinced that Jesus was God’s Messiah, that Christ was God’s way to salvation, and hence (since he continued to see Torah as an exclusive alternative) that faith in Christ, not adherence to Torah, defined the boundaries of the people of God. As a Christian, Paul continued to fulfill his pre-Damascus vocation to bring Gentiles into the community of God. He continued to understand God’s community as Israel, the family of Abraham. But faith in Christ, rather than adherence to Torah, now defined membership in the community.

4. Paul Finds Judaism Ethnocentric

10. Only a year after the publication of Sanders’s Paul and Palestinian Judaism, N. T. Wright agreed that “the real Judaism” was “based on a clear understanding of grace,” and that “good works” were meant to express “gratitude, and demonstrate that one is faithful to the covenant.”15 Pauline scholarship, Wright declared, must find other categories for interpreting Paul than “the thin, tired and anachronistic ones of Lutheran polemic.”16 Rightly understood, Paul “mount[ed] a detailed and sensitive criticism of Judaism as its advocates present it.”17 Judaism, in Wright’s reading of Paul, had come to distort its distinctive vocation.

When God entered a covenant with Israel, he intended to undo the sin of Adam and its effects.18 An obedient Israel would have proved to be the “true Adam, the truly human people of the creator god,” and a “light” conveying God’s blessing to the Gentiles.19 Through Abraham’s “seed” the nations of the world would come to be united in a “single worldwide family.”20 But Israel, no less than other nations, shared in the effects of Adam’s sin.21 Adam, confronted by a divine command, disobeyed; Israel, given the commands of Torah, “recapitulated” Adam’s sin (197, based on Rom 7:7-12), and thus was in no position to bring “light” to the Gentiles. Moreover, the “Adam” in Israel made Israel’s singular vocation the basis for Israel’s characteristic sin, the “meta-sin” (240) of boasting of her special place in God’s plan and treating the symbols of her distinctiveness (Sabbath, circumcision, the dietary laws) as “badges of superiority” (243).

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14 Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).
16 Wright, “Paul of History,” 87.
17 Wright, “Paul of History,” 82.
Israel's sin brought on the nation the curse of the covenant spelled out in Deuteronomy 27-28, thus leading to its exile. That judgment—that exile—was believed to continue in the first century: "Roman occupation and overlordship" represented "the mode that Israel's continuing exile had now taken" (141). Sanders's claim that the post-Damascus Paul contrived a plight to match the solution he perceived in Christ is not, for Wright, the whole story. Paul revised his earlier notion of Israel's plight, but in pre-Damascus days he, like other Jews, would have yearned for Israel's redemption (260-61).

Just as Israel was representative of all humankind, so Jesus, as Messiah, was Israel's representative. The curse of the covenant that led to Israel's exile and subjection to foreign overlordship reached its climax in the death of Israel's Messiah at the hands of Roman soldiers; and so, in Messiah's representative death, the curse of his people was exhausted (141). Moreover, his representative resurrection meant Israel's deliverance from the "ultimate enemies" of sin and death.22 Once the curse of the covenant had been exhausted, the extension of its blessing to the Gentile nations became a reality. The gift of God's Spirit to Gentiles was the sign that the covenant had been renewed, and that its blessings were available to all (154).

The divine plan to unite people from all nations in a single family was evident already in the promise given to Abraham. Habakkuk 2:4 underlines that the single family of God's people would one day be demarcated by faith, not by the boundary markers spelled out in Torah for Israel (148-51). Hence, the fulfillment of God's covenant involves the redefinition of "Israel" as God's people along lines determined by grace, not race; by faith, not by the "works" (or boundary markers) of Torah. "Israel is transformed from being an ethnic people into a worldwide family" (240). Not all Jews, to be sure, are prepared to accept the transformation. Those who cling to the path of "national righteousness" and reject the gospel have both misunderstood God's intentions and perpetuated the "meta-sin" of ethnic Israel. The Israel that, according to Romans 11:26, is destined for salvation is the single family drawn from all nations and marked by its faith (249-50).

11. No one has proven more energetic in the promotion and defense of the "new perspective on Paul" than James D. G. Dunn—who, indeed, gave it the designation by which it has become known.23 Traditional readings of Paul (we are assured) often erred by imposing sixteenth-century categories on Paul's response to Judaism, resulting in a portrayal of Judaism that, like the medieval Catholic church, was "legalistic, dependent on human effort, and self-satisfied with the results."24 Those misreadings may (apparently) be corrected by retaining the categories, but recognizing that first-century Jews were, after all, good Protestants and champions of grace: "The Judaism of what Sanders christened as 'covenantal nomism' can now be seen to preach good Protestant doctrine: that grace is always prior; that human effort is ever the response to divine initiative; that good works are the fruit and not the root of salvation."25 To what in Judaism, then, was Paul objecting, if not to the belief that salvation could be earned by good deeds?

The gospel that Paul proclaimed was the "outworking" of the divine promise given already to (or the divine "covenant" made already with) Abraham.26 The promise designated Israel in the first place as its target, but included a blessing for the nations as well. The (universal) gospel thus represents no abandonment of the covenant with Abraham, but its planned fulfillment, inasmuch as it was God's intention from the beginning that the divine blessing and saving initiative would one day be extended, from its initial restriction to Israel, to include all nations.27 A second crucial feature in the story of Abraham for Paul was its establishment of the principle that "acceptance by God" is "a matter wholly and solely of faith on the human side."28

Prior to the coming of Christ, Jews as well as Gentiles lived "under the power of sin." The law, though neither able nor intended to overthrow sin's dominion,29 found its primary function in defining what constitutes sin and in making evident, when its commands were broken, sin's nature as transgression against God.30 A secondary, temporary function of the law featured its sacrificial cult, which provided the people of Israel with a means to cover their sin and remove their guilt until such time as transgression "could be dealt with definitively and finally in the cross of Christ."31 Yet another subordinate role of the law was fulfilled through the commands that

22 Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said, 51.
24 Dunn, Epistle to the Galatians, 195.
25 Dunn, Jesus, Paul, and the Law, 197.
26 Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 165.
27 Dunn, Jesus, Paul, and the Law, 197.
28 Dunn, Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 83.
29 Dunn, "Justices of God," 7-8; cf. also 18.
30 Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians, 195.
31 Dunn, Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 133-4. Page references to Dunn's work in the body of the text are taken from this book.
32 Dunn, Epistle to the Galatians, 190.
restricted Israel's contact with the Gentile nations. In this way the law protected the people of Israel, who were "like a child growing up in an evil world," from the "idolatry and the lower moral standards prevalent in the Gentile world."

This latter role of the law, too, was meant as an interim measure, appropriate only until the promise given to Abraham could be fulfilled in Christ. But Paul found himself confronted with Jewish Christians who demanded that all who would belong to the people of God, including Gentile believers in Christ, must still observe the laws that had long separated Jews from Gentiles (i.e., the "boundary-markers" of circumcision, food and festival laws). In Paul's terminology, these people advocated "justification by the works of the law." In principle, the latter "works" included all the law's demands; under circumstances in which specific laws distinguishing Jews from Gentiles were the issue, however, the focus was clearly on these boundary-marking ordinances (358). Paul's response, the assertion of justification by faith rather than by the "works of the law," thus did not address the question how an individual may find peace with God, or whether salvation is to be earned by human works — to that extent, the "Lutheran" tradition has misread the context and point of Paul's polemic. The operative question for Paul was rather on what terms Gentiles were to be admitted to the people of God, and whether particular "works" required of Israel in the Mosaic law are to be observed by all God's people now that the Messiah has come.33

In the course of the controversy, however, Paul himself came to the realization that "if entry into the covenant is by faith, the same principle should apply to life within the covenant; membership of the covenant people should not be tied to or be made to depend on particular rulings regarding food and table-fellowship; it should depend solely on faith."34 "Human dependence on divine grace had to be unqualified or else it was not Abraham's faith, the faith through which God could work his own work. That was why Paul was so fiercely hostile to the qualification which he saw confronting him all the time in any attempt to insist on works of the law as a necessary accompaniment of or addition to faith. God would not justify, could not sustain in relationship with him, those who did not rely wholly on him. Justification was by faith, by faith alone." (379).35

Here, of course, Dunn's Paul differs little from his "Lutheran" counterpart. Still, Dunn insists that the Jews who opposed Paul did not think the "works of the law" a way to earn salvation, and the main thrust of Paul's attack was rather on "the restrictiveness implicit" in their emphasis on "works of the law" (372).

12. Dunn's (seemingly boundless) energy has been tapped by numerous graduate students. Don Garlington's revision of a dissertation supervised by Dunn (The Obedience of Faith: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context)36 seeks to demonstrate, in writings from the "Apocrypha," the pervasiveness of "covenantal nomism" and of a commitment on the part of the various writers "to the whole of the Mosaic covenant and its laws" — a commitment that nonetheless focused on the distinctive "badges" of the covenant, namely, "circumcision, the sabbath/festival days and the food laws of Israel" (254). He thus provides a historical context for Paul's critique (construed much as Dunn understands it) of those who would impose these requirements on his converts. Garlington's more recent monograph,37 though by no means treating only issues related to the "new perspective," does insist that what Paul opposed in Judaism was its "narrowly nationalistic" understanding of God's purposes in history (8), its restriction of God's covenant favor to the people of Israel (46-47). Indeed, for Garlington's Paul, Israel clung to its Torah with an "idolatrous attachment" (39, emphasis Garlington's): Torah had become Israel's "new idol," preventing Jews from coming to that "obedience of faith" in Christ that made one a true "doer of the law" (71, referring to Rom 2:13).

13. Bruce Longenecker's dissertation38 claims that both Paul and the author of 4 Ezra abandoned the "ethnocentric covenantalism" (a designation Longenecker prefers to Sanders's "covenantal nomism") prevalent in early Judaism, believing it wrong "in the light of their respective crisis events" (278-9). Paul, for his part, replaced its answer to universal sinfulness with a christocentric solution (280). Longenecker stresses that ethnocentric covenantalism, not Jewish attempts to earn salvation by works, was the target of Paul's polemic. He allows, however, that Paul appears to expand his criticism in places (Rom 4:1-5; cf. 9:11-12, 32; 11:5-6) to include a charge of legalism (213-4).

Longenecker's more recent The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians39 represents a bold attempt to mediate between different readings of Galatians: between the "apocalyptic" reading...

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32 Dunn, Epistle to the Galatians, 199.
34 Dunn, Partings, 133; cf. his Jesus, Paul, and the Law, 162.
35 Cf. Dunn, Theology, 372: "Paul expounds justification by faith in a way which not only addresses the argument over the terms of Gentile acceptance, but also presses beyond to provide a fundamental statement of human dependence on God."
represented by Beker and Martyn and the "salvation-historical" reading found in Wright and Dunn, and between traditional "Lutheran" interpretations and those informed by the "new perspective." With regard to the latter dispute, Longenecker believes that the "new perspective" provides the basis for a truer understanding of the position of Paul's opponents and of the issues debated in Galatia. Nonetheless, a number of themes central to "Lutheran" approaches are indeed to be found in Paul's response: the view that the law cannot convey life because humans cannot obey it perfectly; that nomistic observance takes place within the framework of "fleshy" existence and continues to express human rebellion against God; that humanity's bondage is such that human activity comes to nothing and only God's invading grace can provide redemption (180–81). Moreover, Longenecker repeats his earlier claim that, "while the kind of Judaism that Paul seeks to undermine in Romans is ethnocentric ... rather than legalistic, he nonetheless finds that, from a Christian perspective [i.e., once saving grace has been restricted to those in Christ], Judaism's ethnocentric covenantalism reduces to nothing else than legalism" (140). In none of these cases does Paul portray Jewish covenantalism on its own terms. The Judaism of Paul's depiction is Judaism as it "really" is — reality being determined by Paul's reconfigured, Christian worldview (182).

14. Some years earlier, John M. G. Barclay — not a student of Dunn — had reached conclusions of a similar vein in his Obeying the Truth: Paul's Ethics in Galatians. In Galatians, Paul's polemic against "works of the law" is not an attack on "works" as such, nor does Paul "divorce 'believing' from 'doing'" (82): indeed, believers themselves are "free from the obligation to work — to turn their faith into loving behaviour" (94; cf. 236). References to those who live "under the law" carry no overtones of "legalistic self-righteousness" (116 n. 24), nor is life "according to the flesh" marked by "self-seeking and self-reliance" (197). Paul opposes "the works of the law" in Galatians because they represent imposing a Jewish life-style ... on his Gentile converts" (239). He "renounces law-obvant Judaism not because it is legalistic but because it is nationalistic" (240). But "while Paul is not building a general theological contrast between salvation by human achievement and salvation by divine gift, he is propounding a far-reaching contrast between human values and traditions on the one hand and the sovereign initiative of God on the other" (241). In Philippians, too, Judaism is seen as "too firmly wedded to human cultural and social values" (243). In

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40 Sanders himself makes a similar point: "Only if one simply equates 'the word of Christ' ... with grace can one say that [Jews] rejected grace. Paul himself very likely made such a connection, and thus he can accuse his compatriots of rejecting the Christian gospel (Rom. 10:14–21) and of rejecting grace (11:6; cf. 6:14ff.)." (Sanders, Law [n. 3 above], 127).

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15. William S. Campbell is convinced by the work of E. P. Sanders that Paul did not fault Jews for pursuing a wrong goal (righteousness by works) or for pursuing a right goal in a wrong (i.e., legalistic) way; "rather they failed to believe in the Gospel because they sought their own righteousness, i.e. a righteousness available only to Jews alone, only to those who possess the law. For Paul it is of the essence of the Gospel that it is available to Gentiles on the same terms as Jews" (100). With Dunn, Campbell believes that Paul directed his polemic against the view that the particular "works of the law" that served as "badges of the covenant" had to be adopted by Gentiles if they were to belong to the community of God's people (126–7). For Paul, it was axiomatic that faith in Christ is the only criterion for such membership: he "[denied] ultimate significance to ethnic distinctions" (100). Nonetheless, his theology "validated equally the right of Gentiles to live as Gentiles and Jews to live as Jews in Christ" (101). Against Watson, Campbell claims that "Paul's strategy in Romans [was] to seek the social reorientation of both Jewish and Gentile Christians through the Gospel rather than the separation of church and synagogue" (130). While Paul attempted to be even-handed, refusing to side with either the Jewish or Gentile Christians, he did attempt to give a positive view of Judaism (133); and texts like Romans 11:16–17; 15:27 refute the claim that Paul wrote as a "sectarian" intending to displace the distinctively Jewish presence from the church (142).

16. Daniel Boyarin sees his monograph on Paul as "part of the movement to thoroughly discredit the Reformation interpretation of Paul and particularly the description of Judaism on which it is based" (11). Where he departs from Sanders, he insists, is in his own belief that "Paul was motivated by a critique of Judaism" (11), a critique originating in a disquietude that preceded and, indeed, precipitated Paul's Damascus experience: "in Paul, ... the agony preceded the ecstasy" (122).

In Boyarin's view, the pre-Christian Saul shared with "many Jews of the first century" a "sense that something was not right" in their ancestral faith (39). On the one hand, Torah "claims to be the text of the One True God of

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all the world” (39). “Biblical Israelite tradition” itself contains “certain universalistic tendencies” (52), and these were naturally nourished by the “general Hellenistic longing for the universal and the univocal” (24), the “Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy” (7). On the other hand, Torah is preoccupied with the “history of one particular People,” and its prescriptions serve to mark off their particularity (39). The tension between “narrow ethnocentrism and universalist monotheism” in Judaism (52) was overcome for Paul by a revelation mediated by the Christ event. Christ himself had both a physical and a spiritual nature: both have value, though the former is subordinate to the latter (29). Here, for Paul, was the “hemereneutic key” (29) resolving the tension within Judaism, for Paul saw in Christ’s death and resurrection a disclosure of the transcendence of the spiritual and universal over the physical and particular (39).

The transcended realm is, in Paul’s terminology, that of the “flesh.” “Israel according to the flesh” is the historical Israel, marked by its literal interpretation and observance of the law, an observance expressed, moreover, in the physical acts prescribed by the law: the “works of the law” that marked off the Jews as God’s special people (53). Paul’s critique of Judaism centered on the latter’s devotion “to the literal, physical carrying out of the Law as opposed to the inner movements of its spiritual referent” (81–82). “What concerned Paul ... was the literal observance of the Law insofar as it frustrated what Paul took to be the moral and religious necessity of human-kind, namely to erase all distinction between ethnos and ethnos, sex and sex and become one in Christ’s spiritual body” (85). “The whole purpose of Christ’s coming ... was to free us from the practices of Israel in the flesh by teaching us of their allegorical meaning for Israel in the spirit, through his crucifixion which revealed his own dual nature and thus figured our transformation” (115). Bearing this in mind, we can understand how Paul can speak of the law as both arrogated and obligatory for Christians: the “literal, carnal sense” of the law — that expressed in prescriptions of circumcision, kashruth, and the Sabbath — is done away, whereas the law’s “spiritual sense — the universal Law of Christ, of love, of faith” — is affirmed (132).

17. Kent L. Yinger has examined the topic of “judgment according to deeds” in both Judaism and Paul. As evidence for Judaism, he looks at, in addition to the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the literature from Qumran; the results, he believes, essentially confirm the work of Sanders (95). Divine judgment in this literature does not involve an inquiry to determine who the sinners and the righteous are; it simply reveals the nature of those judged (93). Nor are the righteous those whose individual righteous deeds, viewed “mechanically or atomistically,” outweigh any evil they may have done; works are conceived and judged rather as “a unitary whole revealing one’s inner character or faith” (95–96; cf. 25). Those of the righteous are “the observable manifestations of the covenant loyalty of the unseen heart” (62). On such a view, competition between the “faith” of the “righteous” and their “works” is inconceivable: faith and works “represent two sides of the single coin of human response in the light of God’s gracious covenantal arrangement” (96).

Yinger believes that “divine judgment according to deeds is no less a fundamental axiom for Paul the apostle of Christ than it was for Saul the Pharisee” (182); and the “deeds” are similarly understood, not as merits by which one gains entry into a particular status with God, but as the means of recognizing a person’s inner character (159). Nor can any distinction be drawn between Paul and Judaism on the relation between grace and works (cf. 161, 192): “the righteousness upon which salvation depends is by grace through faith from start to finish, and receives its necessary confirmation in the outworking of obedience to be judged at the end” (228). Where Paul does differ from Judaism is, first, in the belief that “membership in the eschatological people of God no longer has anything to do with Jewishness ... , but is by faith in Christ” (179). In Judaism, there was at least a potential for presuming upon one’s Jewishness, and Paul characterizes his diatribal opponent in Romans 2 along these lines; such presumption was not, however, “characteristic of the second temple period” (180). Second, Paul “places ethical righteousness much more clearly within the context of his pneumatology than was the case in Judaism ... Because of Paul’s confidence in the Spirit’s ability and readiness to bear fruit in the believers’ lives, he could look with confidence toward the final judgment according to works” (203).

5. Paul Finds Judaism Reliant on Human Works

In Sanders’s understanding of “covenantal nomism,” it will be recalled, obedience is an indispensable condition for the enjoyment of “life” and salvation in Judaism, but not its cause: obedience (“works”) maintains one’s position within a covenant established by God’s grace. For Sanders’s Paul, the relationship between “works” and “grace” is no different. The scholars to whom we now turn think Paul saw in Judaism’s reliance on “works” its decisive shortcoming. Helkki Räisänen believes that Paul’s critique was based upon a distorted understanding of Judaism. For other scholars,
however, Paul's claim that Jews had not lived up to the covenant’s requirements of righteousness articulated a perception widely shared even among his non-Christian compatriots (Thielman, Eskola). Still others think that Paul’s interpretation was arrived at on distinctly Christian grounds: either Christ’s atoning death was believed to have invalidated (or to have showed the purely symbolic nature of) Judaism’s rites of atonement, leaving non-Christian Jews under the law’s demands but without its means for forgiveness (Schreiner and Das, though the latter finds analogous positions in Judaism); or, in the light of Christ’s atoning death, human nature was assessed much more pessimistically by Paul than by other Jews, and its corruption was thought to prevent untransformed humans from showing even the modicum of obedience required by covenantal nomism (Stuhlmacher, Laato, Aletti, and Seifrid). In the view of these scholars, Paul sees salvation as a gift of God’s grace to which humans, perverse as they are, cannot contribute. For our final group of scholars, however, Paul found it important in principle that human beings rely exclusively on divine goodness for all their needs — and he deemed Judaism, in its reliance on “works,” to have departed from this principle (Davies, Thürén, Kruse, Bell, Smiles, Eastman, and Kim).

18. Heikki Räisänen occupies a distinctive place in the debate roused by the “new perspective.” On the one hand, he is among the most whole-hearted in his endorsement of Sanders’s depiction of Judaism: for his own “quest” in these matters, “the publication of Sanders’s illuminating work was like a gift from heaven” (v), and Räisänen suspects that it will be “extremely hard for anyone to refute Sanders’s interpretation of Tannaitic Judaism, as far as the main lines are concerned.” Following Sanders, Räisänen believes that salvation in Judaism was perceived as “God’s act,” and “the theme of gratuitity with regard to salvation is conspicuously present in Judaism” (178–9). But whereas Sanders thinks Paul did not in fact charge Judaism with being legalistic, Räisänen agrees (to this extent at least) with Paul’s “Lutheran” interpreters in thinking that he did. Not that Paul speaks as though smugness, self-righteousness, and boasting in one’s achievement were characteristic sins of Jews; but Paul does (Räisänen believes) distort Judaism by suggesting that the law was its “way of salvation”; and Paul misleadingly contrasts the “works” required by the Jewish law with reliance on divine grace (162–4). In Räisänen’s terms, “grace, faith, promise, and Spirit are, according to [Paul], something diametrically opposed to the law. The entirety of Paul’s argument

is, indeed, little more than a constant reiteration of this axiom.” Nor is that all. Räisänen believes that Paul himself is not consistent in propounding salvation by grace. Like the rabbis, he “speaks of right behaviour as necessary for salvation” (184), of judgment as according to deeds. Gregious sins lead to condemnation even for Christians. The pattern is precisely what we find in Judaism, and Paul’s doctrine of grace differs only from the Judaism of his own distorted representation. This, for Räisänen, is only one of a number of areas in which Paul’s theology of the law proves incoherent and self-contradictory.

19. Other scholars, however, think that Paul was not the only Jew convinced that his people’s habitual failure to submit to God’s law had turned their covenant’s blessing into a curse.

Frank Thielman, while agreeing with Sanders that Paul did not attribute to Judaism “a doctrine of salvation by works” (182), thinks that some Jews believed that God had left to them the choice between life through obeying his commands and death should they choose disobedience (Sir 15:15–17; Pss. Sol. 9:4–5; cf. Deut 30:11–20). That such Jews were boastful of their righteousness does not follow, still less that they lived in fear lest their evil deeds should prove to outweigh their good at the final judgment. Nonetheless they thought that their efforts must be added to God’s grace if they were to obtain his favor at the last (66, 238).

Paul’s understanding was different, but not for that reason unjewish. Though covenantal texts in Leviticus (like ch. 26) and Deuteronomy (like chs. 28–31) do indeed speak of Israel’s choice between obedience and disobedience as determinative of the people’s “life” or “death,” the same texts anticipate that Israel will opt for the path of disobedience and thereby bring upon itself the curse of God’s covenant. Such, moreover, is the story of Israel as reflected in the historical books of the Jewish Scriptures, the Psalms, and, above all, the prophets. Repeatedly the latter denounced the rebelliousness that God’s people show in transgressing his law, declare their sinfulness incorrigible, yet find hope for the future in a decisive divine intervention.

This understanding of Israel’s history and eschatological hope remained current in Paul’s day. Far from concocting an artificial dilemma to suit his Christology, then, Paul merely appropriated a “plight to solution” pattern well established in the Scriptures and thinking of Second Temple Judaism. His “deeply held conviction” that the law cannot justify because, outside of the eschatological community, its demands cannot be met was, in fact, a common understanding among Jews of his day (239). His claim that “those who rely on works of the law are under a curse” (Gal 3:10) was not even controversial in his day, since it was well known that “membership in the people of God,

46 Compare also the position, summarized above, of N. T. Wright.
47 Compare also the position of Winninge, summarized above.
as it is defined by the Mosaic covenant, is membership in a people with a plight — they are cursed by the very law that defines them as God's people, because they, as a people and as individuals, have not kept the law" (126–7). Paul did, to be sure, point out to those other Jews who thought their obedience to God's law a factor in their approval at God's judgment that the human condition as Scripture describes it is bleaker than they imagine; God's gracious intervention alone can redeem us (188). This insistence in Romans and Galatians is broadened in Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles to a general affirmation of salvation as the gift of a gracious God in which human effort has no role (229, 234, 244). Yet it would be wrong to conclude that Jews in general ascribed salvific merit to their deeds. Rather Paul's own position was standard in Judaism — with the difference, of course, that for Paul the various communities of Christian believers represented the eschatologically restored people of God for which others still looked to the future, a people whose sins had been forgiven, from whom the curse of the law had been removed, and to whom the Spirit of God had been granted to enable them to do God's will (245).

20. A Finnish scholar, Timo Eskola, attempts to trace the relation between Jewish notions of "predestination" and Pauline soteriology. In Second Temple Judaism, the problems of theodicy induced by the recurrent crises that had befallen the nation had led to a change in the way the covenantal promises were perceived. The covenant's blessings were hardly the lot of all Jews, and, indeed, the whole nation was often thought to be living in sin and subject to God's judgment (31, 51). A kind of "soteriological dualism" emerged (40), whose operative principle we may label "prospective predestination" (47): Jews who continued in sin would face God's punishment (though neither their sin nor their succumbing to judgment were thought to be predetermined), while those who used the opportunity granted every sinner to repent and live in obedience to the law would find God merciful. In Paul's more radicalized scheme, rooted in a more pessimistic anthropology, all humankind is enslaved to sin and thus "predestined" for judgment

21. We turn now to scholars for whom Paul's conviction that Judaism wrongly relied on human works was a distinctly Christian perception. Thomas R. Schreiner grants that Sanders's work should caution us against naive portrayals of Palestinian Judaism ("it is not evident that rabbis weighed merits against demerits" [115]), but does not think it has established that the legalism against which Luther and Paul protested was not to be found in Palestinian Judaism. In the case of neither Luther nor Paul did those whom they attacked rely on their own achievements to the exclusion of any role by divine grace; in both cases, however, they believed that humans must contribute to their attaining of eternal life (94–95). As Luther correctly perceived, Paul's insistence that justification is not by the "works of the law" reflects his exclusion of any such contribution. Paul's point is missed when his formulation is thought to be directed merely against Jewish exclusivism, with its emphasis on the particular laws that defined Jewish identity. Paul's charge in Romans 2 is that Jews are liable for divine judgment because they have transgressed God's moral demands, not because they exclude Gentiles and trumpet Jewish prerogatives (55–56). Moreover, it is clear from the beginning of Romans 4 that Paul thinks human works in general can play no part in justification (54–55, 101). In a number of other Pauline texts, too, the alternatives of salvation by "doing" and by "believing" (without "doing") are set forth, and the latter alone deemed viable (60, 107, 125).

Not that "works" are themselves wrong, or that one who fulfilled all that the law required would not be recognized as righteous in God's sight (44). Perfect obedience, however, is what the law demands (45, 63–64); and that no one can obey the law perfectly was both the common Jewish understanding in Paul's day (64) and a natural conclusion to draw from the scriptural record of Israel's persistent failure to obey God's law (49). For Jews, to be sure, the requirement of perfect obedience was academic, since the law itself


23. For Eskola, "predestination" is found wherever a criterion is set forth by which a person's eternal salvation or damnation is decided (6). It is, of course, unfortunate that the word does not readily convey to readers what the author means to say.

24. They thus took on the "Avodat Israel," the service of God prescribed in the Mosaic law (including, with no sharp distinction between them, both its ritual and its moral components). Paul's references to the "works of the law" have this whole "service" in mind (his focus is by no means limited to "identity markers"); but, in keeping with his pessimistic anthropology and the judgment that humans are completely unable to carry out God's precepts, he made the astounding claim that "no human being will be justified by Avodat Israel" (220; cf. "Avodat Israel and the "Works of the Law" in Paul," in From the Ancient Sites of Israel: Essays on Archaeology, History and Theology 'In Memory of Apeili


provided for the atonement of sins. But Paul believed that, in the light of the "definitive atonement" provided by Jesus’ death on the cross, the Old Testament sacrifices can no longer atone (44). Indeed, the need for Christ’s atoning work suggests that the Old Testament sacrifices were never more than provisional, intended to point to Christ rather than themselves provide final forgiveness (44, 62–64).

The Mosaic covenant as a whole had an interim character (124). For a time it was intended to keep Jews untainted by pagan practices and to show that, without the Spirit, people are powerless to observe God’s law (171, 173). Now, in one sense, it has passed away—though in another sense, the Mosaic covenant “remain[s] authoritative for the church of Christ” (160). Its moral norms remain in force for believers (149, 154, 171): Paul took these moral demands seriously, believing that people will be judged by their works (184–6). Of course, the unregenerate cannot produce works that God will approve. But “the saving work of Jesus Christ radically changes people,” and, as a result, they now perform the good works “necessary for salvation”—though, since these deeds follow the transformation wrought by Christ’s salvific work, they can hardly be said to “earn salvation”; rather, they furnish evidence that salvation has indeed been granted (203). Nor is the obedience even of Christians ever perfect prior to their “full redemption”: it will, however, be “significant, substantial, and observable” (204).

22. A. Andrew Das, like Schreiner, believes that Paul understood the law to demand perfect obedience of those who would attain life through its commands. Das goes further, however, in challenging Sanders’s view that Jews thought differently. Das examines several pre-70 Jewish sources (Jubilees, the works of Philo, and Qumran literature) and concludes that God’s demands are never set aside, that right conduct is always required. In Tannaitic literature, too, at least certain rabbis declared that God’s judgment was strict and demanded perfect obedience, though others thought that those would be approved whose good deeds outweighed their evil. Admittedly, the demand for perfect obedience was made within a framework of grace marked by election and by measures that atoned for human failures (39 n. 100). Yet “the very existence of a system of atonement shows that any act contrary to God’s law, even the least infraction, had to be rectified in some way; each of God’s laws demands obedience” (43–44).

Das holds, furthermore (and, again, together with Schreiner), that for Paul it is unthinkable, in the light of Christ’s salvific work, that the Old Testament sacrifices alone for sin. Das goes further: the whole gracious framework of Judaism (election, covenant, sacrifices of atonement) has collapsed for Paul: the apostle consistently denies “any salvific or life-giving capacity in the old/Mosaic covenant” (8). Without its gracious framework, Judaism is left with a law demanding perfect obedience of its adherents, who will be judged solely by their achievements (214 n. 76). In Paul’s eyes, therefore, Judaism is indeed legalistic—though only because he has excluded from Judaism the framework of grace within which non-Christian Jews generally thought themselves to be living. Yet Paul’s position should not be dismissed as idiosyncratic: Das examines a series of Jewish works (4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch, 2 Enoch, and Testament of Abraham) from the post-70 period in which, because of the catastrophic outcome of the Jewish War and because of the pressures of diaspora living, the election and covenantal framework of Judaism are similarly displaced by an accent on the law’s demands and on strict judgment according to deeds. The roots of such a position are to be found in the earlier insistence on complete compliance with God’s law. When the covenantal framework of that demand disappears from view, legalism is left.

Finally, Das, like Schreiner, believes Paul finds the “works of the law” inadequate for salvation because humans cannot measure up to the law’s demand for perfect obedience. Das agrees with Dunn that Paul attacked a perceived Jewish preoccupation with ethnic identity; but he finds that Dunn strains unconvincingly to deny the obvious import of texts that rule out any role for human “works” in salvation. The need for such exegetical contortions disappears once one realizes that, for Jews, the law demands full obedience, that God judges humans according to their deeds, and that these become the decisive convictions in Judaism for those who believe, like Paul, that Judaism’s covenantal framework of grace has been displaced.

23. Peter Stuhlmacher claims that representatives of the “new perspective” obscure the main problem Paul addresses in Romans. The fundamental issue for Paul is “whether Jews and Gentiles will or will not survive before God’s throne of judgment.” That final judgment is in view throughout Romans 1:18–3:20 (60–61). The passage is “a relentless analysis of the culpability of Gentiles and Jews in the judgment. In the final judgment, . . . no Jew or Gentile will be able to claim that he or she has been a righteous doer of the will of God. Instead all will stand convicted as transgressors of the law” (42). When Paul rejects the “works of the law” as a means of justification, he means that “all attempts of humans in the final judgment to build upon their own righteousness derived from the law are futile” (43; cf. 64); this

58 Schreiner quotes approvingly C. F. D. Moule’s distinction between the view of Palestinian Judaism (good works are the “means of ‘staying in’ [the community of salvation]”) and that of Paul (good works are a “symptom of ‘staying in’”) (203 n. 69).

59 Paul, the Law, and the Covenant (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001). I am grateful to Dr. Das for supplying me with a copy of his manuscript prior to its publication.

60 Peter Stuhlmacher, Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 43. Page references to Stuhlmacher’s work in the body of the text are taken from this book.
assessment is part of Paul's post-Damascus reevaluation of the human condition by which he came to see the rule of sin as so powerful that human beings cannot, by force of will and moral effort, free themselves from its grip. Jewish confidence in the law and in the human capacity to fulfill it were likewise now seen to be illusory. But, as Paul goes on to claim in 3:21–30, "God himself by his grace has provided the legal basis for the justification of Jews and Gentiles in the atoning death of Jesus. . . . Because Christ went to death for them vicariously, they are spared the death sentence and may rather share in the dominion of Christ" (61). Justification "means at its core the creative act of justice whereby the one God justifies the individual ungodly person. . . . for the sake of Jesus' atoning death" (68). Still, when rightly seen in the context of Paul's apocalyptic vision, the goal of Paul's doctrine lies not in the justification of individuals, but "in the achievement of God's justice in heaven and on earth, that is, in the reconciliation of the cosmos and the establishment" of God's kingdom (52).  

24. Timo Laato65 sees the "greatest weakness in [Sanders's] argumentation" to be his "inadequate coverage of the question of the capacity of humankind" (62). In Judaism, human beings are considered to have "free will": a capacity both to choose and to do good rather than evil (67, 73). Admittedly, they are born with a propensity to disobedience, but it falls short of a compulsion (73). For Paul, on the other hand, the sin of Adam introduced into the world the dominion of sin — "sin" here referring not simply to "the multitude of individual, concrete transgressions" actually committed, but to the "wretched state of calamity" in which humans find themselves unable to do, or even to choose, the good (75, referring to Rom 5:12). Clearly, then, the "anthropological presuppositions of the Jewish and the Pauline pattern of religion" differ markedly from each other: "the former is based on human free will, while the latter is founded on human depravity" (146). 

The difference in anthropology is matched by one in soteriology (167). In Judaism, "salvation requires human cooperation" (150). The generation of the Exodus entered the covenant by accepting the Torah of their own free will (an acceptance not matched, according to a well-known tradition, by Gentiles, who proved unwilling to part with their sins); later generations of Jews, though born into the covenant, must subsequently—and "consciously"—"take up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven": so, too, must Gentiles who become proselytes to enter the covenant (148–50). Moreover, those within the covenant must fulfill the law if they would gain a place in the future world (157) — and (this is, of course, the point) it is within their capacity adequately to do so. For Paul, however, God himself must call into being the new creation. Faith does not replace the "works of the law" as the required human contribution for salvation; rather (as 2 Cor 4:6 shows) "God acts creatively by the Gospel and calls forth the faith" in a way that "excludes human cooperation totally" (151–2, noting also 1 Cor 1:28; Rom 4:17; 10:17). Elsewhere (Phil 1:29; cf. 3:12b) Paul "classifies faith explicitly as a gift of God's grace" (152). Nor does Paul think that those called to faith ever reach a stage in their "spiritual development" in which they can "fulfill the law by [their] own will power. By faith [they] have placed [themselves] completely outside the field of human action" (160). When Paul, then, criticizes Jewish soteriology, he cites its "anthropocentric" as well as its "antichristological" implications. The two belong inevitably together (198).

25. Jean-Noël Aletti's studies of Romans show full awareness of the work of E. P. Sanders: Sanders's portrayal of Judaism as based on "covenantal nomism" is warmly endorsed, and Aletti agrees that Paul himself understood Judaism very much as Sanders has described it. For Aletti, however, Paul engaged "covenantal nomism" in ways more fundamental and forceful than Sanders would have us believe. In the epistle to the Romans, Aletti sees an extended work of "deconstruction" in which Jewish understandings of the nature and function of the law are first undermined, then replaced by a Christian configuration. Here we note only a few key illustrations of Paul's procedure as Aletti understands it.

For Aletti, Romans 1:16–17 represents the main propositio developed in the argument of the epistle. The first main section that follows (1:18–4:25) elaborates on the thesis that Jews and Greeks alike are justified by faith alone. It may be divided into two subsections. The first, 1:18–3:20, deals — on the basis of expectations and ideas found within Judaism itself — with the operative principles of divine retribution, and anticipates the obvious Jewish objection to Paul's propositio: grace and justification, a "covenantal nomist" would point out, are already to be found within the Mosaic system; indeed, apart from its commands and its provisions for pardon, righteousness is unthinkable. In the second subsection (3:21–4:25), Paul develops his own

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64 Cf. Stuhlmacher, Theologie (see n. 1 above), 263–4, 280.  
65 Ibid., 264, 341.  
thesis, on the basis of his own theology, that justification is by faith alone, apart from the works of the Mosaic Law.  

The *propositio* with which the first section opens (1:18) announces God’s opposition, not to the sins of all human beings, but to all ungodliness and wickedness (63). The thesis is surely unexceptionable to Jewish readers, though formulated without any reference to differences between Jews and Gentiles in a way that contributes to the leveling of such distinctions (62). In the first sixteen verses of chapter 2, Paul establishes that a decisive line cannot be drawn between those (Jews) who know God’s will because they have the Mosaic law and those (Gentiles) who do not know it; the latter, without the law but through their consciences, have a conception of what is right (55).  

If God declares righteous those who obey the law (so 2:13), must he not – inasmuch as he is – approve as well those non-Jews who follow their conscience (56)?  

Paul’s point in 2:14–15 is not to affirm that such good Gentiles exist, but to insist on the *principle* that a God who is impartial must judge Jews and Gentiles in the same way (56–57). In 2:17–24, Paul is by no means saying that all Jews are guilty of the sins listed, but merely that some Jews are and that, as such, they cannot be judged by God any differently than Gentile sinners (58–59, 64). By the end of chapter 2, Paul has established that the sole criterion for determining who is righteous is the “circumcision of the heart” – and that such a category is by no means the private preserve of Jews (60).  

It is first in chapter 3 that Paul declares the universality of sin’s dominion (3:4, 9, 12, 19). Only God can pronounce such a verdict (64), so Paul establishes the point by citing Scriptures that speak, first, of the universality of human sinfulness (3:10–12), then of the perversity of all things human (3:13–18). If, as Scripture insists, Jews no less than Gentiles are “sinners,” dominated by the power of sin and liable to God’s judgment, then the provisions of the Mosaic law for atonement and forgiveness have clearly proved ineffective (3:19–20) – and it is “apart from” them that Jews no less than Gentiles must be “justified” (60, 65).

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74 The law’s provisions for atonement are surely part of the “law” that Paul insists can have no part in “justification” (Rom 3:21–22). Paul does not pause at this point in his argument to ask why these provisions were given. Nonetheless, his borrowing of terms from the Jewish sacrificial cult in Rom 3:25 presupposes that he interpreted its rites typologically. They thus served to prefigure Christ’s death on the cross and to prophesy redemption through him (Jean-Noël Aletti, *Comment Dieu est-il juste? Clefs pour interpréter l’épître aux Romains* [Paris: Seuil, 1991], 237–9; cf. “Cohérence,” 160–61).

75 In Rom 10:5–17 (the explanation or *probatio* of the *propositio* in 10:4 [Cfes, 123]), Paul contrasts the two economies, that of the law and that of faith (or of Christ). Paul’s point in these verses is to show that the two economies are incompatible, the former based on “doing” (so Rom 10:5), the latter on a “believing” that involves no human pursuit, but the accepting of a divine visitation and gift (10:6–8). Paul here presents the path to life prescribed by the Mosaic law in the terms in which it was understood by Jews (10:5 is a quotation of Lev 18:5), believing that his earlier argument had already established that this path was not viable (Cfes, 108–9, 118; *Loi*, 218–26).

76 That is, since Gen 15:6 and Ps 32:1–2 have in common an occurrence of the Greek word *koyō*, the two passages are allowed to illustrate each other.


on salvation by works. Sanders minimizes the importance of forensic justification in Paul’s thought on inadequate grounds and fails to acknowledge that beliefs adopted by Paul subsequent to his conversion could have become of central importance to his theology. As for Dunn, when he claims that Paul opposed an exclusivist national righteousness that insisted on the observance of circumcision, food and Sabbath laws, he does not duly acknowledge the religious and ethical values attached by Jews to these “markers,” or Jewish receptiveness toward non-Jews who adopted these practices to signal their rejection of idolatry and worship of the one true God, or the subordination (particularly apparent in Jewish texts that place some Jews as “outside the boundaries”) of the idea of “nation” to the larger one of “true religion and piety.”

If the nationalism of some Jews had become “proud and prejudiced,” there was no need for the cross of Christ to demonstrate the error of their ways: such attitudes are abundantly condemned in the Hebrew Scriptures themselves (19–21). In fact, Paul never attacks Jewish observance of the law. In Romans 4, he appears to distinguish circumcision, the primary mark of Jewish identity, from “works (of the law);” and the contrast Paul draws between “works” (or “working”) and “concepts such as impiety, transgression, and forgiveness” indicates that he is here concerned with the ethical aspect of the “works of the law” and is “exploring the moral dimension of covenant fidelity.”

In Seifrid’s own reading of Paul, Adam’s transgression was the first of two acts that “determine the entire course of human history”: the consequent subjection of all humanity to sin and death represents the condition “under which all sinned” (70, referring to Rom 5:12). To fallen human beings the divine law was given. The law, precisely as law, demands deeds of obedience of those who would obtain life while condemning the transgressions of the disobedient (105). Inevitably, fallen human beings prove unable to meet its demands: apparent compliance is merely external, neither altering the idolatrous human heart nor expressing true love for God or neighbor (102–4, 148–9).

Jews (including the pre-Christian Paul) knew well that they fell short of full compliance with the law, yet thought the law’s requirements adequately met when their acts of piety were supplemented by attention to the law’s provisions for atonement (102–3). Paul viewed human disobedience more radically: human beings are in outright rebellion against God (125). All are “idolaters” and “liars” (57–58) who fail to give God his due; hence God has a “contention” against us. The law cannot cure our fallenness. Instead it effects our transgression, reveals our bondage to sin, pronounces our sentence of death, demonstrates the justice of God in his contention against us— and so sets the stage for the incarnation (108–9).

It is an indispensable stage. The law’s sentence of death is by no means to be escaped, since God’s Spirit gives life only to that which has been killed, and righteousness is granted only “where the judgment of condemnation has been rendered” (112).

If Adam’s sin was the first of two determinative acts in human history, the obedience of Christ was the second. Not that his decisive importance lies in the model of faithfulness that he left; rather, in the death to which his faithfulness brought him, he atoned for our sins. The law’s condemnation of humanity’s sinfulness was not set aside, but carried out on the cross; and it faithfulness brought him, he atoned for our sins. The law’s condemnation of humanity’s sinfulness was not set aside, but carried out on the cross; and it...
present in the cross and resurrection of Christ: the vindication of God, the condemnation of his foes, the establishing of right order in the new creation. These — not the problems of nationalism or ethnicity — are the issues when justification is the theme in Paul’s writings (84–85).

27. The scholars at whom we have just looked believe that, for Paul, the sinfulness of human beings rules out any possibility of “righteousness through the law”; those to whom we now turn think (in addition) that, for Paul, Jewish pursuit of that path violates the principle that humans must trust God for all their needs.

The thrust of Glenn N. Davies’s Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1–4 is “to assert the continuity of God’s ways of dealing with mankind both before and after the coming of Christ. . . . The appropriate response of men and women to God is always faith and obedience” (18). In Romans 1:18–32 Paul describes the condemnation, not of all humankind, but of the wicked — Jews as well as Greeks — in contrast with the righteous who, according to 1:17, live by faith (45). Chapter 2 goes on to portray, not only God’s impartial condemnation of all who are wicked, but also his impartial blessing of the righteous: Old Testament believers are primarily intended in 2:6–11, but righteous Gentiles (such as the repentant Ninevites, Job, Melchizedek, Rahab, Ruth, and Naaman), accepted because of their faith, are included as well (55–56). Even the judgment of Romans 3:10–18 is not universal, but rather an assertion of “the presence of evildoers among both Jews and Gentiles and their bondage to sin” (95). Excluded from their number are the righteous, Jews and Gentiles alike, whom God saved throughout the Old Testament era. God’s righteousness in doing so, however, was first established through the faithfulness Christ showed in his death on the cross: “although God’s forgiveness had been operative in Old Testament times (cf. Rom. 4.7), the definitive expiation and propitiation with respect to that sin had not been effected” (109, on Rom 3:21–26).

For even the “righteous” committed sins that needed forgiveness. When Paul excludes the “works of law” as a basis for justification, “the reason for their exclusion is that they do not deal with sin” (118). The works excluded in Romans 3:20a can hardly be confined to “emblems of national righteousness,” since it is scarcely these demands of the law alone that bring knowledge of sin (3:20b) (118). Indeed, since Paul, in Romans 2, has in effect said that righteous Gentiles do the “works of the law,” the latter can hardly refer to the “badges of [Jewish] national righteousness” (120). Similarly, in Romans 4 Paul argues from Scripture that it is not human works that result in the “non-reckoning of sins, but the sovereign act of God who forgives them. Clearly again the works that Paul has in mind are good works, done in obedience to God. Yet they play no part in God’s acquittal of the sinner”

(122). In Romans 9:11, too, Paul asserts “that it is God’s activity and not man’s which forms the basis of salvation” (123). And though in none of the texts cited so far does Paul suggest that “works” are excluded because they are wrongly deemed by Jews to be meritorious, such an intimation seems clear in 9:32: “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Israel considered her works, done in obedience to God, would be satisfactory to gain the acceptance of God at the last day” (124). Romans 11:6 points in the same direction (126). Thus, whereas Sanders appears to have successfully refuted the view that “Rabbinic religion was a religion of legalistic works-righteousness,” he has “not really avoided the conclusion that works do play [among Paul’s Jewish contemporaries] an integral (as opposed to evidential) role in one’s salvation” (146).

28. Our final Finnish contribution comes from Lauri Thurén, the title of whose monograph (Dehistorizing Paul: A Dynamic Perspective on Pauline Theology and the Law) conveys to those who can pronounce it the book’s pivotal point. Too often Paul’s writings have been read in a “static” way, as though Paul were merely informing his readers of his religious ideas, and as though what he writes on a matter reproduces exactly what he thinks (23). This approach has led to errors on the part both of those who think to derive from Paul’s letters direct statements of timeless, universal truth and of those who, finding Paul’s argumentation at the surface level problematic, conclude too readily that he was an inconsistent thinker (56). Paul intended to affect his readers by what he wrote, to induce a desired response, to influence their thoughts and actions (24); this intention gives his letters a “dynamic” character that must dictate our reading of them. On the other hand, Paul’s interest in theology is not to be underestimated, and the search, beneath the rhetoric, for the theology of his letters is by no means inappropriate. “Paul really seems to have had a special interest in theological questions, and a tendency . . . to approach even practical questions from a theological point of view” (17–18; cf. 138). It is telling that his letters have always provoked theological inquiry in a way that the letters of Peter and James have not (18).

When the soteriology of Judaism is derived from a “static” reading of Paul’s letters, the results differ from what we know of the reality. But Paul was not writing an “objective” description of the faith of his opponents. What we have is rather a “pedagogically overstated” presentation of an alternative position to his own, not without some perceived relation to the actual thinking of his opponents (otherwise Paul’s rhetorical purposes would not have been served), but theoretic to the extent that it includes what, to Paul’s mind, were the “true nature” and possible consequences rather than the simple substance of his antagonists’ views. We are left with a “legalistic”


86 Cf. the summaries of Kudl, Räisänen, Eskola, and Laato above.

87 Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2000.
picture only if we are guilty of a “static” reading of Paul’s very “dynamic” texts (68–69, 145–6, 165–6, 177).

On the other hand, Thünen believes, recent Pauline scholarship has correctly moved beyond Sanders’s “one-sided amendment” of earlier studies on rabbinic theology to a more balanced view. “Both divine grace and human obedience could be emphasized” in ancient Judaism, and both are repeatedly seen to have a role in salvation. We seldom find in Jewish texts (or, for that matter, in many early Christian texts) Paul’s “radical view of man’s universal guilt and explicit disregard of the human contribution to salvation” (147–8, 177–8). Paul made “grace” and “works” exclusive alternatives – in the process, giving “grace” a restricted meaning not normally borne by the term (170) – in a way that Judaism did not. Judaism did not, like Paul, emphasize “grace” or “faith alone” while totally rejecting the role of good works for salvation” – and to that extent at least it provided a basis for Paul’s rhetorical differentiation between a “righteousness of the law” and that “of faith” (142, 146, 178).

Why, in the end, did Paul reject the law? Part of the answer may lie in the perception that the law constituted a barrier between Jews and Gentiles that “must be eliminated before true universal monotheism is possible” (163). The prophets themselves had proclaimed the “religious differentiation between Jews and Gentiles as temporal” (163). Perhaps Paul simply took the further step of proclaiming that the source of the differentiation, the Torah, was transient too.

But the question then arises why universal monotheism could not have been reached by proclaiming the universal validity of the law apart from the boundaries it imposed upon Jews (166). Something deeper must be at stake – and an old, now unpopular, idea may provide a glimpse of the answer. Regardless of what actually happened in first-century Judaism, those who possess a law are, in principle, susceptible to the temptation to boast, not simply of its possession, but also of their compliance with it (166). It is common for scholars now to confine the boasting excluded by Romans 3:27 to the possession of the law; but the thesis there stated is expanded on and illustrated in chapter 4, where it is allowed that, if one is justified by works, then one has reason to boast, though boasting is ruled out where there is obedience to it (169–71).

Clearly Paul thinks that, where the “works of the law” play a role in salvation, boasting of one’s righteousness is at least a theoretic possibility (Phil 3:4–6 suggests that it was not only theoretic [168–9]). Yet Paul’s opposition to boasting that deprives God of his glory is expressed in different contexts and appears to be basic to his thinking (173). What, most profoundly, was wrong with the law for Paul may well have been that it provoked pride and trust in something other than God alone (183).

29. For Colin G. Kruse,88 though the soteriology of first-century Judaism may, in principle, have been based on God’s election and grace, and though, in principle, observance of the law was to mark the Jew’s grateful response to God’s goodness, in practice “covenantal nomism” at times “degenerated into the legalism which the apostle attacked. . . . In Paul’s view, many Jews of his day. . . . had fallen into the trap of believing that justification could be attained by carrying out what the law required” (241; cf. 225, 296). In Galatians, Paul’s opposition was initially sparked by an insistence that the distinctively Jewish “works of the law” be performed even by Gentile believers. His argument developed, however, into a “thoroughgoing” critique of the law (68): the law “operates on the principle of performance. . . . and not on the principle of faith” (107, referring to Gal 3:12; cf. 84), whereas the “means by which people are justified in God’s sight” has always been that of faith (110). The intended function of the law was merely to “restrain moral decline in Israel until the coming of [the family of] Christ to whom the promise applied” (92–93). When, in Romans, Paul rejected the “works of the law” as a path to justification, the moral demands of the law were primarily in view: Paul’s point was that “no-one would be justified on account of his or her moral achievements” (187; cf. 242). In Philippians 3 and elsewhere, “Paul contrasts righteousness based upon human status and achievement (mostly the latter) with that which comes from the overflowing goodness of God” (270). When we reach Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, we find emphasized “again and again. . . . that believers are saved, not by their own moral achievements, or by works or deeds of righteousness of their own, but only by the grace of God (and through faith)” (270). While many of Paul’s claims about justification combat the views of others, it is apparent from “many statements in which Paul celebrates the personal blessings of justification” that his concern with the doctrine was by no means limited to its controversial aspects (283). As for believers, they are free from the law as a “regulatory norm,” though, as Scripture, the law continues to be a source of instruction for them (249, 276). “Paul found in the law paradigms for Christian behaviour (and paradigms of God’s response) on which he could draw in his ethical exhortations without reinstating the demands of the law as a regulatory norm for believers” (136; cf. 119, 145).

30. According to Richard H. Bell,89 “Paul’s critique of works of law in Rom. 1.18–3.20” centers on “human inability to keep the law” (271).

88 Paul, the Law, and Justification (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997).
89 No One Seeks for God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 1.18–3.20 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1998).
phrase “works of law” cannot be isolated from the argument of Romans 2, with its language of “practising the law,” “observing the ordinances of the law,” “keeping the law,” and “doers of the law,” and where not keeping the law is shown in sins of theft, adultery, and temple robbery (229). The emphasis on judgment according to works in this section of Romans underlines the need for a revelation of God’s righteousness if sinners are to be saved (255). Still, Beil finds in the passage hints that Paul detects and rejects “legalism” in Judaism as well: something of self-righteousness is evident in 2:17–24, and 3:27–4:2 is explicit in rejecting boasting based on the doing of the law (184–7, 263–5). And when Paul rules out justification by “works of law” in 3:20, it seems that Paul believes this was God’s intention from the beginning (271). “Paul’s view that no one can be justified by works has a certain parallel with the view that no one can know God through the created order. So in Rom. 1.19–21a Paul puts forward the view of people knowing God through creation; then in 1.21b–32 he says this is an impossible way, for any such knowledge has been lost. . . . Likewise, in Rom. 2.1–29 he puts forward the view that one can be justified by works; then in 3.9–20 he makes it clear that this way is impossible because all are under the power of sin” (272). The suggestions that humans can know God through the created order and that they can be justified by works are both rejected in the end, not only because sin renders them moot, but also because they leave room for a theology of glory apart from the cross of Christ (272).

31. Vincent M. Smiles50 agrees with the “new perspective” that Paul was not attacking Jewish “legalism,” if the latter term means “a fastidious externalism that, forgetful of election and covenant, insisted on ‘works-righteousness’ as the only way humans could earn salvation” (21). On the other hand, “Judaism can properly be called ‘legalist’ . . . in that the demands of the covenant, enshrined in the ‘law,’ make ‘life’ dependent on obedience and threaten the ‘curse’ for disobedience (e.g., Deut 27–29; Lev 18:5). . . . It makes nonsense of Paul, not to mention Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, to deny that the law requires obedience and makes such obedience, within the context of the covenant, a prerequisite for salvation” (19). In Judaism, then, “the law has a necessary soteriological function” (18 n. 46).

But any such role for the law is rejected by Paul. Where the law’s requirement of obedience (within the context of the covenant, to be sure) is seen as determinative of the divine-human relationship, there the sovereignty of divine grace is compromised (226). This is the thrust of Paul’s rejection of the notion that “justification” is “by the works of the law.” The latter phrase is a favorite of Paul’s, though extremely rare outside his writings; determinative of its meaning is the word “works,” which can, indeed, be used by itself as an abbreviation of the whole: if justification is “by the works of the law,” then “the divine-human relationship” is defined “in terms of performance of the law’s demands” (119, 123). But this is to distort the true nature of that relationship: clearly already in the story of Abraham, and demonstrably in the gospel of God’s initiative, in Christ, for the salvation of sinners, grace is foundational (24). To suggest, as did certain Jewish Christians, that the law was not by itself sufficient for salvation but that faith in Messiah is also necessary (118) is to imply that the death of Christ for our sins was insufficient for the purpose (70, 102).

32. Brad Eastman51 suggests that recent estimates, influenced by the work of Sanders, of the role of grace in Paul’s thinking about the law and justification have suffered from a failure to examine the concept in other (and non-polemical) contexts. A survey of the acknowledged Pauline epistles leads him to conclude that grace is of “fundamental importance” to “Paul’s religious vision” (198). Everywhere we find expressions of the conviction that grace is needed both for entrance into the Christian community and throughout the lives of believers: “people ‘get in’ and ‘stay in’ the community only because God calls them and empowers them” (210; cf. 160). Eastman notes in particular “Paul’s almost instinctive tendency to qualify statements about human achievements and responsibility with statements that at least imply, if not explicitly refer to, dependence on God. The apostle cannot speak of human effort without immediately being led to refer, in some way, to dependence on divine resources” (198, referring in the first place to Phil 2:12–13; texts cited elsewhere include 1 Cor 15:10; Gal 4:9). The theme, though by no means confined to discussions of the Jewish Torah or other polemical contexts, does “shape” Paul’s understanding of “justification” as well: the law, requiring human compliance with its demands, can have no part in the process—the gift of salvation from which human activity is excluded (210, 213–4). Sanders, Eastman believes, “errs in his underestimation of the significance of grace in Paul and in a failure to appreciate the full extent of Paul’s pessimism about ‘flesh’ and its abilities to please God” (216). In fact, Paul’s “justification” texts “readily fall into the larger pattern of dependence on God” (210).

33. Seyoon Kim52 energetically tackles the work of the most energetic proponent of the “new perspective,” James D. G. Dunn. To Dunn he attributes the positions that Paul received at Damascus "only God’s call to the gentile mission" (22); that Paul’s conversion did not entail a devaluation of the law as the means of justification (27, 46); that Paul’s doctrine of justification developed only gradually "in the wake of the Antiochian incident


51 The Significance of Grace in the Letters of Paul (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

and the Galatian controversy" (22); and that that doctrine is to be understood narrowly as a defense of Paul's gentile mission (3), its primary thrust lying in the "insight that God's covenant grace is also for the Gentiles as Gentiles" and "does not require Gentiles to merge their ethnic identity into that of the Jewish people" (20, quoting Dunn). Against these claims he advances his own thesis that the Damascus Christophany brought Paul both a revelation of the gospel and an apostolic commission to the Gentiles (6): Damascus "convinced Paul . . . of the truth of the Christian kerygma that Christ vicariously bore the curse of the law for our sins . . . so he realized that now salvation depends on appropriating the divine redemption that had been wrought in Christ . . . rather than on observing the law" (42). As a result, "Paul began to develop his distinctive soteriological formulation of the gospel in terms of justification through faith in Christ without works of the law. This new soteriology provided a theological basis for his gentile mission to which he was also called at the Damascus Christophany" (22).

That the "righteousness of the law" pursued by Pharisaic Judaism in the first century A.D. in fact contained "an element of works-righteousness" is apparent from the personal achievements Paul lists to his credit in Philippians 3, and from his claim that, on their basis, he could have "greater confidence in the flesh" than his Jewish opponents (76): were such "righteousness" conceived without thought of merit, and had it amounted merely to a matter of good intentions to observe the law with atonement provided for all shortcomings, then claims to excel would have been pointless (149). This conclusion, based on the first-hand evidence that Paul provides for Pharisaic Judaism, is confirmed by a number of recent studies of Jewish sources (83, 143–52). On the other hand, only when Paul's opposition to "works of the law" is seen as rooted in his conviction that the latter represent human, and therefore inadequate, attempts to earn salvation is the contrast he draws between such works and "faith" or "grace" comprehensible (60).

As for justification, it has "a forensic dimension, so that it often refers to acquittal or deliverance from God's wrath at the last judgment . . . and to its anticipation in the present" (66). When the forensic dimension of justification is kept in view, the sins or trespasses "from which justification or acquittal is supposed to be made cannot be limited to the transgression of the commandments that specially mark Israel off as the covenant people of God." And, in fact, transgressions of the "religious and ethical commandments of the law" are often explicitly the issue (67). "To that extent, the traditional interpretation of the doctrine of justification by grace and through faith without works of the law in terms of acquittal of sinners by God's grace apart from their own good works of observing all the religious and ethical commandments of the law is legitimate" (83).

6. Concluding Observations

No assessment of the studies here summarized can be attempted without a careful reexamination of the Pauline texts from which they claim support-and that task belongs to the other contributors to this volume. Nonetheless, a few concluding observations may be in order.

That there is little consensus on the "new perspective" is apparent enough. But perhaps all would agree that Sanders has rightly reminded us of the need to portray the Judaism of Paul's day in its own terms, and from sources other than Paul's writings (though the latter, as some scholars point out, provide evidence as well). And no reader of Sanders can fail to see that divine grace played a fundamental role in Jewish "soteriology." Since, however, the latter can also be said of the soteriology of Pelagius and the sixteenth-century church, the question remains whether the insistence on an exclusive reliance on divine grace that Augustine and Luther derived from Paul's writings is in fact a theme of the apostle-and whether it was a point on which he differed from his opponents.

Having combed much of the literature sparked by the "new perspective," I find myself in closest (though by no means complete) agreement with Westerholm's Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics. As argued there, Paul finds the basic principle of the "righteousness of the law" in Scripture itself, so that what he rejects can scarcely be confined to perceived misunderstandings (ethnocentric, legalistic, or otherwise) among his contemporaries. The law, as law, is meant to be observed: only so can the life and blessings that it promises be enjoyed. But (the post-Damascus) Paul believes that human beings, at enmity with God and in slavery to sin, have neither the ability nor the inclination to submit to God's law. (Laato, among others, has reminded us that the pessimism of the first century A.D. in fact contained "an element of works-righteousness" is apparent enough. But perhaps all would agree that Sanders has rightly reminded us of the need to portray the Judaism of Paul's day in its own terms, and from sources other than Paul's writings (though the latter, as some scholars point out, provide evidence as well). And no reader of Sanders can fail to see that divine grace played a fundamental role in Jewish "soteriology." Since, however, the latter can also be said of the soteriology of Pelagius and the sixteenth-century church, the question remains whether the insistence on an exclusive reliance on divine grace that Augustine and Luther derived from Paul's writings is in fact a theme of the apostle-and whether it was a point on which he differed from his opponents.

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That Luther, to this extent at least, gets Paul "right" is part of what I intended when I once suggested, somewhat epigrammatically, that Pauline...
scholars can learn from the Reformer. But there is more to be said. Admittedly, Luther is prone to seeing his own circumstances reflected in biblical texts (if this is a fault); and (herein lies a very great fault), when he writes polemically, his terms and tone are often monumentally lamentable. Still, one has only to read a few pages of his writings (most any will do) to realize that, in crucial respects, he inhabits the same world, and breathes the same air, as the apostle. Both are driven by a massive, unremitting sense of answerability to their Maker. For both, the message of God’s grace in Christ is a source of palpable liberty and joy, and of prodigious οὖς. For both, the faith in God awakened by the message of the cross is a living, busy, active, mighty thing; for both, works without faith are dead. Neither makes the slightest gesture toward cloaking his horror and indignation at any perceived tampering with the divine kerygma or infringement of divine prerogatives. Such kindredness of spirit gives Luther an inestimable advantage over many readers of Paul in “capturing” the essence of the apostle’s writings. On numerous points of detail, Luther may be the last to illumine. For those, however, who would see forest as well as trees, I am still inclined to propose a trip to the dustbins of recent Pauline scholarship – to retrieve and try out, on a reading of the epistles, the discarded spectacles of the Reformer.

94 Westerholm, Law, 173.
95 My colleague John Robertson reminds me of the preface to the second edition of Barth’s Romans, where Barth speaks of the “genuine understanding” and “intuitive certainty” of Luther’s exegesis, and compares it favorably with commentators who do not advance beyond a “prolegomenon to the understanding of the Epistle” (Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans [6th ed.; trans. Edwin C. Hoskyns; London: Oxford University, 1933 (repr. 1977)], 7).

2. Paul’s Use of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background

by

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Prof. Dr. em. Peter Stuhlmacher in aufrichtiger Dankbarkeit gewidmet

As a survey of the literature quickly shows, the common temptation in an essay of this nature is to confuse the analysis of word-usage with theology. This difficulty, we may suggest, derives not so much from the tendency to avoid the detailed work of mapping the overlap and opposition of terms as it does from the assessment of the significance of such semantic relations in context after context. These acts of interpretation inevitably involve fitting the data into larger frameworks which scholars themselves create, inherit or appropriate. Unless one is to be content with mere statistics, synthetic judgments are unavoidable, particularly when dealing with the theological vocabulary of Scripture. Consequently, the danger of imposing foreign ideas on the biblical text cannot be avoided – nor can it be fully overcome. We see in a mirror dimly. That we cannot see perfectly does not mean, of course, that we cannot see at all. Nor does it remove the continuing responsibility to test our judgments against the text as it stands. This well-known problem of interpretation is worth mentioning here because it is particularly relevant to any investigation of theological terms. Considered in themselves and lifted from their contexts, words are relatively defenseless things, that may be readily subjected to our whims. As Humpty Dumpty once remarked to Alice, it is merely a matter of showing them who is master. To acknowledge this difficulty is not to do away with it, but it is important to be aware of one’s limitations. The essay which follows is not a word-study. It is simply not possible here to plot the field of meaning of all the terms derived from the δικαιοσύνη root in the Septuagint, which by the count of one database appear 1791 times. The writings of two important representatives of Hellenistic Jewish literature, Josephus and Philo, each contain several hundred occurrences of the δικαιοσύνη-stem. There are 152 occurrences of terms based on the δικαιοσύνη root in the Pauline literature. Perhaps an exhaustive plotting of righteousness language in Hellenistic literature as a whole is simply not practical. Furthermore, we are concerned here with the theological significance of