Recent decades have witnessed a change in views of Pauline theology. A growing number of evangelicals have endorsed a view called the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) which significantly departs from the Reformation emphasis on justification by faith alone. The NPP has followed in the path of historical criticism’s rejection of an orthodox view of biblical inspiration, and has adopted an existential view of biblical interpretation. The best-known spokesmen for the NPP are E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright. With only slight differences in their defenses of the NPP, all three have adopted “covenantal nomism,” which essentially gives a role in salvation to works of the law of Moses. A survey of historical elements leading up to the NPP isolates several influences: Jewish opposition to the Jesus of the Gospels and Pauline literature, Luther’s alleged antisemitism, and historical-criticism. The NPP is not actually new; it is simply a simultaneous convergence of a number of old aberrations in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

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When discussing the rise of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), few theologians carefully scrutinize its historical and presuppositional antecedents. Many treat it merely as a 20th-century phenomenon; something that is relatively “new” arising within the last thirty or forty years. They erroneously isolate it from its long history of development. The NPP, however, is not new but is the revival of an old ideology that has been around for the many centuries of church history: the revival of works as efficacious for salvation. One should emphasize that the NPP is the direct offspring of historical-critical ideologies. The same ideologies that destroyed orthodox views of inspiration and the trustworthiness of the Scriptures gave rise to the NPP. Historical critics first questioned the inspiration and integrity of the Gospels and then moved with the same intent in the letters of Paul. The
historical-critical search for the “historical Jesus” has led to the “search for the real Paul.” Though many historical critics nominally maintained a Reformed perspective on Pauline literature, their work provided the fodder for the eventual confluence of ideologies that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as the NPP. Sadly, historical criticism has provided not only the avenue to produce the unorthodox concepts of the “historical Jesus” but also an unorthodox concept of the “historical Paul,” a Paul that bears little resemblance to the letters he wrote. For the NPP, eisegesis, not exegesis, of the biblical text dominates.

Introduction to the New Perspective on Paul

Pauline Theology's Radical Change in the Last Century

Some may not be aware of the qualitative and even substantively radical changes that have come in understanding Pauline theology, especially in soteriology with its concepts of sola gratia and sola fide and the forensic declaration of the righteousness of God apart from works that was hammered out on the anvils of the Reformation of 1517. Some even suggest that such a “normative” understanding of Pauline theology has been wrong through the centuries of church history.

A so-called New Perspective¹ has arisen that has sought to replace the “old” perspective so firmly guarded by the Reformation and its heirs. More accurately, however, it is not a new perspective but a revival of an old perspective of works salvation as advocated by Roman Catholicism leading up to the Reformation. Some important reasons prove this. First, even the Reformer Calvin was aware of those who, like the NPP proponents today, interpreted the Pauline expression “works of the law” as referring to “ceremonies” rather than “the whole law.” In commenting on the phrase in Rom 3:20, Calvin shows the NPP is not really new:

Even among learned scholars there is some doubt about what is meant by the works of the law. While some extend them to include the observance of the whole law, others restrict them to ceremonies alone. The addition of the word law induced Chrysostom, Origen, and Jerome to accept the latter opinion, for they thought that this addition had a peculiar connotation, to prevent the passage from being understood of all works. . . . Even the schoolmen had a well-worn cliché that works are meritorious not by any intrinsic worthiness, but by the covenant of God. They are mistaken, since they do not see that our works are always corrupted by vices which deprive them of any merit. . . . Paul . . . rightly and wisely does not argue about mere works, but makes a distinction and explicit reference to the keeping of the law, which was properly the subject of his discussion.

The arguments adduced by other learned scholars in support of this opinion are weaker than they should have been. They hold that the mention of circumcision is offered as an example which refers only to ceremonies. . . . [However] Paul was arguing with those who inspired the people with false confidence in ceremonies, and to remove

this confidence he does not confine himself to ceremonies, nor does he specifically discuss their value, but he includes the whole law. . . . We contend, however, not without reason, that Paul is here speaking of the whole law. . . . It is a . . . memorable truth of the first importance that no one can obtain righteousness by the keeping of the law.2

Second, the doctrine of sola fide is a sine qua non of the Reformation, which sought to return to the true intent of Paul’s letters. Runia strikes at the heart of its importance: “For the Reformers, and those who stood in their tradition the doctrine of the justification of the sinner by faith alone (sola fide) was always of the utmost importance. In the Lutheran Reformation it was called “the article upon which the church stands or falls (articulus ecclesiae stantis et cadentis ecclesiae).”3 Luther warned in his Smalcald Articles,

Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered [nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same], even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, says Peter, Acts 4, 12. And with His stripes we are healed, Is. 53, 5. And upon this article all things depend which we teach and practice in opposition to the Pope, the devil, and the [whole] world. Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine, and not doubt; for otherwise all is lost, and the Pope and devil and all things gain victory and suit over us.4

He foresaw that a day would come after the Reformation’s restoration of Paul’s doctrine of salvation through faith alone that some theologians would attempt to bring back the efficacy of works in justification. At one time, Packer observed,

Luther anticipated that after his death the truth of justification would come under fresh attack and theology would develop in a way tending to submerge it once more in error and incomprehension; and throughout the century following Luther’s death Reformed theologians, with Socinian and other rationalists in their eye, were constantly stressing how radically opposed to each other are the “Gospel mystery” of justification and the religion of the natural man.5

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3 Klaas Runia, “Justification and Roman Catholicism,” in Right with God, ed. D. A. Carson (London: published on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship by Paternoster and Baker, 1992) 197. Although Luther himself did not use this precise expression, he used similar ones. For further information, see H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., Justification By Faith, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 25, 320 n. 51.
4 Martin Luther, The Smalcald Articles. A Reprint from the “Concordia Triglotta,” in Commemoration of the Four-Hundredth Anniversary of the Presentation of This Confession of the Lutheran Church at Schmalkalden, Germany, in 1537 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1937) 4 (emphases in the original).
Basic Definition and Description of the NPP

One will see through this faculty series of articles that when all the dust clears and the issue is seen for what it really is, the NPP supports a mixture of faith and works for justification, thereby violating the sole side principle, so long held by orthodox Protestantism (as well as by the faithful church from the earliest centuries, e.g., Augustine). It truly is a revisionist hermeneutic that fatally undercuts this vital doctrine. Not only is the NPP, “at heart, a counter to the Reformational view,” but it constitutes an assault on the gospel of God’s grace (cf. Gal 1:8-10). This is at heart the definition as well as a description of the NPP.

A Survey of the Reformation Paradigm
on Paul and the Law

Five Hundred Years of Reformation Heritage

The Reformation perspective, wrongly labeled by some as the “Lutheran” perspective, on Pauline theology has dominated the vast majority of Protestant theologies. If one also considers the great church fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), this perspective had even deeper roots than the Reformation, dating back 1,100 more years to the early church itself. Westerholm remarks,

In all essentials Augustine appears to represent what in many has come to be dismissed as the ‘Lutheran’ reading of Paul . . . with his eleven-century headstart on Luther, his [Augustine’s] dominance of Christian thinking throughout those years, and his demonstrable impact on the Reformers themselves, Augustine has a fair claim to be history’s most influential reader of Paul.  

The Reformation approach had two key elements: first, the justification of the individual as the center of Paul’s theology, and second, the identification of Paul’s opponents as legalistic Jews (Judaizers) whom Luther and Calvin viewed as agreeing with the Roman Catholicism of their day. To say that the Reformation perspective has dominated Protestant scholarship to the present is no exaggeration. The Reformation view of Paul and that of Augustine posited the great doctrine of justification by faith as the central focus not only Paul’s theology but also that of the whole Bible.

Luther saw justification by faith as “the summary of Christine doctrine” and Calvin called it “the main hinge on which religion turns.” Though the Reformers

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2 The inaccuracy of labeling the Reformation as the “Lutheran” perspective is that the majority of Reformers, such as Melanchthon and Calvin, also supported the essentials of the Reformation perspective.


had differences, they were united on a sinner’s justification before God as the prime focus of biblical doctrine, especially in terms of soteriology.\(^\text{10}\) For instance, the two most prominent Reformers, Luther and Calvin, agreed that justification by OT law was not possible due to its stringent demands for perfect obedience. Luther remarked, “[T]he commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They teach man to know himself that through them he may recognize his inability to do good. That is why they are called the Old Testament and constitute the Old Testament.”\(^\text{11}\) Calvin remarked, “Because observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life, and fall back into the mere curse. . . . Since the teaching of the law is far above human capacity, a man may view . . . the proffered promises yet he cannot derive any benefit from them.”\(^\text{12}\) For them, the Pauline phrase “works of the law” (e.g., Gal 2:16; 3:10) refer not merely to ceremonial but all aspects of the OT commandments. Luther argued, “[F]or Paul, ‘works of the law’ means the works of the entire law. Therefore one should not make a distinction between the Decalogue and ceremonial laws. Now if the work of the Decalogue does not justify, much less will circumcision, which is a work of the Ceremonial Law.”\(^\text{13}\) Calvin similarly stated, “the context [Gal. 2] shows clearly that the moral law is also comprehended in these words [i.e., “works of the law”], for almost everything that Paul adds relates to the moral rather than the ceremonial law.”\(^\text{14}\)

Though the Reformers were united on the principle of sola fide, Luther and Calvin differed significantly on the relevance of moral aspects of OT law for believers in the NT era, i.e., its sanctifying effects. Luther’s writings give the impression that the believer is free from the OT law of Moses, even the moral law:

> It [the Law of Moses] is no longer binding on us because it was given only to the people of Israel. . . . Moses has nothing to do with us [NT saints]. If I were to accept Moses in one commandment, I would have to accept the entire Moses. . . . Moses is dead. His rule ended when Christ came. He is of no further service. . . . Exodus 20:1 . . . makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us. . . . We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as our lawgiver—unless he agrees with both the NT and the natural law. . . .

\(^{10}\) Buchanan remarked, “Few things in the history of the Church are more remarkable than the entire unanimity of the Reformers on the subject of a sinner’s Justification before God” (J. Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification [reprint of 1877 ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977] 151).


\(^{12}\) Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion 2.7.3 (p. 352).

\(^{13}\) Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians ” (1535), in Luther’s Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963) 26:122; see also 26:123-41, 248-68.

Luther saw the OT as binding only when it agrees with the NT and mirrors natural law: “I keep the commandments which Moses has given, not because Moses gave commandment, but because they have been implanted in me by nature, and Moses agrees exactly with nature.”

Although he believed that the OT law was abrogated, Luther saw an important significance of Moses for NT believers: its prophetic pointers to Christ: “I find something in Moses that I do not have from nature: the promises and pledges of God about Christ,” and its spiritual lessons: “[W]e read Moses for the beautiful examples of faith, of love, and of the cross, as shown in the fathers, Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all the rest. From them we should learn to trust in God and love him.”

In contrast to Luther, Calvin maintained that although one is saved by grace through faith alone, keeping the moral law does not conflict with the NT message of grace, because for him the keeping of the moral law by the saved person was generated from a thankful response to God’s grace through obedience. Calvin saw benefits from the moral law for the unsaved too: (1) its convicting and punitive power moves one to seek grace; (2) it acts as a deterrent for the unregenerate; (3) it is “the best instrument for [mankind] to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord’s will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it”; (4) “by frequent meditation upon it be aroused to obedience, be strengthened by it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression.” Calvin went on to note that “certain ignorant persons, not understanding . . . rashly cast out the whole of Moses, and bid farewell to the two Tables of the Law.” For Calvin, the ceremonial aspects of the OT law “have been abrogated not in effect but only in use. Christ by his coming has terminated them, but has not deprived them of anything of their sanctity.” Calvin saw the New Covenant as providing the Holy Spirit’s enablement to live a godly life:

“If I accept Moses in one respect (Paul tells the Galatians in chapter 5:3), then I am obligated to keep the entire law. For not one little period in Moses pertains to us.”

Luther saw the OT as binding only when it agrees with the NT and mirrors natural law: “I keep the commandments which Moses has given, not because Moses gave commandment, but because they have been implanted in me by nature, and Moses agrees exactly with nature.”

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Calvin saw the New Covenant as providing the Holy Spirit’s enablement to live a godly life:

[T]he proper use of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved

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15Luther’s Works 35:164-66.
16Luther’s Works 35:168.
17Luther’s Works 35:173.
19Institutes 2.7.7-12 (351-61).
20Institutes 2.7.16 (364).
upon their heart by the finger of God [Jer. 31:33; Heb. 10:16], that is, they have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law.\textsuperscript{21}

The moral law provided that instruction for believers as to what pleases God, and for those born-again, they long to please God for his gracious provision, though believers often fail in this present life; perfection awaits glorification.\textsuperscript{22}

Another very important perspective of Protestantism inherited from the Reformers is its viewpoint on Judaism. To Luther, Calvin, and their successors, Judaism was essentially a legalistic religion that had as its core beliefs the need of earning salvation and justification through obedience to the law. They perceived a similar legalism in the Roman Catholicism of their day. Typical is the following comment on Gal 2:10 by Luther regarding Judaism:

I also believe that if the believing Jews at that time had observed the Law and circumcision under the condition permitted by apostles, Judaism would have remained until now, and the whole world would have accepted the ceremonies of the Jews. But because they insisted on the Law and circumcision as something necessary for salvation and constructed an act of worship and some sort of god out of it, God could not stand for it. Therefore He threw over the temple, the Law, the worship, and the holy city of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{23}

And again, Luther reacted strongly to all forms of legalism:

Whoever surrenders this knowledge [of God’s grace] must necessarily develop this notion: ‘I shall undertake this form of worship; I shall join this religious order; I shall select this or that work. And so I shall serve God. There is no doubt that God will regard and accept these works and will grant me eternal life for them. For He is merciful and kind, granting every good even to those who are unworthy and ungrateful; much more will He grant me His grace and eternal life for so many great deeds and merits!’ This is the height of wisdom, righteousness, and religion about which reason is able to judge; it is common to all heathen, papists, the Jews, the Mohammedans, and the sectarians. They cannot rise higher than that Pharisee in Luke (18:11-12). They do not know the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness. . . . Therefore, there is no difference at all between a papist, a Jew, a Turk, or a sectarian. . . .\textsuperscript{24}

Calvin also shared this view of Judaism’s legalism. In commenting on Rom 10:3, he wrote,

\textsuperscript{21}Institutes 2:7.12 (360).

\textsuperscript{22}For further comparison between Luther and Calvin on their approach to the OT, see David Wright, “The Ethical Use of the Old Testament in Luther and Calvin: A Comparison,” \textit{Scottish Journal of Theology} 36 (1983):463-85.

\textsuperscript{23}Luther, “Galatians ” (1535), \textit{Luther’s Works} 26:105.

\textsuperscript{24}Luther, “Galatians ” (1535), \textit{Luther’s Works} 26:396-97.
Notice how they [the Jews] went astray through their unconsidered zeal. They wanted to set up a righteousness of their own, and their foolish confidence proceeded from their ignorance of God’s righteousness. . . . Those, therefore, who desire to be justified in themselves do not submit to the righteousness of God, for the first step to obtaining righteousness of God is to renounce our own righteousness. . . .

Commenting on Romans 10:4, he argued,

The Jews might have appeared to have pursued the right path, because they devoted themselves to the righteousness of the law. It was necessary for Paul to disprove this false opinion. He does show [sic, “so”?] by showing that those who seek to be justified by their own works are false interpreters of the law, because the law was given to lead us by the hand to another righteousness. . . .

To the Reformers, Roman Catholicism of their day had many parallels to the legalism of other religions, especially the Judaism of the NT (e.g., Matt 12:8-14; 15:1-20; 23:1-36; Rom 3:27-4:8; 9:30–10:8; Phil 3:2-11). They saw in Judaism a degeneration into attempting to merit favor with God through good works, which the Reformers interpreted as idolatry, i.e., glory goes to the human instrument rather than to God.

Reformation Exegesis and View of Inspiration

Very important, however, the Reformers anchored their views in grammatico-historical exegesis based in the original languages and nurtured them with an uncompromising view of the complete inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture. Terry, in his classic work on Biblical Hermeneutics, comments not only about the exposition of the Reformation period but also changes in exegetical approach that followed soon after the Reformation. He notes that while the more rigid Lutherans at times exhibited a “dogmatic tone and method” in their use of Scripture and Reformed theologians broke away “from churchly customs and traditional ideas and treat the Scriptures with a respectful, but free critical spirit,”

In general exposition no great differences appeared among the early reformers. Luther and Melanchthon represent the dogmatic, Zwingli . . . and Beza the more grammatico-historical method of scriptural interpretation. Calvin combined some elements of both, but belonged essentially to the Reformed party. It was not until two centuries later that a cold, illiberal, and dogmatic orthodoxy provoked an opposite extreme of lawless

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25 Calvin, “Romans,” Calvin’s Commentaries 8:221.
26 Calvin “Romans,” Calvin’s Commentaries 8:221-22.
The Rise of the New Perspective Paradigm on Paul and the Law

First Stimulus: Historical-Criticism’s Rejection of Inspiration

A very important key in understanding the NPP is that the “new” approach to Pauline theology was not founded so much on grammatico-historical exegesis of Scripture such as motivated the Reformers, but on the superimposition on scriptural interpretation of dogmatic, historical-critical ideologies and political correctness resulting from those presuppositions. Geisler has correctly observed another major factor that contributed to the fall of the Reformation and its high view of biblical inspiration and inerrancy: the willful imposition of ideologies hostile to the authority of the text:

[W]ithin a little over one hundred years after the Reformation the philosophical seeds of modern errancy were sown. When these seeds had produced their fruit in the church a century or so later, it was because theologians had capitulated to alien philosophical presuppositions. Hence, the rise of an errant view of Scripture did not result from a discovery of factual evidence that made belief in an inerrant Scripture untenable. Rather, it resulted from the unnecessary acceptance of philosophical premises that undermined the historic belief in an infallible and inerrant Bible.

The Reformation view of both the centrality of justification and the righteousness of God in Pauline theology and the legalism of Judaism remained the dominant paradigm among Protestant theologians, even among such radical theologians as Baur, Bultmann, and more recently Hans Hübner, albeit with some differences in interpreting the text. Those differences centered in a wholesale adoption of historical-criticism in interpreting Paul’s theology and NT theology in general. Terry’s and Geisler’s comments expose one of the underlying impetuses ultimately responsible for producing the NPP: historical-criticism with its hostile philosophical biases was imposed on the scriptural text that eventually not only undermined the sine qua non of inspiration and inerrancy but also served to

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30Hans Hübner, *Law in Paul’s Thought*, trans. James C. G. Greig, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984). Hübner’s radicalism is demonstrated by his bold assertions of an alleged inconsistency in Paul’s thought and that Paul’s thoughts developed regarding the law, being strongly negative in Galatians, while turning positive and maturing over time when he composed Romans. Hübner went so far as to say that Paul in Gal 3:19 believed that evil angels had imposed the law on the Israelites (see 1-11, 26-30).
undo these basic underpinnings of the Reformation application of grammatico-historical exegesis to Pauline theology. Once a departure from an orthodox view occurred through the rise of historical-critical exegesis of the NT rather than grammatico-historical, the rise of the NPP was inevitable.

The radical critic Bultmann maintained Luther’s teaching on the law somewhat, but imposed historical-criticism in reinterpreting much of Paul’s works, including existentialism, demythologization, a history-of-religions approach, all operating with the assumption of an uninspired text. This audacious and unjustified imposition of presupposed ideologies on the text under the assumption of rejecting inspiration and inerrancy was directly responsible for the rise of the NPP. Reventlow decried the “failure of exegetes to reflect adequately on their methodology and the presuppositions, shaped by their view of the world, which they bring to their work.” He insisted that in biblical exegesis interpreters must search for “hidden presuppositions.” This is a major factor in changes in Pauline theology and constitutes the first of two prime reasons for current changes in approach to Pauline theology. Historical-critical ideology lies at the center of the NPP.

Thielman notes changes caused by the emergence of the NPP. In discussing the legitimacy of NT theology, he writes,

An increasing number of scholars are concluding that this or that aspect of Paul’s theology, once thought important, hopelessly contradicts the rest, and a few have decided that nothing in the letters is worth salvaging. . . .

At the center of this negative evaluation of New Testament, and particularly Pauline, theology lies the recent cross-examination of Paul’s view of the Jewish law. It would be hard to imagine a more fundamental principle of Protestant theology than Paul’s dictum that salvation comes through faith alone, apart from works. Martin Luther’s understanding of this statement lay at the heart of his protest against the Roman Catholic Church, and a variety of theologians, both Protestant and otherwise, came to agree that the great Reformer’s interpretation of this statement was both historically correct and theologically necessary. During the past several decades, however, Luther’s reading of Paul’s statement about the Jewish law has come under devastating attack.
The attack has been so devastating that some theologians dismiss the possibility of any consistency in Paul’s theology. Sanders, reflecting the impact of historical criticism, argues that Paul was thinking in a knee-jerk “reflex” mode driven by his soteriology;36 that Paul’s thinking about the law was frequently inconsistent or “aberrant” (e.g., Rom 2:12-16);37 and that Paul’s view of the law in Romans 2 “cannot be harmonized with any of the diverse things which Paul says about the law elsewhere.”38 Raisanen, deeply influenced by Sanders’ thinking,39 argues that Paul is hopelessly inconsistent even within individual letters: “[C]ontradictions and tension have to be accepted as constant features of Paul’s theology of law. They are not simply of an accidental or peripheral nature.”40 Instead of recognizing orthodox concepts of the inspiration, inerrancy, and divine guidance in Paul’s thinking, the NPP imposes historical-critical postulations on the text.

With the dominance of historical-critical ideologies, the question that now dominates in many NT circles is “Did Paul Have a Theology?” Reid relates,

Not all are convinced . . . of the quality of Paul’s thinking. Some forceful challenges to the notion that Paul had a coherent, consistent theology, free from contradictions have emerged. The most outstanding example is that of Heikki Räisänen, who has argued that Paul’s statements about the law are logically inconsistent and are simply rationalizations for views that he arrived at by other means.41

Reid views the NPP as “A revolution in New Testament studies” that “will lead to a fresh understanding of Paul.”42 Historical-critical exegesis provided the platform to remold Pauline thought into a form acceptable to transient modern thought apart from any consideration of authorial intent.

Second Stimulus: Existentialism of the New Hermeneutic

The close of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have seen a radical departure in Pauline theology from the formerly dominant Reformation perspective. The change has been accurately termed a “paradigm shift” for the study of Paul:

37 Ibid., 516.
40 Ibid., 11.
One of the most important challenges to current scholarship on Paul’s letter to the Romans is to come to terms with an interpretive tradition marked by largely unacknowledged anti-Semitism while remaining true to Paul’s purpose in writing the letter. If a ‘paradigm shift’ is occurring in the study of Romans, stimulating scholars to revise the traditional anti-Judaic approach, the task is to provide a more adequate alternative. I believe that we are now in a position to suggest that this alternative involves a respectful coexistence between Jews and Gentiles in the context of a mission of world conversion and unification.43

In addition to the first stimulus—historical-critical ideologies—to the rise of the NPP, Jewett’s comments reveal a second presupposition: an alleged anti-Semitism stemming from the Reformation or what might be called a “Holocaust hermeneutical override approach” to Paul. For quite a while before Jewett, a call for a “new paradigm” for reading Romans had been voiced. Porter commented,

I intend to demonstrate that in the interpretation of Paul’s letter to the Romans there are shared paradigms in the commentaries and “textbooks,” that there is a growing sense that existing paradigms have ceased to function adequately, and that the dialogue between Christians and Jews, between the church and synagogue, is a major factor in making the existing paradigms inadequate. Furthermore, it is the [my] intent . . . to propose in a very preliminary fashion the implications of the “paradigm shift” for the interpretation of Romans.44

Glenn Earley, tracing the rise of the hermeneutical stimulus, terms the second presupposition as “the radical hermeneutical shift in post-Holocaust Christian thought” that has strongly influenced NT interpretation, especially Paul. He finds two phases in the shift: (1) “anti-Judaism in the Christian tradition was a necessary condition for the Holocaust” and (2) a “radical shift in Christian theology away from traditional interpretations of Judaism and the ‘New Testament’ has been developed.”45 Earley remarks,

[Efforts by Christian theologians to come to terms with the Holocaust have led to the recognition that a demonic strand of anti-Judaism runs all the way back to the first centuries of Christian tradition. This recognition has led . . . to a radical hermeneutical shift in the way that Christian scholars and theologians interpret their own tradition as well as Judaism’s which . . . has led to an altered understanding of present-day Judaism and Christianity. Thus a shuttle-like dialectic between tradition and the present has begun.46

46Ibid., 17.
Such a hermeneutical shift has been strongly influenced by current existentialist thinking with its resultant postulation that preunderstanding excludes the possibility of objective interpretation.

As a main influence on this Holocaust hermeneutic, Earley cites Hans-Georg Gadamer’s work. That work explained the process of understanding involved in interpretation through the New Hermeneutic’s “hermeneutical circle” that was previously proposed by existentialists Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. The New Hermeneutic postulates an interaction between text and interpreter that brings new meaning to the text from the subjective experience of the interpreter. A set of principles of interpretation is not involved, but an existential or experiential understanding by which the interpreter and his biases approach the text for a new understanding whereby the interpreter himself is altered experientially. That hermeneutic rejects the scientific method and reverses the traditional approach to interpretation by producing meanings not derived through traditional grammatico-historical principles. Rather it imposes subjective opinions on the text derived from present cultural experiences of the interpreter. Simply stated, the interpreter’s bias and not the historical meaning becomes the meaning of the text. The original context is overlooked. What the text means for a reader’s present situation becomes the measure of what is true. As a result, an interpreter’s whimsical bias controls the interpreted meaning of the biblical text. The text becomes a launching pad for the interpreter’s viewpoints rather than being objectively understood as in grammatico-historical exegesis. The New Hermeneutic dismisses the conventional nature of language and the propositional nature of the biblical text.

As the second major presupposition, the New Hermeneutic provided the ability to reinterpret the Pauline text without any consideration of his original meaning in favor of the interpreter’s bias.

No Uniform Interpretation in the NPP

The NPP has not developed a broad consensus among its proponents.

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50 For an excellent discussion, see the edited and expanded transcript given by J. Ligon Duncan, “The Attractions of the New Perspective(s) on Paul,” A paper given at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi (October 2001); expanded at Twin Lakes Fellowship Fraternal, Florence, Mississippi (April
Historical criticism and the subjective bias of the New Hermeneutic contribute directly to nonuniformity. The misnomered “Lutheran approach” had a broad consensus of understanding because it anchored itself in grammatico-historical principles that promote objectivity. In contrast, each NPP proponent, although sharing some basics with others, has his own ideas so that the movement is more accurately “New Perspectives on Paul.” The NPP might be seen as a loose aggregate of similar yet sometimes conflicting opinions.

Although no single spokesperson for the viewpoint exists and no organization propagates it, the NPP has some prominent advocates. The three main proponents, E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright agree with one another on some basics, but sharply disagree on others. Duncan speaks of the central common thread:

At the heart of NPP’s critique of both Protestant and Catholic interpretation of Paul is the charge that Reformatio-n-era theologians read Paul via a medieval framework that obscured the categories of first-century Judaism, resulting in a complete misunderstanding of his teaching on Justification. The ideas of “the righteousness of God,” “imputation,” and even the definition of justification itself—all these have been invented or misunderstood by Lutheran and Catholic traditions of interpretation.51

Moo comments similarly:

Scholarship on Paul and the law in the last ten years has witnessed a “paradigm shift.” For a long time, the dominant approach to Paul’s teaching on the law was set within the framework of key reformation concepts. Against the background of Luther’s struggles with “pangs of conscience” and a works-oriented Catholicism, this approach placed the justification of the individual at the center of Paul’s theology and identified his opponents as legalistic Jews or Judaizers. These two key components of the old paradigm have been discarded as a decisively new direction in Pauline studies has emerged.52

Essentially, the NPP’s central tenet accuses the Reformers of subjective bias, at the same time completely ignoring the extreme bias of their own approach that promotes subjectivity through historical criticism and the New Hermeneutic.

NPP proponents either accuse Paul of misunderstanding or misrepresenting Judaism (i.e., Paul was wrong), or redefine the opponents that Paul was criticizing, asserting that Luther and the Reformation heritage have misperceived Paul’s opponents by misreading Paul. Westerholm comments,
The conviction most central to the “new perspective on Paul” pertains in the first place to Judaism, not Paul: first-century Jews, it is claimed (in dependence on E. P. Sanders’ Paul and Palestinian Judaism), were not legalists who supposed that they earned salvation (or membership in the people of God) by deeds they did in compliance with the law. Since the “Lutheran” Paul rejected his ancestral religion because it pursued salvation by “works,” our better understanding of Judaism requires a revolution in our understanding of the apostle.

From this point paths diverge. It is possible to hold, with the new perspectivists, that Judaism was not legalistic while still holding, with the “Lutherans,” that Paul thought it was: Paul, we must then conclude, was wrong. . . . More commonly it is held that Judaism was not legalistic, that Paul has been misread . . . and that the error is to be attributed to Luther and his heirs, whose views of Judaism we need not scruple to amend.53

One must stress that this re-reading of Paul does not result from an objective exegesis of the text to correct an error but has been stimulated by acutely subjective biases of historical criticism and the New Hermeneutic.

At the beginning of the 21st century, two diametrically opposed views on Pauline theology and his view of Judaism and the law compete for dominance: (1) The traditional “Lutheran” or Reformational paradigm as a correct understanding of Paul’s thought, rejecting the dominance of legalism in soteriology, whether expressed in Judaism of Paul’s day or Roman Catholicism of Luther’s. Paul opposed Judaism as a religion of works; the Reformers were correct in understanding Paul’s opposition to the works of Judaism; Judaism, like Roman Catholicism, was legalistic. NPP proponents have misrepresented the Judaism of Paul’s day due to the church’s embracing of historical-critical ideology and a prejudicial hermeneutical bent. (2) The NPP is a needed corrective. Second-Temple Judaism was a religion of grace. In this case, two sub-conclusions compete among NPP proponents: either Paul deliberately misrepresented Judaism in his epistles, or Paul’s opposition to Judaism did not lie in a rejection of works. The old perspective has misunderstood Paul’s thinking regarding Judaism for the last 500 years of church history.54 Paul was not opposed to works in matters of soteriology.

Three Main Proponents of the NPP

E. P. Sanders

Sanders’ Educational Background. Ed Parish Sanders (1937-) is Arts and Sciences Professor of Religion (New Testament and Christian origins) at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. He received his Th.D. from Union Seminary (NY) 1966. In 1990, he was awarded a D.Litt. by the University of Oxford and D.Theol. by the University of Helsinki. He is a Fellow of the British Academy. He came to Duke University from Oxford, where he was from 1984-1990 the Dean

53Stephen Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 178.
54For further information, see ibid., 133.
Ireland’s Professor of Exegesis and also fellow of the Queen’s College. Sanders, characterized as “The most influential scholar on Paul in the last quarter-century,” was the catalyst who brought the NPP thinking to the forefront of NT theology. His book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism, A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (1977), and its impact on Pauline studies has led to a collapse of Reformation consensus regarding Paul’s view of the law in the learned centers of theology.56

Sanders, however, was not necessarily the originator of the NPP thinking. As will be demonstrated below, much of his approach was anticipated through prior historical-critical ideologies of Baur and the Tübingen school, Schweitzer, Wrede, but especially Moore and Jewish scholars such as Montefiore (to mention only a salient few).57 Importantly, this article will show that Sanders *has not based his position on objective exegesis of biblical texts but on dogmatically held, a priori thinking that controls his conclusions in the same way that he accuses Paul of doing.

**Influenced Heavily by Historical-Critical Ideologies.** Sanders argued that Paul’s Christology is unclear as well as conflicting. On Rom 1:3-4 Sanders remarks,

> The reader of this passage would understand that Jesus was ‘designated’ Son of God, and further that he was designated such only at the time of the resurrection. In later terminology, this is an ‘adoptionist’ Christology. Jesus was adopted by God as Son, not born that way,” while in Philippians 2:5-11 Paul “goes to the other extreme” and “the passage basically states that Jesus Christ was pre-existent and was in some sense divine.”58

Sanders concludes regarding Paul’s writings, “One sees that is impossible to derive from Paul’s letters anything approaching one single doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ. It is possible that both the passages . . . are pre-Pauline in origin, in which case they show that he drew on, rather than composed, quite diverse statements, one offering a ‘low’ Christology, the other a ‘high’ Christology.”59 As will be seen, by negating the authenticity of certain books recognized by orthodoxy as genuinely Pauline since the early church, Sanders’ view of Paul’s Christology is problematic. Deeply affected by historical-criticism, Sanders denies the apostolic origin of the canonical gospels, asserting, “We do not know who wrote the gospels. . . . These men—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—really lived, but we do not know that they wrote gospels.”60 Sanders strongly differentiates between the Jesus of history

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55Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New* xiii.
57Sanders’ position is substantially that of Moore, but Sanders was more successful in popularizing the views than Moore.
59Ibid., 96.
60E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993) 63.
and the so-called Christ of faith. He argues that the Gospels are limited in their information about Jesus as a historical Jesus: “Nothing survives that was written by Jesus himself. . . . The main sources for our knowledge of Jesus himself, the gospels in the NT, are, from the viewpoint of the historian, tainted by the fact that they were written by people who intended to glorify their hero.” 61 and “[T]he gospels report Jesus’ sayings and actions in a language that was not his own (he taught in Aramaic, the gospels are in Greek). . . . Even if we knew that he has his own words, we would still have to fear that he was quoted out of context.” 62 Again, he argues that the authors of the NT “may have revised their accounts to support their theology. The historian must also suspect that the ethical teaching that has so impressed the world has been enhanced by homiletical use and editorial improvements between the time of Jesus and the publication of the gospels.” 63

He also strongly advocates form and redaction-critical principles, stating, “The earliest Christians did not write a narrative of Jesus’ life, but rather made use of, and thus preserved, individual units—short passages about his words and deeds. This means that we can never be sure of the immediate context of Jesus’ sayings and actions,” and “Some material [in the Gospels] has been revised and some created by early Christians.” 64

Sanders denies orthodox teaching of the deity of Jesus, arguing, “While it is conceivable that, in the one verse in the synoptic gospels that says that Jesus’ miracles provoked the acclamation ‘Son of God,’ the phrase means ‘more than human’, I doubt that this was Matthew’s meaning. . . . This title [Son of God] . . . would not make Jesus absolutely unique.” 65 He adds, “Jesus’ miracles as such proved nothing to most Galileans beyond the fact that he was on intimate terms with God. . . . Probably most Galileans heard of a few miracles—exorcisms and other healings—and regarded Jesus as a holy man, on intimate terms with God.” 66

Sanders also denies the virgin birth when he argues about Rom 8:14-17 in discussing the term “Son of God,” noting, “This is another passage that shows the definition of sonship as adoption . . . and he [Jesus] had been declared Son, not literally sired by God. . . .” 67

Sanders’ Approach to the NPP. Strongly influenced by George Foot
Moore, Sanders cited Moore’s 1921 article, “Christian Writers on Judaism,” and stressed that it “should be required reading for any Christian scholar who writes about Judaism.” Moore’s central focus was that Paul’s understanding of Judaism was essentially wrong. Paul’s focus on individual rather than national salvation and his neglect of the Jewish understanding of human repentance and forgiveness reveal that Paul missed entirely the significance of the law in Judaism. Moore argued, “The prejudice of many writers on Judaism against the very idea of good works and their reward, and of merit acquired with God through them, is a Protestant inheritance from Luther’s controversy with Catholic doctrine, and further back from Paul’s contention that there is no salvation in Judaism.” In other words, not only Luther but also Paul missed the true character of Judaism as a religion of grace. Moore also asserted that this may be traced back to the NT writings that were more interested in polemics or apologetics of proving Jesus as Messiah. This factor caused an inaccurate reflection of Judaism in the NT era that has been carried down through the centuries. Where Moore only partially succeeded in his contentions, Sanders followed through with such thinking in greater detail.

Reflecting Baur’s historical-critical concept of Hauptsbriefe, Sanders is selective in his evidence, excluding from consideration of Paul’s pattern of religion in 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals as well as dismissing the historical reliability of Acts’ treatment of Paul. Sanders argued that Christians set about changing Paul to coincide with what became mainstream Christianity by adding new letters to the Pauline collection to prove Jesus’ deity and by portraying him as always in agreement with Peter.

Sanders also revealed a prior motive among his six “chief aims”: “to

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69Sanders, PPJ 33.

70Moore, Judaism 93.

71Moore, “Christian Writers on Judaism” 197-221.

72Although more will be noted about Baur’s contribution, sufficient to note here is that Baur concluded that only four epistles were genuinely Pauline, i.e., Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Galatians. Baur’s position was based only on the study of these four epistles, which led him to many false conclusions. Baur strongly influenced NT scholarship as a whole, other epistles subsequently being rejected, i.e., 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastorals. For a brief, historical overview of Baur’s position, see Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986, new ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 1988) 25; Werner Georg Kümmler, The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1972) 120-43.

73A check of Sanders’ “Index of Passages” reveals that these books are never considered in his study but overwhelmingly rendered to a handful of footnote references that gloss over these works. See PPJ 584-88.

74Sanders, Paul, A Very Short Introduction 22.
destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship” and “to establish a different view of rabbinic Judaism.” Although he denies a polemical bias in dealing with anti-Semitism, he less than subtly reveals his bent on improving Judaism and Christian relations coupled with holocausitic hermeneutical preunderstanding so prevalent in NPP and refuting notions that Judaism in Paul’s day was a religion of “legalistic works-righteousness.”

Important also, Sanders develops his radical thesis apart from any concepts of the inspiration of Paul’s writings, orthodox or otherwise. Sanders accuses Paul of contradictory or conflicting thinking in his writings. For example, in Romans 1–2, he argues, “There are internal inconsistencies with this section, not all the material actually lends itself to the desired conclusion, and there are substantial ways in which parts of it conflict with the positions of Paul elsewhere adopted. . . . [T]he treatment of the law in chapter 2 [Romans] cannot be harmonized with any of the diverse things which Paul says about the law elsewhere.”

Apparent also, for Sanders, Paul’s concept of the law is based on reflex thinking rather than careful accuracy regarding Judaism. Sanders classic positional statement accuses Paul not only of reflex but also dogmatic thinking:

Paul’s thought did not run from plight to solution, but rather from solution to plight. . . . It appears that the conclusion that all the world—both Jew and Greek—equally stands in need of a savior springs from the prior conviction that God had provided such a savior. If he did so, it follows that such a saviour must have been needed, and then only consequentially that all other possible ways of salvation are wrong. The point is made explicit in Gal. 2:1: if righteousness could come through the law, Christ died in vain. The reasoning apparently is that Christ did not die in vain; he died and lived again “that he might be Lord of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:9). . . . If his death was necessary for salvation, it follows that salvation cannot come in any other way. . . . There is no reason to think that Paul felt the need of a universal saviour prior to his conviction that Jesus was such.

Paul’s thinking stems from his dogmatically held conviction that “[j]t is the Gentile question and the exclusivism of Paul’s soteriology which dethrones the law, not a misunderstanding of it or a view predetermined by its background,” not a pre-Christian dissatisfaction with the law or a post-Christian accusation that Judaism is legalistic. Sanders deprecates Paul’s reasoning by concluding, “In short, this is

75Sanders, PPJ xii.
76Ibid., xiii.
77Ibid., 33.
79Sanders, PPJ 443 (emphasis in the original).
80Ibid., 497 (see 442–97 also).
what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.”

Another of Sanders’ distinctive contributions is the idea that the long-held conviction (as also expressed in the writings of the NT) that Palestinian Judaism was legalistic is entirely wrong. He contends that such a position is not supported by Jewish literature of the Second-Temple Period. Instead he speaks of the Jewish position in Paul’s day as “covenantal nomism.” He describes covenantal nomism as “the view that one’s place in God’s plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.” For Sanders, Judaism affirmed entrance into the covenant through God’s grace. However, “The intention and effort to be obedient constitute the condition for remaining in the covenant, but they do not earn it.” Sanders further remarks that in rabbinic literature “obedience maintains one’s position in the covenant, but it does not earn God’s grace as such” and that a “major shift” occurs between Judaism and Paul regarding righteousness. In Judaism, righteousness implies one’s maintaining his status among the elect; in Paul, righteousness is a term implying transfer into the body of the elect.

Sanders further delineates that Paul did not reject the law because no one could obey it perfectly or because devotion to the law resulted in legalism. Instead, Paul rejected the law because he believed that salvation was only through Christ, not that the law had any inherent defects.

Taking and applying his thesis to the Reformation, Sanders argues, “Martin Luther, whose influence on subsequent interpreters has been enormous, made Paul’s statements central to his own quite different theology”; “Luther, plagued by guilt, read Paul’s passages on ‘righteousness by faith’ as meaning that God reckoned a Christian to be righteous even though he or she was a sinner”; and further,

Luther’s emphasis on fictional, imputed righteousness, though it has often been shown to be an incorrect interpretation of Paul, has been influential because it corresponds to the sense of sinfulness which many people feel, and which is part and parcel of Western concepts of personhood, with their emphasis on individualism and introspection. Luther sought and found relief from guilt. But Luther’s problems were not Paul’s, and we

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81Ibid., 552 (emphasis in the original).
82Ibid., 75 (see also 236).
83Ibid., 180 (emphasis in the original).
84Ibid., 420 (emphasis in the original).
85Ibid., 140.
86Ibid., 420.
88Ibid., 57.
He argues that Paul reveals in Phil 3:6-9 that “The truth finally comes out: there is such a thing as righteousness by the law. Further, it is not wicked [contra Luther and the Reformational heritage]. In and of itself it is ‘gain’ (Phil. 3:9). It becomes wrong only because God has revealed another one.” Sanders relates, “Paul fully espoused and observed a ‘work-ethic’, as long as the goal was the right one. His opposition to ‘works of the law’ was not motivated by dislike of effort,” and again, “He [Paul] did not, however, regard effort in doing good as being in any way opposed to membership in the body of Christ.” Sanders argues that while Paul did not require Christians to keep the cultic aspects of the law (circumcision, Sabbath, food laws) that created social distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, he did, however, want Gentiles to keep what Sanders terms “his [Paul’s] own reduction” of the law. He summarizes Paul’s view of law for Christians in the following manner:

(1) Paul held the normal expectation that membership in the “in group” involved correct behavior. One of the ways in which he stated that expectation was that Christians should fulfill “the law” or keep “the commandments.” (2) In passages in which he requires the fulfillment of the law, he offers no theoretical distinction between the law which governs Christians and the law of Moses; put another way, he does not distinguish between the law to which those in Christ die and the law which they fulfill. (3) In concrete application, however, the behavior required of Christians differs from the law of Moses in two ways: (a) Not all of Paul’s admonitions have a counterpart in Scripture; (b) Paul deliberately and explicitly excluded from “the law,” or held to be optional, three of its requirements: circumcision, days and seasons, and dietary restrictions.

Sanders asserts, however, that Paul was inconsistent and non-systematic with his viewpoints of Christians and the law: “We cannot determine to what degree he was conscious of his own reduction of the law. . . . [He] offered no rationale for his de facto limitations, but insisted that those in the Spirit keep what the law requires (Rom. 8:4).”

**Efficacious Nature of Law in Soteriology.** The implications of Sanders’ hypothesis are stunning for orthodox soteriology. Christianity’s, especially Paul’s, acceptance of Jesus is based on presumptive bias and negativity toward Judaism,
which logic is entirely dogmatic and capricious on Paul’s part. Jesus as the means of salvation reflects Christianity’s prejudice rather than being grounded in Scripture as it competed with Judaism for adherents. Paul’s lack of systematic presentation of the believer’s relationship to law opens the door to seeing Paul as favorable to Christians “in covenant” as required to keep law to sustain that covenant relationship. The practical implication if Sanders’ logic is taken to its inevitable conclusions is that Judaism has equal viability with Christianity as a means of salvation, especially since it is grounded in a religion that always viewed salvation by grace but maintenance of that salvation in covenant by works. Any attempt to integrate such thinking can only bring works in through the back door as Luther had warned. Though Sanders’ view of Judaism has been accepted to at least some degree, his solutions in terms of Paul’s theology have not been so widely accepted.

James D. G. Dunn

Dunn’s Educational Background. James D. G. Dunn (1939-) is Emeritus Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham, England. He holds the M.A. and B.D. degrees from the University of Glasgow and a Ph.D. and B.D. from Cambridge. Dunn is another of the three most notable proponents of the NPP. Though Sanders’ work was the catalyst for the NPP, Dunn’s efforts have popularized and defended this “new” approach.

Dunn argues that Sanders’ Paul and Palestinian Judaism deserves the accolade of “breaking the mold” in Pauline studies and the designation “what amounts to a new perspective on Paul.” In his magnum opus on understanding the NPP, The Theology of Paul the Apostle (1998), Dunn argues, “A fresh attempt at a full restatement of Paul’s theology is made all the more necessary in the light of what is now usually referred to as ‘the new perspective on Paul.’”

Heavily Influenced by Historical-Critical Ideology. Dunn operates his assertions apart from any consideration of inspiration, whether orthodox or aberrant, for NT canonical books. Dunn, like Sanders, has been heavily influenced by historical-critical theories. Dunn asserts that the canonical Gospels cannot be a secure starting point to formulate Jesus’ theology: “[T]hough a theology of Jesus would be more fascinating than one of Paul, we have nothing firsthand from Jesus which can provide a secure starting point. The theologies of the Evangelists are almost equally problematic, since their focus on the ministry and teaching of Jesus makes their own theologies that much more allusive.” Assuming the Two-Source hypothesis, Dunn notes, “[I]n two at least [i.e., Matthew and Luke] of the four cases [i.e., the canonical Gospels] we have only one document to use [i.e., Mark]; we can

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97 Dunn, Theology of Paul 5.
98 Ibid., 13.
speak with some confidence of the theology of that document." For Dunn, what Jesus actually taught and preached is illusive since it was mediated through “Evangelists” (i.e., not the traditional authors of the Gospels but unknown evangelists).

Dunn also denies the orthodox view of the deity of Jesus Christ, insisting that no theology of Christ’s pre-existence is present in Paul: “Paul does have a conception of the preexistent Christ.”

An examination of his theology of Paul reveals that, like Sanders, Dunn also has been influenced by Baur’s concept of Haupfbriehe. He attributes Pauline authorship to eight epistles: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1–2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.101 The others—Colossians, Ephesians, 1–2 Timothy, and Titus—were written by Timothy or other pseudepigraphers. Dunn offers no evidence to support his assumptions about authorship.

Furthermore, Dunn’s rejection of Ephesians as post-Pauline fits conveniently within his assertions. For instance, he readily admits that Eph 2:8-9 supports the traditional Lutheran approach of “works of the law”: “The traditional understanding of the phrase within Protestant theology is that it denoted good works done as an attempt to gain or achieve righteousness. . . . The post-Pauline Eph. 2:8-9 looks very much like a confirmation of this . . . (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9 and Tit. 3:5).”102 His acceptance of the Lutheran position appears likely if he had not accepted an abbreviated approach to the NT canon.

**Dunn’s Approach to the NPP.** In terms of the NPP, Dunn also reveals a second assumption imposed on NT exegesis: Martin Luther read his own situation into Paul’s writings, resulting in the errors of justification by faith and anti-Semitism. He praises Sanders in reflecting this assumption:

Sanders has been successful in getting across a point which others had made before him. . . . that Protestant exegesis has for too long allowed a typically Lutheran emphasis on justification by faith to impose a hermeneutical grid on the text of Romans. . . . The emphasis is important, that God is the one who justifies the ungodly (4:5), and understandably this insight has become an integrating focus in Lutheran theology with tremendous power. The problem, however, lay in what the emphasis was set in opposition to. The antithesis to “justification by faith”—what Paul speaks of as “justification by works”—was understood in terms of a system whereby salvation is earned through the merit of good works. This was based partly on the comparison suggested in the same passage (4:4-5), and partly on the Reformation of the rejection of a system where indulgences could be bought and merits accumulated. . . . The hermeneutical mistake was made of reading this antithesis back into the NT period, of

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99Ibid., 13.
100Ibid., 292.
101Ibid., 13.
102Ibid., 354.
assuming that Paul was protesting against in Pharisaical Judaism precisely what Luther protested against in the pre-Reformation church—the mistake . . . of assuming that the Judaism of Paul’s day was coldly legalistic, teaching a system of earning salvation by the merit of good works, with little or no room for the free forgiveness and grace of God.”

As he continues, Dunn adds, “It was this depiction of first-century Judaism which Sanders showed up for what it was—a gross caricature, which, regretfully, has played its part in feeding an evil strain of Christian anti-Semitism.

For Dunn and many others who espouse the “New” Perspective on Paul, the “Old” perspective of Martin Luther’s and his Reformation heirs who continued teaching justification by personal faith and its alleged gross mischaracterization of second-temple Judaism are directly responsible for a virulent Gentile Christian anti-Semitism that led to (1) Nazi racialism to promote its philosophy of the master race and to embark on the genocide of the Jews in the 1940s, (2) South African apartheid, and (3) even some forms of contemporary Zionism. In other words, Luther read his own situation into his theology, the obvious implication being Luther’s ruinous theological mistake has grossly misled Protestant theology for the last five-hundred years, culminating in the tragedy of the Holocaust in which millions of Jews lost their lives.

In this line of thought, Dunn also echoes the thinking of Krister Stendahl, arguing, “[A]s Krister Stendahl pointed out, this portrayal has been too much influenced by Luther’s own experience of grace, set as it was against the background of the medieval Church’s doctrine of merits and salvation as something which could be paid for in installments.”

Stendahl, in addressing the Annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in 1961 asserted that modern experience has caused a misunderstanding of Paul. He said, “[T]he Pauline awareness of sin has been interpreted in the light of Luther’s struggle with his conscience. But it is exactly at that point that we can discern the most drastic difference between Luther and Paul, between the 16th and the 1st century, and, perhaps, between Eastern and Western Christianity.”

Stendahl continues, “In Phil. 3 Paul speaks most fully about his life before his Christian calling, and there is no indication that he had had any difficulty in fulfilling the Law. On the contrary, he can say that he had been ‘flawless’ as to the righteousness required by the Law (v. 6). His encounter with

104Ibid.
105D. G. Dunn and Alan M. Suggate, The Justice of God, a Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 28; Dunn, Romans 1–8 lxv.
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Jesus Christ . . . has not changed this fact." Dunn laments that Stendahl’s point has “been too little ‘heard’ within the community of NT scholarship. For Dunn, the hermeneutical grid of Luther’s preunderstanding has had an unfortunate impact on Protestant theology.

Dunn builds upon the work of Sanders, but he also disagrees with him on some points. Dunn considers Sanders’ assertion that Paul rejected Judaism simply because it was not Christianity as ill-advised, noting,

Though Dunn endorses Sanders’ definition of Judaism as “covenantal nomism,” his own explanation goes against both the Lutheran/Protestant characterization of Judaism as legalistic and Sanders’ view of Paul as arbitrary. In referring to his Manson Memorial lecture in 1982, Dunn argues for the crux of his thesis: “My conclusion . . . is that what Paul was objecting to was not the law per se, but the law seen as a proof and badge of Israel’s election; that in denouncing ‘works of the law’ Paul was not disparaging ‘good works’ as such, but observances of the law valued as attesting membership of the people of God—particularly circumcision, food laws and Sabbath.”

Thus, for Dunn, the term “works of the law” does not refer to good works in general or to Jewish legalism but should be limited to Jewish national-identity boundaries that excluded Gentiles from salvation, i.e., circumcision, Sabbath, and dietary restrictions, which Dunn terms the “social function of the Law”. His position is that Paul’s opposition to “works of the law” stemmed from the fact that these social functions of the law “confined the grace of God to members of that nation.” For Dunn, “Sanders did not follow through this insight [i.e., covenantal nomism—getting in by grace; living within by works] far enough or with sufficient consistency.” For Jews, these social functions became the “test cases

Ibid., 200-201.

Dunn, Jesus, Paul and the Law 186–87; Dunn, Romans 1-8 lxvi.


Dunn, Jesus, Paul and the Law, 11.

Dunn remarks, “Anthropologists and sociologists have made us aware of the fact that any social grouping will inevitably have various features and characteristics which provide the group’s self-definition (consciously or unconsciously) and mark it off from various other groups . . . Two key words . . . are identity and boundary.” For further information, see Dunn, Jesus, Paul and the Law 216-19.

Dunn, Jesus, Paul and the Law 11-12.

Dunn, Romans 1–8 lxvi.
of covenant loyalty,” marking them out as the people of God. Dunn believes that the social function of the law is consistent with the idea of “covenantal nomism.” He asserts that “Galatians is Paul’s first sustained attempt to deal with the issue of covenantal nomism” and “covenantal nomism is the issue underlying Paul’s argument in Galatians.” The crux interpretum for Dunn’s understanding of “works of the law” lies in Gal 2:16 and 3:10-16. Dunn regards Gal 2:16 as “the most obvious place to start” for a NPP understanding. Commenting on Reformation understanding of the expression, he laments, “Unfortunately exegesis of Paul’s teaching here has become caught up in and obscured by the Reformation’s characteristic polemic against merit, against the idea that anyone could earn salvation [by good works]. . . . The mistake was to assume too readily that this was what Paul too was attacking.” For Dunn, the Reformation idea of “works of the law” as legalism centering in Luther’s assertion that Paul was speaking of the whole law, not just the ceremonial parts, was mistaken. Galatians 2:16 (cf. also Gal 3:10-14; Rom 3:20-2) states, “Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified” (καὶ γὰρ ἐκτὸς Ἰσραήλ ἐκεῖνος ἐξ ἐργῶν νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ένα δικαιωθημένοι εἰς πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ εἰς ἐργῶν νόμου, άτι έξ ἐργῶν νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σάρξ). For Dunn, the term “works of the law” in these places “most obviously” refers to “circumcision and food laws.” He comments,

That is what was at issue—whether to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ requires also observance of these ‘works’, whether . . . it is possible to conceive of membership of the covenant people which is not characterized by precisely these works. The Jerusalem Christians having conceded the argument about circumcision, so far as ‘getting in’ was concerned, drew the line at food laws: a membership of the chosen people which did not include faithfulness to food laws and purity rituals of the meal table was for them too much a contradiction in terms. And Peter, Barnabas and other Jewish Christians in Antioch evidently agreed, however reluctantly or not—the threat to Jewish identity was

115Ibid., lxii.
116Dunn, Jesus, Paul and the Law 242 (also 251-57).
117Ibid., 188.
119Interestingly, Luther attacks Jerome for limiting this phrase to ceremonies only: “Hence the opinion of Jerome and others is to be rejected when they imagine that here Paul is speaking about the works of the Ceremonial law, not about those of the Decalogue.” See Luther, “Commentary on Galatians,” Luther’s Works 26:138; I 3.17.2 (804-5).
120For Dunn, Galatians 3:10-14 is his “test case” for the appropriateness of his view. See Dunn, Jesus, Paul and the Law 225-32.
too great to be ignored.  

Dunn takes the expression τὰν μῆ (ean mē) in 2:16 to mean “except”:

According to the most obvious grammatical sense, in this clause faith in Jesus is described as a qualification to justification by works of law, not (yet) as an antithetical alternative. Seen from the perspective of Jewish Christianity at that time, the most obvious meaning is that the only restriction on justification from works of law is faith in Jesus as Messiah. The only restriction, that is, to covenantal nomism is faith in Christ. But, in this first clause, covenantal nomism itself is not challenged or called into question—restricted, qualified, more precisely defined in relation to Jesus as Messiah, but not denied. Given that in Jewish self-understanding covenantal nomism is not antithetical to faith, then at this point the only change which the new movement calls for is that the traditional Jewish faith be more precisely defined as faith in Jesus Messiah.

Dunn’s approach does not center justification in an individualistic, soteriological doctrine as understood by the Reformation, but turns it into primarily a sociological doctrine to include Gentiles among the people of God. Covenantal nomism—getting in by faith, staying in by obedience—for Gentile believers teaches that justification by works only has the primary restriction that those works are to be centered in Jesus Christ. Though Gentiles get in by God’s gracious actions through Messiah, works keep them within the community of God under the rubric of covenantal nomism.

Dunn’s interpretation opens the door decisively to justification by works, for works are “restricted, qualified, more precisely in relation to Jesus as Messiah, but not denied.” Paul’s negative words in Galatians are not to works in general but to a “particular ritual response”—circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath—but not to good works in general. Dunn relates again, “For Paul justification by faith had to do as much, if not more with the breaking down of the racial and national exclusiveness of Israel’s covenant claims, than with his own personal experience of grace as persecutor of the Church of God.” Regarding Rom 3:27-30 where Paul’s theme of boasting crescendos, he asserts, “justification by faith is a corollary of Jewish monotheism, directed primarily against the exclusiveness of Israel’s own claim upon that one God.” In Rom 10:3, he again asserts, “Once again the belief against which justification by faith is directed is the belief that Israel’s privilege and prerogative as God’s elect people had to be established and defended against Gentile
Dunn has come under severe criticism for his position in his ground-breaking “New Perspective on Paul” article as well as his other works, and has attempted to qualify his assertions. For example, Bruce pointed out that Dunn’s interpretation of τὴν μην ἐκ τῆς γενεαλογίας as “except” in the construction of Gal 2:16 runs “counter to the Greek idiom” thereby rendering a crucial point of Dunn’s *crux interpretum* as a grammatical solecism. Yet, Dunn maintains this translation in order to sustain his thesis. Schreiner has pointed out the Dunn’s view of “works of the law” fails to observe correctly with the contextual argument that Paul builds in Rom 2:17-29 in relationship to Rom 3:20 whereby Paul in 2:17-29 faults them not for circumcision but for disobedience to the law in general. Silva’s criticism of Dunn faults Dunn’s “point of departure” which is Sanders’ basic position, noting that Sanders operates (1) “with an understanding of ‘legalism’ that is at times fuzzy and ambiguous, at other times quite misleading,” and (2) “with an inadequate understanding of historical Christian theology.”

Dunn’s comments reveal the tenuous exegetical nature of his assertions regarding the phrase “works of the law” in Romans 3 as well as Galatians 2, for he assumes what he is trying to prove and reduces Christ’s death to the narrow view of removing boundary markers of the law rather than seeing it as removing the curse of the whole law (cf. Gal 2:20). As a result, Cranfield has taken Dunn to task for his exegesis of the term “works of the law” that Cranfield labels as “unconscionably tortuous.” Dunn has responded to Cranfield’s criticism, claiming that “Cranfield appears to ignore, more or less completely, the social context and ramifications of such a view of the law and its requirements.” He also remains adamant that “Paul’s gospel of justification by faith is clearly aimed at Jewish assumption of privileged status before God.”

**Efficacious Nature of Law in Soteriology.** In sum, Dunn, like Sanders, opens the door for destroying the doctrine of *sola fide* (“faith alone”). Preunderstandings stemming from covenantal nomism and its boundary markers, encroachment.”


133Ibid., 111.
control Dunn’s exegetical decisions; indeed, Dunn is guilty of the same charge leveled against Luther: subjectively controlled exegesis. Moreover, nothing inhibits Dunn’s conclusions degenerating into works-righteousness except for personal denials that it does not. Dunn’s assertion that “what I say is not and should not be conceived as an attack on the Protestant doctrine of justification” stands in direct opposition to his assertion that Luther’s conversion experience and the insight which it gave him also began a tradition in biblical interpretation, which resulted for many in the loss or neglect of other crucial biblical insights related to the same theme of divine justice. And particularly in the case of Paul, Luther’s discovery of “justification by faith” and the theological impetus which it gave especially to Lutheran theology has involved a significant misunderstanding of Paul, not least to “justification by faith” itself.134

One wonders if Dunn’s approach to the NPP resembles a purpose of dialectical thinking: an intentional design to conceal his actual theological position from opponents, but to reveal his true position to those who ardently support him.

**N. T. Wright**

**Wright’s Educational Background.** The third main proponent of the NPP is Nicholas Thomas Wright (1948–) who, until recently, was Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey. He is now Bishop of Durham, one of the highest ranking bishops in the church of England. He formerly was Dean of Lichfield Cathedral in England. He received his bachelors, masters, and doctorate degrees from Oxford University. He taught for twenty years at Cambridge, McGill, and Oxford Universities. Of the three main proponents of the NPP, Wright is the only one who considers himself an evangelical, as he has commented, “I see myself as a deeply orthodox theologian.”135 Because Wright calls himself an evangelical, his writings have had a powerful impact on the spreading of the NPP among evangelicals.

**Influenced Heavily by Historical-Critical Ideologies.** Wright, however, displays a middle-of-the-road approach to biblical research, weaving a conflicting tapestry of radical and moderate ideological concepts. He describes his studies at the University: “There was all this liberal stuff on the one hand, and then the noble evangelicals saving the day. Of course, I realized before my first year at Wycliffe Hall was over that you couldn’t divide scholars like that.”136 He proceeds to speak of his growing respect for liberals such as Rudolf Bultmann and Joachim Jeremias.137 He now finds his greatest difficulties in relating to conservative Christians, not
liberals.\textsuperscript{138}

Certain factors indicate, however, that Wright would be definitely in the left-leaning areas of British evangelicalism. Accommodating his research to Baur’s concept of \textit{Hauptbriefe}, Wright confines evidence for his work, \textit{What Saint Paul Really Said}, to selected epistles of Paul: “Most of what I say in this book [\textit{What Saint Paul Really Said}] focuses on material in the undisputed letters, particularly Romans, the two Corinthians letters, Galatians and Philippians. In addition, I regard Colossians as certainly by Paul, and Ephesians as far more likely to be by him than by an imitator.”\textsuperscript{139} Such a capricious approach not only impugns the orthodox NT canon, but also slants evidence for his position by providing opportunity to ignore passages that do not support his position (e.g., Eph 2:8-10; Tit 1:9).

Wright apparently takes an agnostic position on Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles: “It would be just as arbitrary to exclude them from a ‘Pauline’ section as to include them, since even if, as most scholars have supposed, they are not by Paul himself, they are clearly by someone, or more than one person, who thought they should belong closely with his work and thought.”\textsuperscript{140} He also questions Paul’s authorship of the Pastoralts because of no mention of resurrection in them.\textsuperscript{141}

Wright participates in what he has labeled the “Third Quest for the Historical Jesus.” He writes, “I still believe that the future of serious Jesus research lies with what I have called the ‘Third Quest,’ within a broadly post-Schweitzerian frame.”\textsuperscript{142} Based on philosophical skepticism, historical-critical discussions of the last two centuries have distinguished between the Jesus of the Gospels—the Christ of Faith—and the Jesus of history—the Jesus as He existed in a time-space continuum.\textsuperscript{143}

The discussions have included three quests for the “historical” Jesus. The First Quest covered the period from Reimarus (1694-1768) to Schweitzer (1906–\textit{Von Reimarus zu Wrede}). It was an extremely skeptical quest that denied the trustworthiness of the Gospels and the rest of the NT. The Second Quest reacted to Bultmannian skepticism. Ernst Käsemann started this quest in 1953. It reopened the question of the “historical Jesus” and the “Christ of faith.” Some consider it less skeptical than the First Quest, but it was only slightly less skeptical. Influenced by Wrede’s radical perspective, its skepticism resulted in the Jesus Seminar. The Third Quest has run from the 1980s. It attempts to place Jesus within the Jewish context of the NT era. It has roots in Jewish studies of older scholars like Strack-Billerbeck and Joachim Jeremias, and is now impacting the NT, bringing the NPP to the forefront.

\textsuperscript{138}Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{139}N. T. Wright, \textit{What Saint Paul Really Said} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 8.

\textsuperscript{140}N. T. Wright, \textit{The Resurrection of the Son of God} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 267.

\textsuperscript{141}Ibid., 271.

\textsuperscript{142}N. T. Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 78.

\textsuperscript{143}See Thomas and Farnell (eds.), \textit{The Jesus Crisis}; Eta Linnemann, \textit{Biblical Criticism on Trial}, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001).
of NT discussion.\textsuperscript{144} Although it is the least skeptical of the quests, it remains heavily skeptical merely by continuing the “search” for the “historical Jesus.” The question is whether the Third Quest should be distinguished from the Second. Wright distinguishes the two because of his personal demarcations that are now accepted by others.\textsuperscript{145} He contends that the New Quest [i.e., the Second Quest] is old and the Third Quest is new due to its emphasis on Jewish studies. It could be a matter of emphasis rather than a distinction.\textsuperscript{146} Because of its roots in historical criticism and skepticism, the Third Quest is not easily separated from the previous ones.

Wright’s assertions about the importance of Jewish sources raises the question of why, for an accurate portrayal of Jesus, evangelicals should not give primary attention to the Gospels whose writers had supernatural guidance in presenting Jesus as He truly was in history. All secondary sources—at best problematic, at worst false—must take a back seat to NT revelation. About twenty years ago Alexander issued cautions regarding rabbinic sources:

An expert Rabbinist could not but be impressed by the New Testament scholar’s new-found enthusiasm for things Rabbinic. However, he would be less impressed to discover that this enthusiasm is not always matched by knowledge, or tempered with caution. Much recent New Testament work is seemingly ignorant of the problems, debates and achievements in the current study of early Judaism, and its methodology in the use of early Jewish source has advanced little beyond pioneering works such as Davies’ \textit{Paul and Rabbinic Judaism} (1948), Duabe’s \textit{New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism} (1956), and Gerhardsson’s \textit{Memory and Manuscript} (1961).\textsuperscript{147}

Alexander identifies some of the weaknesses in evidence in many NT scholars’ handling of Rabbinic literature.\textsuperscript{148} He catalogues the following as important warnings in dealing with such secondary sources: (1) the state of the texts—many rabbinic sources still do not have critical editions; (2) the understanding of the texts—in their understanding of the text many rely on mediaeval scholars who imposed their views on the early sources; (3) the dating of the texts—dates of rabbinic sources are problematic at best, relying on questionable dates reached on subjective grounds; (4) accuracy of the attributions—critics who question the credibility of the Gospels fall into the trap of unquestioning acceptance of a logion...

\textsuperscript{144}For further discussion on these Quests, consult N. T. Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God} 3-124; N. T. Wright, \textit{The Contemporary Quest for Jesus} (Minneapolis:Fortress, 2002).

\textsuperscript{145}Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God} 78-82.


\textsuperscript{148}Ibid., 238.
attributed to someone in a text edited long after (500 or more years) that person’s death; (5) anachronism—“Many New Testament scholars are still guilty of massive and unsustained anachronism in their use of Rabbinic sources. Time and again we find them quoting texts from the 3rd, 4th or 5th centuries A.D. or even later, to illustrate Jewish teaching in the 1st century.” However, any religion changes and develops through time. Academic caution demands that the Judaism of Hillel in the first century A.D. was probably not identical with the Judaism of Hoshiaia in the 3rd. Two events could have profoundly influenced the development of early Judaism and diverted it into new channels: the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the defeat of Bar Kochba in A.D. 135; (6) Parallelogram—“New Testament scholars are still afflicted by the scourge of parallelogramia.” They crudely juxtapose elements of early Judaism and Christianity, detect similarities, and on the basis of these supposed similarities conclude that Christianity has “borrowed from,” or “been influenced by” Judaism. For evangelicals, the questionable application of rabbinic sources along with the skepticism of any Third Quest must cause extreme caution.

Alexander’s cautions are still pertinent. He more recently warned, “It is . . . extremely difficult, using strictly historical criteria, to lay down a norm for Judaism in the first century . . . . Rabbinic Judaism cannot easily be equated with normative Judaism before the third century C.E., and even then only in Palestine.”

Adding more questions about Wright’s approach are the following samples of his ideological criteria: (1) he affirms use of tradition criticism in the Gospels (i.e., “criterion of dissimilarity”) but with “great caution,” placing the burden of proof for authenticity upon the Gospels, his disclaimers notwithstanding. (2) He states, “The critics of form-criticism have not, to my knowledge, offered a serious alternative model to how the early church told its stories.” (3) He refers to the Gospel stories in terms of his own modified version of “myth”: “The gospels, then, are myth in the sense that they are foundational for the early Christian worldview. They contain ‘mythological’ language which we can learn, as historians, to decode in the light of ‘other apocalyptic’ writings of the time.” For Wright, “Jesus and his contemporaries” did not take apocalyptic language “literally, as referring to the

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14Ibid., 244 (emphasis in the original).
15Ibid.
16Ibid., 245.
19Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God 86.
21Ibid., 426 (emphasis in the original).
actual end of the time-space universe.”157 (4) He claims that “Jesus-stories’ were invented or possibly adapted for the needs of the community.”158 (5) Wright is very vague regarding authorship of the Gospels. He explains, “I make no assumptions about the actual identity of the evangelists, and use the traditional names for simplicity only.”159

Wright’s Approach to the NPP. Wright takes his typical moderating stance in accepting the NPP. About Sanders he writes, “[U]ntil a major refutation of his central thesis is produced, honesty compels one to do business with him. I do not myself believe such a refutation can or will be offered; serious modifications are required, but I regard his basic point as established.”160 He contends, “Sanders’ main thesis . . . is that the picture of Judaism assumed in most Protestant readings of Paul is historically inaccurate and theologically misleading.”161 He “strongly disagrees with Sanders on some points, and wants to go a good deal further than him on some others.”162 Wright also criticizes Sanders for “a somewhat unsystematic treatment of different Pauline themes. Nor has he [Sanders] offered very much verse-by-verse exegesis.”163 He concedes, “Sanders’ proposal had its own agenda at the level of the study of religions . . . and indeed was in some ways a plea to see Christianity from a modernist comparative-religion perspective rather than a classical theological one.”164 Such admissions from Wright are telling because they reveal that the NPP is as guilty of a priori thinking as the Protestant-Lutheran traditions so heartily condemned by the NPP, and perhaps more so. Wright also admits that no fundamental agreement exists in Pauline studies: “The current situation in Pauline studies is pleasantly confused.”165

He agrees with Sanders and Dunn that the Judaism of Paul’s day was not a religion of self-righteousness in which salvation depended on human works: “Christians should regard Jews with a good deal more respect than in the past, and in particular should not saddle them with a form of religion of which they are innocent.”166 For Wright, “the traditional” picture of Judaism as self-righteous legalism promoted by Luther and the Reformation (“though by no means exclus-
sively”) is “false”: “My case here is simply stated: the tradition of Pauline interpretation has manufactured a false Judaism for him to oppose.” For Wright, as with Sanders and Dunn, Luther and others have wrongly imposed their own historical situation of opposition to Roman Catholic legalism on Paul’s writings. The idea that Paul was “proto-Pelagian . . . who thought he could pull himself up by his moral bootstraps” is “radically anachronistic . . . and culturally out of line (it is not the Jewish way of thinking). . . . [W]e have misjudged early Judaism, especially Pharisaism, if we thought of it as an early version of Pelagianism.”

Wright also contends that Paul should be absolved of any charge of anti-Semitism (being a self-hating Jew). Paul was not criticizing Jews for using the law, as falsely charged by Lutheranism. Instead, Paul directed his criticism toward Jewish nationalism:

If we ask how it is that Israel has missed her vocation, Paul’s answer is that she is guilty not of “legalism” or “work-righteousness” but of what I call “national righteousness”, the belief that fleshly Jewish descent guarantees membership of God’s true covenant people. This charge is worked out in Romans 2:17-29; 9:30–10:13, Galatians, and Philippians 3 . . . Within this national “righteousness”, the law functions not as a legalist’s ladder but as a character of national privilege, so that, for the Jew, possession of the law is three parts of salvation: and circumcision functions not as a ritualist’s outward show but as a badge of national privilege. Over against this abuse of Israel’s undoubted privileged status, Paul establishes, in his theology and in his missionary work, the true children of Abraham, the world-wide community of faith.

For Wright, Paul’s real concern in his controversy with Jewish leaders centered in their treatment of Gentiles in terms of inclusion (nationalism) rather than in legalism. For Wright, “the tradition of Pauline interpretation has manufactured a false Paul by manufacturing a false Judaism for him to oppose.”

Wright also adds his own emphases to NPP. One of these is Rom 2:17-29, calling it “a somewhat neglected passage.” He says that Paul was not criticizing Jews for legalism, but presents “a detailed and sensitive critique of Judaism as its advocates present it” (cf. also Rom 3:27-29; 9:30–10:13; Galatians 2–4; Phil 3:2-11). Paul’s critique centers on (1) Jewish boasting about being the exclusive chosen people of God, (2) Jewish breaking of the law (or sin), not legalism, (3) Paul is positive about God’s law itself, for he focuses his attack on the “abuse” of the law

16Ibid., 78.
17Ibid., 87.
18Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 32.
19Wright, “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith” 65 (emphasis in the original).
20Ibid., 78.
21Ibid., 82.
22Ibid., 82 (emphasis in the original).
claiming national righteousness (not legalism), and (4) Paul’s attack against Jewish trust in the law and circumcision as badges of national privilege rather than “‘true circumcision’ which keeps the law from the heart.” In this section Paul outlines his theology of the church as Israel, the people of God.\(^{174}\)

For Wright, the gospel is a message about the Lordship of Jesus Christ:

> It is not . . . a system of how people get saved. The announcement of the gospel results in people being saved. . . . But the ‘gospel itself, strictly speaking, is the narrative proclamation of King Jesus. . . .’

His [Paul’s] announcement was that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead; that he was thereby proved to be Israel’s Messiah; that he was thereby installed as Lord of the world. Or, to put it yet more compactly: Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, is Lord.\(^{175}\)

Wright also contradicts the Reformation doctrine of justification and sole fide. For Wright, an examination of Galatians indicates “[w]hat Paul means by justification . . . is not ‘how you become a Christian’, so much as ‘how you can tell who is a member of the covenant family.’”\(^{176}\) He argues, “Justification is thus the declaration of God, the just judge, that someone has had their sins forgiven and that they are a member of the covenant family, the family of Abraham. That is what the word means in Paul’s writings. It doesn’t describe how people get into God’s forgiven family; it declares that they are in. . . .”\(^{177}\) Wright argues again, “Despite a long tradition to the contrary, the problem Paul addresses in Galatians is not the question of how precisely someone becomes a Christian or attains to a relationship with God. . . . The problem he addresses is should his ex-pagan converts be circumcised or not?”\(^{178}\)

To Wright, justification is corporate rather than individual; it is primarily eschatological rather than immediate. Yet he straddles the fence on the issue, for though justification from his perspective is primarily eschatological, he contradicts himself: “Justification in the present is based on God’s past accomplishment in the Messiah, and anticipates the future verdict. The present justification has exactly the same pattern.”\(^{179}\) Wright refers to eschatological judgment in Rom 2:13: “Possession of Torah had become, in Jewish thought, a badge of privilege, a talisman, a sign that Israel was inalienably God’s people. No says Paul. What counts is doing Torah. . . . Israel’s ethnic privilege, backed up by possession of Torah, will be of no

\(^{174}\)Ibid., 82.
\(^{175}\)Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 45-46.
\(^{176}\)Ibid., 122.
\(^{178}\)Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 120.
\(^{179}\)Wright, “The Shape of Justification” 8.
He is unclear whether the believer’s standing before God depends on works or on Christ’s sacrifice. Wright goes on,

“Justification” in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God’s eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people. . . . It was not so much about “getting in”, or indeed about “staying in”, as about “how you could tell who was in”. In standard Christian theological language, it wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.181

For Wright, justification by faith is not Paul’s gospel, though it is implied by that gospel. It does not represent Paul’s answer to the question of how an individual can be saved or enjoy a right relationship with God:

[If] we come to Paul with these questions in mind—the questions of how human beings come into a living and saving relationship with the living and saving God—it is not justification that springs to his [Paul’s] lips or pen. . . . The message about Jesus and his cross and resurrection—“the gospel” . . . is announced to them; through this means, God works by his Spirit upon their hearts; as a result, they come to believe the message: they join the Christian community through baptism, and begin to share in its common life and its common way of life. That is how people come into relationship with God.182

For Wright, justification does not describe how people get in to God’s family; it declares that they are in. He never clarifies when an individual comes into the family of God. His position is, therefore, quite nebulous, but he asks his readers to dismiss centuries of understanding from Augustine through Luther and accept it.

Adding to Wright’s ambiguity regarding the role of works in justification is his interpretation of “works of the law” (ἐργατωρίαν νόμου, ex erga n nomou; cf. also Rom 9:32) in Gal 2:16; 3:10-14. Wright disagrees with Dunn on some minor points in Gal 3:10-14: “[W]hile I disagree with Dunn’s exegesis of this particular passage, I am in substantial agreement with his general thesis about ‘works of law’ in Paul, and indeed I think that my reading of this text supports this position better than his does. . . . The work of Sanders, and later Dunn, has served in some ways as confirmation of the general line I had taken.”183 Yet, Wright affirms that “works of the law” refer to “the badges of Jewish law observance” (cf. also Phil 3:2-11) and “table fellowship.”184 He, therefore, reflects Dunn’s interpretation rather than

181Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 119.
182Ibid., 116.
183N. T. Wright, The Climax of the Covenant (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 139 n. 10; for minor disagreements between Wright and Dunn on Gal 3:10-14, see ibid., 137-56.
184Wright, “Justification” 8, 50.
substantially differing with him. For Wright, Paul is not so much arguing against meritorious works, as he is arguing against racial exclusion: “Justification in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all those who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as together they wait for the final new creation.”

Wright also changes traditional understanding of the “righteousness of God.” He rejects the traditional Protestant view of imputation of righteousness “as denoting that status which humans, on the basis of faith, as a result of the gospel,” or as Luther believed, “God’s moral activity of punishing evil and rewarding virtue.” For Wright, the Protestant view describes more of a “legal fiction” of imputation. It is not “something that “counts before” God” or “avails with God.” Instead, he argues that the term refers to “God’s faithfulness to his promises, to his covenant,” having a qualitative idea rather than a status. It is righteousness as a moral quality (genitive of possession). On Paul’s comments in Phil 3:9 where Paul states, “and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,” he remarks,

First. It is membership language. When Paul says he does not have a righteousness “of my own”, based on Torah, the context of the previous verses must mean that he is speaking of a righteousness, a covenant status, which was his as a Jew by birth, marked with the covenant badge of circumcision, and claiming to be part of the inner circle of that people by being a zealous Pharisee. That which he is refusing in the first half of the verse 9 is not a moralistic or self-help righteousness, but the status of orthodox Jewish covenant membership.

Second, the covenant status Paul now enjoys is the gift of God: it is ‘a . . . righteousness from God.’

He also rejects the traditional concept of imputation of the righteousness of God. Overturning Augustinian and Reformation understanding of imputation, Wright argues, “If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.”


119 Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 122.

120 Ibid., 100, 102.

121 Ibid., 102.

122 Ibid., 124.

123 Ibid., 116.

124 Ibid., 124.
Efficacious Nature of Law in Soteriology. A logical result of Wright’s (as well as Sanders’ and Dunn’s) position is the opening wide of the contribution of meritorious works in salvation. Wright does not explicitly declare that a person’s works are grounds for a righteous standing before God, but dismisses standard texts used by the Reformers and their Protestant heirs as support for their case. That ambiguity leads toward the Romanist/works position. At the very least, the barriers to the a contribution of works in salvation have been removed—nothing prevents Wright (or his followers) from logically moving toward human effort as having a soteriological impact.

The Historical and Philosophical Motives of the NPP

How did this NPP develop? The discussion above has noted two main stimuli behind it: historical-critical ideology based on philosophy and the New Hermeneutic with its subjective interpretation of the biblical text. The development stemmed from the same presuppositions that generated historical-critical ideologies (such as source, form, redaction, tradition criticism), unorthodox views of inspiration of the OT and NT, aberrant views of Synoptic development, and the overall rejection of the historicity, integrity, and the authority of the biblical texts. Its historical, theological antecedents make the NPP far from neutral or a mere “rethinking” of the Reformational perspective. It was spurred by philosophies, generated from a preunderstanding replete with prejudicial thinking, not from an objective exegesis of the Pauline texts.

Important also is the fact that while admittedly many historical-critical ideologists such as Baur and Bultmann maintained a nominal Lutheran perspective on Paul, historical-critical approaches provided the avenue through which the NPP could develop. Especially as the inerrancy and authority of Scripture were undermined through historical-criticism, the NPP could remake Paul’s theology into something palatable to a “politically-correct” explanation that predominates in much of theology today. Tracing the impact of these presuppositions on Pauline studies reveals that the NPP did not appear suddenly on the scene. Basic presuppositions and philosophical developments have facilitated its rise. Although historical beginnings of any movement can be at times gradual, the beginnings of the NPP are traceable to several key movements and figures.

Jewish Opposition to the Gospel’s Presentation of Jesus

Throughout church history, Jewish theologians, with perhaps some exceptions, have expressed strong antipathy not only towards Jesus and the Gospel accounts of His life but also toward Paul, his theology, and his statements regarding. Scripturally, this is not a surprise to astute Christian theologians, especially since

\[^{12}\text{For a succinct history of historical-critical ideologies, consult F. David Farnell, “Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism,” in The Jesus Crisis 85-131.}\]
Paul warned in 1 Cor 1:18–2:14 that God sovereignly planned that a crucified Messiah would be a stumbling block to the Jews (“we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness,” 1 Cor 1:23; cf. Rom 9:30-33; 10:1-4). God’s program for including Gentiles in salvation also included the judicial blinding of Israel (Rom 11:1-36).

Within about the last hundred years, however, a Jewish reclamation of Jesus has come, including a recasting of Jesus into a image acceptable to Jews. The new image is in sharp contrast to how He is portrayed in the Gospels, one that is more palatable to non-believing Jewish sensibilities. Many Jews now declare that Jesus is/was a rabbi among rabbis, a part of Israel’s literary heritage. Hagner provides a major clue as to how a Jewish “reclamation” of Jesus was possible: “Building on the results of radical Protestant scholarship, Jewish writers argue that the Jesus of the Gospels is to a very large extent the product of the faith of the later church. The actual Jesus of history, on the other hand, is regarded as belonging with Judaism rather than Christianity.” In essence, modern Jews have used historical-critical ideologies (source, form, redaction, tradition criticism, History-of-Religions School, etc.) derived from radical Gentile Christian scholars that denigrated the historicity of the Gospels in order to remake Jesus into someone who was acceptable to them. They used these ideologies to drive an artificial wedge between the “Jesus of History” (how Jesus actually was in history) and the “Christ of faith” (how Jesus is portrayed in the canonical Gospels), thereby reinventing a Jesus who is unoffensive to them. The NT’s “rock of offense” and “stumbling stone” for Jews (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:8; cf. Isa 28:16) was removed by constructing a qualitatively different Jesus than the Gospel portrayals.

**Jewish Opposition to Paul and His Presentation of Judaism**

Until the modern period, Jews were mostly silent in their sharp disagreements with Paul. A few scattered, albeit elusive, references to Paul are possible. For example, some Jews consider Abot 3.12 as speaking of Paul when it notes someone “who profanes the Hallowed things and despises the set feasts and puts his fellow to shame publicly and makes void the Covenant of Abraham our Father [negating circumcision] and discloses meanings in the Law which are not according to the

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193 For an excellent study of this Jewish reclamation of Jesus, consult Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).


195 Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 143.


Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 144.

See Farnell, “Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism,” in The Jesus Crisis, 96-97.

imported elements foreign to Judaism.\textsuperscript{201}

The impact was profound. The theories cast Paul as an inventor of a new religion inconsistent with the Judaism of his day and a radical departure from what Jesus had taught. As Hagner observes, “To have such views [against Paul] uttered not out of a context of religious polemics or apologetics, but from what claimed to be ‘objective,’ ‘scientific’ Christian scholarship was indeed a boon to the Jewish perspective.”\textsuperscript{202} Bruce tellingly notes,

Although he [Paul] was rabbinically trained, his reappraisal of the whole spirit and content of his earlier training was so radical that many Jewish scholars have had difficulty in recognizing him as the product of a rabbinical education. They have found it easier to appreciate the Prophet of Nazareth (who, indeed, was not rabbinically trained) than the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul presents an enigma with which they cannot readily come to terms.\textsuperscript{203}

Jewish scholars made good use of Gentile-originated historical-criticism, and their criticisms, in turn, influenced the thinking of such NPP proponents as Sanders, Dunn, and Wright. For instance, Sanders devotes the “Preface,” “Introduction,” and “Part One” of his seminal work \textit{Paul and Palestinian Judaism} to formulating his view of “covenantal nomism” by reviewing the emphasis of Jewish scholars such as Claude Goldsmid Montefiore\textsuperscript{204} and Hans Joachim Schoeps on correcting improper thinking on Judaism, which Sanders terms “the ‘wearing struggle’ to get Christian scholars to see Rabbinic Judaism (or Pharisaism) in an unbiased light.”\textsuperscript{205} For Sanders, Christian theology from Paul through the Reformation was primarily a result of anti-Semitism.

Montefiore, the most influential Jewish writer of the early 20th century, decried “the imaginary Rabbinic Judaism, created by Christian scholars, in order to form a suitably lurid background for the Epistles of St. Paul.”\textsuperscript{206} Montefiore asserted, “[T]here is much in Paul which, while dealing with Judaism, is inexplicable by Judaism.”\textsuperscript{207} Montefiore denied that Paul ever knew authentic Rabbinic Judaism: “[T]he present writer is going to argue that Paul’s pre-Christian religion must have been, in many important points, very unlike the religion of a representative Rabbinic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{201} Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 146.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 146.
\item \textsuperscript{203} F. F. Bruce, \textit{Paul the Apostle of the Heart Set Free} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 462.
\item \textsuperscript{205} Sanders, \textit{PPJ} 35.
\item \textsuperscript{206} C. G. Montefiore, \textit{Judaism and St. Paul, Two Essays} (London: Max Goschen, 1914) 65.
\end{itemize}
Although Sanders does not agree with everything that these Jewish scholars propose, he does affirm the central thesis of their works that true rabbinic Judaism was a religion of grace rather than the traditional understanding of Protestant scholars that it was based on legalism and works-righteousness. Sanders dismisses this latter view, arguing that Jewish literature has demonstrated the former position to be accurate. Profoundly under such influence, Sanders stated in his seminal work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, that among his six purposes for writing this work was “to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship”; “to establish a different view of Rabbinic Judaism”; to argue for a certain understanding of Paul”; “to carry out a comparison of Paul and Palestinian Judaism.”

**Luther’s Alleged Antisemitism**

Worsening the negative reaction against the Lutheran and Reformed positions on Pauline theology has been the harsh anti-Semitic statements of Luther in his later years. The most famous such treatise of Luther is *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), written when he was around sixty years of age (b. 1484 and d. 1546). The treatise caused widespread dismay, not only among Jews contemporary with Luther, but also in Protestant circles. Melanchthon and Osiander were unhappy with its severity, and Bullinger related Luther’s words to the Spanish Inquisition. Luther’s proposals were quite severe, especially in the fourth section of his work. Fortunately, Luther’s proposals did not receive widespread approval, and the treatise did not sell as well as his pro-Jewish treatise, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, produced twenty years earlier (1523).

Realizing the volatility of Luther’s words, the editors of the American edition of *Luther’s Works* state that they have “played so fateful a role in the development of anti-Semitism in Western culture” that many attribute to them the eventual rise of anti-Semitism in Germany and the Holocaust. That caveat shows the difficulties caused by the treatise: “Publication of this treatise is being undertaken only to make available the necessary documents for scholarly study of this aspect of Luther’s thought. . . . Such publication is in no way intended as an endorsement of the distorted views of Jewish faith and practice or the defamation of

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208Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul* 17.

209Sanders, *PPJ* xii.


211*For an excellent treatment of the history and reaction surrounding this article, see “Introduction to ‘On the Jews and Their Lies,’” in The Christian in Society, vol. 47 of Luther’s Works 123-36.


213Introduction to “On the Jews and Their Lies” 123.
the Jewish people which this treatise contains.”

In the fourth section, Luther suggests the following actions for Christians against the Jews:

> What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. . . .

> First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn. . . .

> Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. . . .

> Third, I advise that that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them. . . .

> Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach. . . .

> Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. . . .

> Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. . . .

> Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow. . . .

Luther stopped short of encouraging physical harm to Jews, however. He cautioned pastors of Protestant churches to warn their people against the Jews, but not to “curse them or harm their persons. . . . For the Jews have cursed and harmed themselves more than enough by cursing the Man Jesus of Nazareth . . . which unfortunately they have been doing for over fourteen hundred years.” Nevertheless, he called for the expulsion of the Jews from Germany: they should “be expelled from the country and be told to return to their land and their possessions in Jerusalem.” He called them “a brood of vipers and children of the devil.”

Earlier in life, he had not shown such marked prejudice. In 1523, Luther published *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, a work greeted positively by Jewish readers throughout Europe. Luther wrote,

> They [i.e., popes, bishops, sophists, and monks] have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. . . . I have heard myself from pious baptized Jews that if they had not in our day heard the gospel they would have remained Jews under the cloak of Christianity for the rest of their days. For they acknowledge that they have never yet heard anything about Christ from those who baptized and taught them.

> I hope that if one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully

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214Ibid., 123.
215Ibid., 268-72.
216Ibid., 274.
217Ibid., 276, 277.
from the Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets and patriarchs.218

Various theories have been propounded for Luther’s change from sympathy for Jews to outright antagonism. Suggestions have ranged from declining health to splinter movements in the Reformation that saddened him. Perhaps the answer lies in his treatise itself: Jewish obstinacy or refusal to accept conversion. Jewish historian Marvin Lowenthal (1890-1969) remarks,

Luther entertained high hopes of converting the Jews. By stripping Christianity of its centuries of Catholic accretions he felt that he was making it attractive and acceptable to the members of the Old Faith. Unfortunately for both parties, while he thought he was bringing the Jews nearer to the church, they thought he was approaching the synagogue. A few Jews even waited on Luther to persuade him to take the final step...

But as the Protestant movement matured, Luther’s attitude changed. He grew embittered to discover that the Jews were as deaf to Martin of Eisleben as they had been to Paul of Tarsus. He became alarmed to find among the sects which sprouted like mushrooms in the fertile soil of Protestant resolve a dangerous tendency to revert to Jewish type; to deny the Trinity, to look upon Jesus as a prophet rather than a deity, to observe the seventh day as the Sabbath, and to take the Old Testament with a literalness embarrassing to the New—in short, to go “Jewish” as the Humanists had gone “ancient.”219

Rightly or wrongly, Luther has received a great share of blame for the rise of the Holocaust, especially since some nominal Lutherans in the 20th century participated with Hitler in the rise of the Third Reich. The NPP is in many ways a reaction to perceived Protestant (i.e., German Lutheran) church passivity or, in some cases, sympathy toward Nazi atrocities in World War II.

**Historical-Criticism as the Primary Agent of Change**

Much has already been noted about Gentile Christian scholar’s assault on the trustworthiness of the NT, especially the Gospels, and their contrast of Jesus’ teachings with those of Paul. Historical criticism provided the means through which Scripture’s authority was rejected, aiding the rise of the NPP. Many historical-critics remained nominally Protestant—or Lutheran—in approach to Paul, their ideologies providing the fertile ground for the NPP eventually to challenge the theological basis of the Protestant Reformation, especially in its approach to Paul’s epistles.

**F. C. Baur (1792-1860).** Prominent in the assault on the NT was Ferdinand Christian Baur, founder and uncontested leader of the “Tübingen School”

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of German radical biblical criticism and a tutor of Strauss.\textsuperscript{220} Hagner observes, “The modern debate of this problem [of a radical difference between Jesus’ and Paul’s preaching] goes back to F. C. Baur, who regarded Paul as an innovator and who was followed in this by others among whom Wendt, Goguel, Wrede and Bultmann deserve special mention.”\textsuperscript{221} Although Baur and the Tübingen school he headed remained nominally Lutheran in their view of Paul and eventually fell into disrepute because of radical scholarship, Baur’s effect on Gospel and Pauline studies had lasting effects, including several contributions that aided the development of the NPP.

First, with no substantive basis Baur pursued a dogmatic view of Scripture through his imposition of Fichtean-Hegelian philosophy on the biblical text, especially Paul’s epistles. This view became the foundation of his understanding of the entire NT, especially Pauline and Petrine epistles and the history of the early church. Baur based this philosophical imposition on the sheer hubris of his personality. He represented a more moderate approach to Hegel’s philosophy (actually derived from Fichte), for as Corduan notes, “Baur’s appropriation of Hegel is far more subtle than those of other Hegelians.”\textsuperscript{222}

In 1831, Baur published an essay entitled, “Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petriniischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom,” (“The Christ-party in the Corinthian Church, the Conflict Between Petrine and Pauline Christianity in the Early Church, the Apostle Peter in Rome”) in which he asserted that apostolic Christianity was marked by deep cleavage between the Jerusalem church and the Pauline mission.\textsuperscript{223} On the one side was Jewish Christianity represented by Peter that maintained a Judaizing form of Christianity and on the other side was Paul who insisted on the abolition of Jewish legalism. This assumption affected all interpretive data from the NT epistles. Paul’s mention of divisions in the Corinthian church between himself and Peter (1 Cor 1:11-12) became central to this imposition.

Second, Baur theorized a radical contrast between Jesus’ and Paul’s teachings. The historical-critical dichotomy between Jesus and Paul continued with his The Church History of the First Three Centuries, in which he posits,

“...but the apostle takes up an attitude of so great freedom and independence not only towards the older apostles, but towards the person of Jesus himself, that one might be...


\textsuperscript{221}Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 146; see also V. P. Furnish, “The Jesus-Paul Debate: From Baur to Bultmann, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 47 (1965) 342-81.

\textsuperscript{222}Winfried Corduan, “Transcendentalism: Hegel,” in \textit{Biblical Errancy} 94.

inclined to ask whether a view of his relation to the person of Christ can be the right one which would make the apostle Paul the originator and first exponent of that which constitutes the essence of Christianity as distinguished from Judaism. . . . He bears himself but little like a disciple who has received the doctrines and the principles which he preaches from the Master whose name he bears. . . . [H]is whole Christian consciousness is transformed into a view of the person of Jesus which stands in need of no history to elucidate it.\textsuperscript{224}

The assertion of a dichotomy between Paul and Jesus along with the rise of the History-of-Religions school (see below) that widened the gap more sharply, eventually aided the case of Jewish theologians that Paul had imported ideas foreign to Judaism and invented a religion contrary to Jesus’ intentions.\textsuperscript{225}

Third, Baur in “Die Christpartei” used this Hegelian-Fichtean paradigm on the NT Epistles. Books that clearly reflect either Pauline or Jewish (Petrine) theology were dated early while books reflecting an alleged synthesis of this thinking were considered late. Based on this paradigm, Baur considered only Romans, Galatians, and 1–2 Corinthians as legitimately Pauline. These became known as the “Hauptbrief” or “chief epistles,” since the Tübingen school considered these epistles the only genuine epistles coming from Paul; the rest were dismissed. Baur viewed the Pastoralas as late-second century documents written against Gnostics and Marcionites. He saw the Prison Epistles and Philemon as written in A.D. 120-140 and as coming from an alleged Pauline school. First and Second Thessalonians were written after Paul (A.D. 70-75) and were of inferior theological quality.

His students and followers applied this scheme to the rest of the NT through what is now known as Tendenz criticism as either Pauline (e.g., Hebrews, 1 Peter), Petrine-Judaizing (e.g., James, Matthew, Revelation), editing and conciliatory (e.g., Luke-Acts; Mark), or catholicizing (e.g., 2 Peter, Jude, John). Those ideas came into the 20th century and are held by NPP scholars (Sanders, Dunn, Wright, et al).\textsuperscript{226}

The surface rejection of the radicalism of Baur and Tübingen has not nullified their impact. Hafemann remarks,

Baur’s consistent attempt to provide a comprehensive and coherent understanding of history of the early church on the basis of historical reasoning alone, without recourse to supernatural interventions or to explanations based on the miraculous, did propel biblical scholarship into the modern world. Moreover, Baur’s work also set the stage for the


\textsuperscript{225}Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 146; Baur’s major works, especially \textit{Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ, His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine}, trans. Eduard Zeller, 2 vols. (reprint of 1876 ed.; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), also set the stage for the 20th-century debate over the relationship between the life and teachings of the “historical Jesus” and the theology of Paul.

debate in the twentieth century over the relationship between the life and teaching of the historical Jesus and the theology of Paul.\textsuperscript{227}

Baur’s \textit{a priori} imposition of philosophical concepts on Scripture as interpretive tools also facilitated the rise of such scholars as Wrede and Bultmann whose works also contributed to rise of the NPP.\textsuperscript{228} Baur’s treatment of Paul also led to a 20th- and 21st-century development of Paul’s view of the law and his own understanding of the gospel, including a search for an alleged center in Paul’s theology.

\textbf{The Religionsgeschichte Schule.} The History-of-Religions school as represented in the works of Pfleiderer, Heitmüller, Gunkel, Bousset, Reitzenstein, and Bultmann (to name a few) also contributed to the development of the NPP. This was a group of influential German biblical scholars from 1880 to 1920 who, based upon comparative study of religions, explained Christianity as a Near Eastern religious syncretism.\textsuperscript{229} They focused on Paul since he among all the NT writers allegedly exhibited the greatest Hellenistic influence. Discoveries involving the Mystery Religions and Gnosticism provided a rich source for finding parallels with Paul’s theology.

The person most responsible for widely disseminating this view was William Reitzenstein (1861-1931). His most famous work, \textit{Die Hellenistischen Mysterien-religionen} (1910), asserted that Paul must have been acquainted with Hellenistic mystery religions that profoundly influenced his thinking. He sought to establish the direct dependence of early Christianity on Hellenistic, Mandaean, and Iranian ideas. Reitzenstein identified Paul as a Hellenistic mystic and Gnostic whose religious experience matched that of the Hellenistic mystics. He claimed that Paul borrowed his presentation of Christ from the pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer myth. He emphatically declared that Paul knew Hellenistic religious literature and that such literature had a profound influence on him as he proclaimed the Jewish faith in a Hellenistic world.\textsuperscript{230}

Another leader in this movement was Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920) who in his \textit{Kyrios Christos} (1913) alleged that in Hellenistic Christianity the “Kyrios Christos” concept replaced the eschatological Son of Man in earlier Christianity and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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\item Though Wrede and Bultmann were essentially still Lutheran in approach, their ideas stimulated discussion that would lead to the NPP.
\item For overviews of the development of the \textit{Religionsgeschichte Schule} or History-of-Religions school, see Kämmel, \textit{The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems} 206-25, 245-80; Neill and Wright, \textit{The Interpretation of the NT 1864-1986} 168-79.
\end{thebibliography}
that it along with many other biblical concepts were based on the ancient myths of Babylonian and Egyptian instead of Jewish origin. Bousset claimed that in many cases Christians were involved in mystery religions before they were converted and transferred concepts of the mystery-gods to Christianity.  

Ernst Troeltsch, who formulated the three basic principles of historical critical methodology (criticism, analogy, correlation), was also a member of the History-of-Religions school. The principles expressed the hostile prejudice and skepticism of the school against the supernatural in the NT. He labeled himself "the systematic theologian of this approach."  

Another notable example of ardent proponents of the History-of-Religions school was Rudolf Bultmann, who although he was essentially Lutheran in approach, created a vast chasm between the Jesus in the Gospels and the one in Pauline writings and an even larger gap between Judaism and Paul. Bultmann viewed Paul as influenced by "Gnostic terminology" and as "the founder of Christian theology."  

The widespread effect of this school was the impression that Paul had combined nominal Jewish ideas within the framework of a dominant syncretistic Hellenism (especially Hellenistic Mystery Religions) and Gnosticism to create a new religion. Paul's central theology (e.g., his alleged, mysticism, his Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology) stemmed from the strong impact that these influences had upon him. Under this impression, many Jewish scholars, who disliked the image of Judaism in the Pauline epistles, and historical-critical scholars viewed Paul as the founder of a new religion. Many Jews considered the findings of the History-of-Religions school as explaining why Paul came to such supposedly bizarre conclusions regarding Judaism: the influence of Hellenistic concepts that distorted his portrayal of the true Judaism of his day. Historical-critics explained alleged differences between Jesus and Paul by Paul's susceptibility to Hellenizing syncretism. Although the History-of-Religions school was responsible for dealing a death-blow to the domination of Baur's concept of Hegelian-Fichtean dialectics in explaining elements of the Pauline epistles, that influences from both helped to contribute to the rise of the NPP is an interesting aspect of history.  

The Impact of Wilhelm Wrede (1859-1906). Wilhelm Wrede is another major contributor to the rise of the NPP. Wrede was primarily a historian, rather than a theologian, with an extreme skepticism toward the NT. He also was strongly

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influenced by and appreciative of the History-of-Religions school. He is remembered primarily for his effect on Gospel studies, but he also contributed to the NPP. Wrede’s influence on Gospel study was expressed primarily through his Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien (“The Messianic Secret,” 1901). Perrin remarks, “Wilhelm Wrede . . . sounded the death knell” regarding the historicity of Mark “by demonstrating that a major aspect of the Marcan narratives was precisely the ‘mythic’ and, in so doing, opened the door for the entry of redaction criticism upon the scene.”

In his Origin of the New Testament, Wrede asserted that “science has destroyed that idea” of “the supernatural origin of the Bible” and “shattered even the simplest facts” of the Bible. Furthermore, he noted, “[T]he books of the New Testament were not, as was once thought, literally dictated to the human authors by God Himself; rather they were written by men in a way entirely human.” The origin of the NT is “a historical, and a purely historical question,” yet “This does not impugn the religious value of the New Testament.”

Following Baur’s example of imposing philosophical ideas upon the biblical text, Wrede imposed his own skeptical philosophy not only on the Gospels but also upon Paul. He based his assertions on the sheer force of his personality with no objectivity and a paucity of exegesis of central Pauline passages.

Wrede’s treatment of the Pauline text has little respect for the documents because of his skepticism. Wrede’s widely acclaimed and popular work, Paul, was the first major challenge to the centrality of justification, a doctrine supported in the Protestant Reformation. In this ground-breaking work, he argued for a wide chasm between Paul and Jesus (reflective of Baur but even more extreme): “the name ‘disciple of Jesus’ has little applicability to Paul. . . . He [Paul] stands much farther away from Jesus than Jesus himself stands from the noblest figures of Jewish piety.” For Wrede, historic Christianity through the centuries is not modeled on Jesus but on Paul, whom he terms “the second founder of Christianity” [emphasis in original], although Paul was inferior to Christ. Nevertheless, Paul “exercised beyond all doubt the stronger—not the better—influence.”

Foundational for the eventual development of the NPP, Wrede argued that the doctrine of justification was not central to Paul’s thought, but only developed as a response to Paul’s conflict with Judaism:

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237Ibid.
238Ibid.
240Ibid., 165.
241Ibid., 179, 180.
The Reformation has accustomed us to look upon this as the central point of Pauline
document: but it is not so. In fact the whole Pauline religion can be expounded without
a word being about this doctrine, unless it be in the part devoted to the Law. It would be
extraordinary if what was intended to be the chief doctrine were referred to only in a
minority of the epistles. That is the case with this doctrine: it only appears where Paul
is dealing with the strife against Judaism.242

Seminal to the thinking of the NPP, Wrede comments regarding Paul’s purposes for
his doctrine of justification: “Two purposes, then, come really into play: (1) the
mission must be free from the burden of Jewish national custom; (2) the superiority
of the Christian faith in redemption over Judaism a whole must be assured. The
doctrine of justification is nothing more than the weapon with which these purposes
were to be won.”243

Long before the NPP concept of a Pauline emphasis on corporate rather
than individual salvation (e.g., Wright), Wrede began a shift toward similar thinking:

Luther asks, how does the individual man, who stands in the church and shares the
church’s faith in the redemption, overcome the tormenting uncertainty whether salvation
and the forgiveness of sins holds good personally for him? His answer is, he reaches a
personal certainty when he recognizes that it depends absolutely on grace, which God has
unconditionally promised. Paul has not the individual in mind at all; the question of
personal salvation plays no part in his exposition. . . . We must not then conceive of
justification as a personal experience of the individual, or a subjective, psychical
process. . . . It is rather conceived in the same mode as the death of Christ, which holds
good for all who belong to Christ.244

According to Wrede, Paul’s thought finds its primary background in Apocalyptic
Judaism:

The framework of the whole Pauline teaching is formed by the Jewish idea of a
contrast between two worlds (æons), one of which is present and earthly, the other is
future and heavenly. Here we have the foundation of the Pauline way of regarding
history. . . . All is Jewish, from the judgment with its wrath and retribution to the great
“oppression” before the end, to the “blast of the last trumpet,” to the victory of Messiah
over the hostile spirits.245

Like the NPP that would follow, Wrede described Paul’s epistles as filled
with contradictions and inconsistencies: “Pertinacious and impulsive, turbulent and
stable, inconsiderate and tender, in his intolerance bitter to the point of hardness and
acrimony, and yet a man of soft sensibility; unyielding and yet pliant; all enthusiasm

242 Ibid., 123.
243 Ibid., 127-28 (emphasis in the original).
244 Ibid., 131-32.
245 Ibid., 139-40.
and glow, all sober prudence; a thinker, a mediator, and yet even more a restless toiler—no scheme will suffice to comprehend the whole man.”

Paul never attempts “to unfold a system of doctrine.” Paul’s thoughts are “somewhat elastic…. His points of view and leading premises change and traverse each other without his perceiving it. It is no great feat to unearth contradictions, even among his leading thoughts.”

The sum total of these thoughts is that Wrede acted entirely apart from any concept of inspiration, with the result that he performed no objective or thorough exegesis of the biblical text.

**The Impact of Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965).** Schweitzer’s understanding of Paul, although not as well-known, was similar to Wrede’s. In contrast to Wrede, however, Schweitzer had nothing but contempt for the History-of-Religions school, especially in its attempt to find oriental and Hellenistic influences on Christianity. Ironically though, he borrowed their method, finding in Judaism the background of Jesus, early Christianity, and Paul.

In his studies, Schweitzer came under the philosophical influence of Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. He has been called an irrational rationalist, but the term that best describes him is “mystic.” Even more so than Wrede, Schweitzer was among the most thoroughgoing eschatologists of all historical critics. Yet he dogmatically read his philosophy into the biblical text without considering exegetical data from the text. As with Wrede, such imposition stemmed more from his personality and reputation than from objective interpretive data.

In Schweitzer’s *The Problem of the Lord’s Supper* (1901), he developed ideological approaches as a matrix he would use on later studies of Jesus and

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24^Ibid., 39-40.
25^Ibid., 74.
26^Ibid., 77.
28^Schweitzer completed his D.Phil. dissertation on Kant (*Die Religionsphilosophie Kants*) in July 1899.
Paul.\textsuperscript{254} (1) as a device, a survey of the history of research on the subject and (2) his solution to the problem centered on this dogmatically imposed assumption of a thoroughgoing eschatology, i.e., an apocalyptic understanding of the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{255} This apocalyptic approach was so overwhelming in determination of Schweitzer’s thinking that it would eventually cause his rejection of Protestant emphasis on justification as a center of Paul’s thinking.

In Schweitzer’s \textit{The Mystery of the Kingdom of God}, he set forth the idea that Jesus’ eschatological (i.e., apocalyptic) conviction “must from the beginning, even in the first Galilean period, have lain at the basis of his preaching!”\textsuperscript{256} Echoing the thinking of Wrede’s Messianic Secret,\textsuperscript{257} Schweitzer maintained that Jesus recognized himself as the Messiah at his baptism, but kept his messiahship secret, arguing,

\begin{quote}
What we call the Transfiguration is in reality nothing else but the revelation of the secret of messiahship to the Three . . . .

There is in fact an inward connection between the Baptism [of Jesus] and the Transfiguration. In both cases a condition of ecstasy accompanies the revelation of the secret of Jesus’ person. The first time the revelation was for him alone; here the Disciples also share it.\textsuperscript{258}
\end{quote}

Schweitzer also posits a secret passion. He asserts that Jesus expected that the messianic woes would happen during His ministry, but when they did not, Jesus decided He would inaugurate the messianic feat by sacrificing himself. Schweitzer believed that Jesus was hopelessly mistaken: “With his death he destroyed the form of his ‘Weltanschauung,’ rendering his own eschatology impossible.”\textsuperscript{259} Instead, “he [Jesus] gives to all peoples and to all times the right to apprehend him in terms of their thoughts and conceptions, in order that his spirit may pervade their ‘Weltanschauung.’”\textsuperscript{259}


\textsuperscript{255}For information, see Reumann, “The Problem of the ‘Lord’s Supper’ as Matrix for Albert Schweitzer’s ‘Quest of the Historical Jesus’” 475-87.

\textsuperscript{256}Albert Schweitzer, \textit{The Mystery of the Kingdom of God}, translated and introduced by Walter Lowrie (London: A. & C. Black, 1925) 87.

\textsuperscript{257}Wrede’s thinking differed from Schweitzer here in that Wrede contended that Jesus never presented himself as Messiah but that the evangelist who wrote Mark used it as a literary device to explain the post-Easter church’s proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah, while Schweitzer believed that the “messianic secret” was not a literary device but was contained in the pre-Marcan tradition. See Schweitzer, \textit{The Quest} 302, 303-14.

\textsuperscript{258}Schweitzer, \textit{The Mystery of the Kingdom of God} 180-81.

\textsuperscript{259}Ibid., 251.
Based on his reading of apocalyptic into any analysis of the biblical text, Schweitzer formulated his best known work, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, that was originally known by its 1906 German title *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesus-Forschung*. In this famous work that chronicles the First Quest for the “historical Jesus,” Schweitzer praised the Deist Reimarus’ work as “one of the greatest events in the history of criticism” because of Reimarus’ apocalyptic approach to understanding Jesus.\(^{264}\) He dismissed previous liberal attempts at reconstructing a life of Jesus as failures because they did not appreciate the apocalyptic element that he had identified. He also lauded D. F. Strauss’ *Life of Jesus* since “we also find in it a positive historical impact . . . as the historical personality which emerges from the mist of myth is a Jewish claimant to the messiahship whose world of thought is purely eschatological.”\(^{262}\) For Schweitzer, all scholarship between Reimarus and Johannes Weiss “appears retrograde” because of a failure to appreciate apocalyptic thought.\(^{265}\) Schweitzer’s heroes in this work were four: Reimarus, Strauss, J. Weiss, and Schweitzer himself.\(^{264}\) His *Quest* crescendos to the following thought about Jesus’ apocalyptic hopes in the Gospels:

> The Baptist appears, and cries: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His Victory and His reign.\(^{265}\)

Schweitzer’s summary of Jesus’ life: Jesus miscalculated both personally and apocalyptically and was killed for His error.

After Schweitzer’s imposition of historical-critical slants and assumption of apocalypticism on the Gospels, he turned to impose the same on Paul. Reflecting a similar position to many others like Sanders in the NPP, Schweitzer stressed

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\(^{260}\)Ibid.

\(^{261}\)Ibid.

\(^{262}\)Schweitzer, *The Quest* 90.

\(^{263}\)Ibid., 23.


alleged Pauline contradictions. He criticized previous works on Paul:

The odd thing is they [previous writers on Paul] write as if they understand what they were writing about. They do not feel compelled to admit that Paul’s statements taken by themselves are unintelligible, consist of pure paradoxes, and that the point that calls for examination is how far they are thought of by their author as having a real meaning, and could be understood in this light by his readers. They never call attention to the fact that the Apostle always becomes unintelligible just at the moment when he begins to explain something; never gives a hint that while we hear the sound of his words but the tune of his logic escapes us.  

According to Schweitzer, Paul’s thinking was not only contradictory but was also marked by two important elements that governed it. The first is “Christ-mysticism” that is historic-cosmic. Schweitzer argued, “The fundamental thought of Pauline mysticism runs thus: I am in Christ; in Him I know myself as a being who is raised above this sensuous, sinful, and transient world and already belongs to the transcendent; in Him I am assured of resurrection; in Him I am a child of God.”  

Schweitzer labels Paul’s “being in-Chris” as “the prime enigma of Pauline teaching.”  

This mystic element, however, was derived from a second more predominant element, Paul’s eschatology: “[T]his mystical element is actually derived from the eschatological concept of the Community of God in which the Elect are closely bound up with one another and with the Messiah.”  

Once again, for Schweitzer, his theory of apocalypticism dominated and prejudiced his interpretation.  

Because of his overwhelming preoccupation with apocalyptic elements in the Gospels and Paul, Schweitzer deliberately shifted from the Reformational emphasis on justification as dominant in Pauline writings to an overwhelming preoccupation with Pauline apocalypticism and mysticism. He noted,

Paul is . . . forced by his mysticism to recast the doctrine of the atoning death of Jesus, in the sense of inserting into it the doctrine of freedom from the Law. This is not possible by straight-forward logic, because there is no argument against the validity of the Law to be derived directly from the atoning death of Jesus. All that can be done therefore is to bring the doctrine of the freedom from the Law into close connection with the doctrine of the atoning death of Jesus by means of logical ingenuities. This Paul does by showing by the argument from Prophecy that the only valid righteousness is that which comes from faith alone, and that works righteousness is incompatible with faith-

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266 Ibid.  
267 Ibid., 116.
righteousness. It is possible for the idea of righteousness apart from the works of the Law to be expounded by means of this ingenious reasoning; but it could never have arisen out of it. The doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore a subsidiary crater, which has formed within the rim of the main crater—the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ.270

Baird’s summary of Schweitzer is significant: “With an arrogance excusable only in a genius, he imagines all preceding work has been mistaken. His passionate arguments, punctuated by either/or, tend to oversimplify and exaggerate. . . . Schweitzer demonstrates the danger of presuppositions in historical research—paradoxically, both in his critique of others and his own results.”271

Conclusion Regarding the NPP

The NPP is not new; it is old. Similar approaches have been around throughout the centuries of church history. Although many of its supporters issue loud attempts at denial, close scrutiny reveals that the NPP is the revival of works as efficacious for salvation which Luther and others in church history warned would happen. Moreover, it is the direct product of historical-critical ideologies. Importantly, often ignored by its proponents as well as its critics, is that the same road that led to the destruction of the orthodox concepts of Scripture, especially the Gospels, also led to NPP. Though many historical critics were nominally Lutheran or Reformed in their views of Paul, their philosophically motivated proposals facilitated the rise of not only a “search for the historical Jesus” but also a “search for the historical Paul.” A fortuitous, well-timed convergence in the 20th and early 21st centuries of historical-critical ideologies, political correctness, and eisegesis of Pauline texts by such men as Sanders, Dunn, and Wright have led to the emergence and prominence of the NPP.
THE REFORMERS’ UNDERSTANDING
OF PAUL AND THE LAW

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For about two thousand years the doctrine of justification by faith has been the bedrock of Christianity, but recently the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) has proposed that such a teaching rests on a misunderstanding of Paul that was propagated by the Reformers. The NPP advocates a view of second-temple Judaism that was free from legalism and focused on an exclusivism based on racial privilege. Such texts as Acts 13:38-39, Luke 18:14, and Rom 9:30-32 show that Judaism of that day was definitely legalistic, however. Rabbinic writings of the same period confirm that fact. Writings of early church fathers such as Clement of Rome, Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Augustine reflect the church’s belief in justification by faith as a contrast with early Jewish legalism. Thomas Aquinas and other Roman Catholic sources of the Middle Ages show a belief in Paul’s picture of Judaism as teaching justification by human merit. Luther continued the tradition of the church’s belief in justification by faith and its antithesis, the works of the law. Though differing slightly from Luther’s view of the law, Calvin concurred with him that justification before God was unattainable without divine intervention in regeneration. Evidence is clear that the Reformers were not merely reacting to conditions of their day as the NPP contends, but continued a tradition of justification by faith alone handed down from the early church.

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No doctrine is of greater importance throughout the history of mankind than the doctrine of justification. Since the opening pages of human history, man has had an insatiable hunger to know how to have his sins atoned for and how to propitiate the demands of a holy God (Job 9:2; 25:4). Furthermore, in the evangelical world, no doctrine has been of greater import and significance than justification by faith alone— the Reformation principle of sola fide. Martin Luther rightly contends that
“if the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost.”1

Despite the bedrock foundation of this marvelous truth, history’s earliest records display mankind’s repeated abandonment of God’s gracious provision of divine accomplishment. The pentateuchal records of Moses to the epistles of Paul tell of a recurring infiltration of human efforts to attack and overrun the simple gospel of grace.

Until recently, Protestants rarely questioned the sola fide principle. The doctrine of justification by faith alone, which reverberates with clarion precision throughout the pages of NT history and echoes through the corridors of the early church, was clearly heard, understood, and embraced. From Jesus to the NT writers to the stalwarts of the early church and beyond, the doctrine of justification by faith was considered to be the soteriological “pearl of great price.”

But the integrity of this sine qua non was not maintained without a price, a fact all-too-vividly recorded in the annals of church history. In the fifth century, it was the central battleground in the theological contest between Augustine and Pelagius.2 So significant was this dispute that it is said to have been the fountainhead of the Reformation more than a millennium later. N. T. Wright ties the two together when he notes that the Reformation doctrine of justification “owes a good deal both to the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine in the early fifth century and to that between Erasmus and Luther in the early sixteenth century.”3 But in acknowledging this connection, Wright quickly adds that this historic Protestant view of justification “does not do justice to the richness and precision of Paul’s doctrine, and indeed distorts it at various points.”4 In agreement with this accusation, proponents of the New Perspective on Paul (mostly NPP hereafter) claim that church historians and theologians, regardless of the era in which they spoke and wrote, have misunderstood Paul’s teaching on the law.

In general, NPP adherents expressly argue against sola fide, lobbying vigorously for Protestants to rethink the historic teaching in light of a more recent understanding of what Paul really meant. Responding to the claim that justification—namely, a description of how persons become Christians—is the central theme of the entire Roman epistle, Wright asserts that “this way of reading Romans has systematically done violence to that text for hundreds of years, and that it is time for the text itself to be heard again.”5

Although NPP advocates have expressed dismay with a wide spectrum of

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1Martin Luther, Lectures on Galatians, in Luther’s Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963) 26:9.

2Historians have appropriately stressed that it was Pelagius who was provoked by Augustine’s earlier declarations in his Confessions: “His mature views on human weakness and divine grace were essentially in place long before the Pelagian conflict erupted” (Stephen Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New on Paul [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004] 3-4). Also cf. Friedrich A. Loofs, “Augustine,” The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949) 1:369.


4What Saint Paul Really Said 113.

5Ibid., 117.
prominent historical church leaders, it appears that the ax-head of NPP theology is aimed most directly at the roots of the Reformation. The Reformers and their *sola fide* teaching—the very core of the split with the Roman Catholic Church—are the focal point of the assault. The frontal attack seems directed primarily at Luther and Calvin, who, it is claimed, have misunderstood Paul’s teaching in Romans and Galatians and have seriously misconstrued the doctrine of justification. E. P. Sanders, another proponent of NPP, agrees. Writing on Galatians 2–4 and Romans 3–4, he argues, “The subject-matter is not ‘how can the individual be righteous in God’s sight?’ but rather ‘on what grounds can Gentiles participate in the people of God in the last days?’”

According to the NPP, Reformers viewed the apostle Paul’s writings through a works-righteousness lens of medieval times and perspectives. In doing so, they misunderstood, misconstrued, and mistook the true perspective of second-temple Judaism, resulting in a radical misinterpretation of Paul’s true teaching. Attempting a more direct hit on the Reformers, Sanders contends that Luther interpreted Paul’s teaching on justification through the eyes of a guilt-ridden conscience. He writes,

Luther, plagued by guilt, read Paul’s passages on ‘righteousness by faith’ as meaning that God reckoned a Christian to be righteous even though he or she was a sinner…. Luther’s emphasis on fictional, imputed righteousness, though it has often been shown to be an incorrect interpretation of Paul, has been influential…. Luther sought and found relief from guilt. But Luther’s problems were not Paul’s, and we misunderstand him if we see him through Luther’s eyes.

Simply put, Sanders is arguing that first-century Judaism was not a religion that taught “bootstrap” justification, i.e., the Pharisees were not teaching a works-based righteousness.

The Judaism of Paul’s day, according to the NPP, understood salvation in terms of the covenant community of Israel—a community brought together by God’s grace. Jews, it is argued, were not made right with God through their own merits but through His covenant. Consequently, their emphasis on keeping the law had nothing to do with salvation but with maintaining one’s place in the covenant community. Thus it is believed that Paul’s concern is not Judaistic legalism; it is not a belief whereby one could merit God’s final acquittal on the basis of good works. Rather, they contend that the apostle’s focus was Jewish exclusivism, the feeling that covenant membership is derived on the basis of racial privilege. Obviously, in the thinking of this new perspective, the Reformers had gotten it wrong. Neither they nor the apostle Paul needed to defend *sola fide*. Rather, the Reformers had mistakenly

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1 Sanders, *Paul* 50.
3 Sanders, *Paul* 49.
4 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 129. Earlier, he explains: “Justification, in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences” (122).
read back into first-century Judaism their own medieval perspectives.

Or had they? Had the Reformers misconstrued the Pauline doctrine of justification? Did the Pharisees believe that their hope of heaven rested on God’s gracious choice? Has the church been misled by the church fathers and more recently by the Reformers in its understanding of the nature of justification? These are the questions that must be answered.

**Justification in Early Judaism**

*First-Century Perspective.* Taking a brief look at first-century Judaism, the NPP argues that the concept of justification is not to be understood in a soteriological sense but in an ecclesiological sense. In other words, Paul’s statements against trusting in the works of the law focus on the Jewish understanding of who could (or could not) share in *their* covenant-community. These second-temple Jews were insisting on an exclusive Jewish membership in the covenant. Paul was addressing that issue, arguing that covenant-status was available to both Jew and Gentile through the Messiah.

But does NT literature substantiate this understanding of justification? Is first-century justification to be viewed ecclesiologically rather than soteriologically? A look at a few passages indicates otherwise.

In Acts 13:38-39, while preaching at Antioch on his first missionary journey, Paul proclaims: “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified through the law of Moses.” Most notably in these verses, the apostle equates the forgiveness of sins with justification (contra the NPP). Justification deals with soteriology, not ecclesiology (contra the NPP).

Jesus, explaining His parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer, directly connects justification with soteriology, not ecclesiology. He remarks, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other…” (Luke 18:14). Romans 9:30-32 is equally definitive in its discussion of works-salvation within the teachings of Judaism. Speaking of this passage, Leon Morris observes: “It is quite clear that righteousness is being used to denote a standing, a status, a verdict of acquittal, and not an ethical quality.”

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11 In *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Wright contends: “Justification in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God’s eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people…. In standard Christian language, it wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology, not so much about salvation as about the church…. Those who adhered in the proper way to the ancestral covenant charter, the Torah, were assured in the present that they were the people who would be vindicated in the future…. Justification in this setting, then, is not a matter of *how someone enters the community of the true people of God*, but of *how you tell who belongs to that community*…” (119, emphasis in the original).

11 Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 275. It could be claimed that the Pauline epistles never directly contrast law and gospel, and thereby maintained that Paul’s argument against the works of the law is not connected with soteriology. However, Paul “does frequently set law in opposition to grace, faith, and promise; and he similarly juxtaposes works of the law and faith as mutually exclusive ways of seeking God’s righteousness” (Douglas J. Moo, “‘Law, ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45/1 [Spring 1983]:74).
Thus, Wright’s argument that “justification” in Pauline writings lacks connection with NT soteriology is without foundation. Also cf. the Book of Jubilees 15:25ff.

Augustine, quoted by Luther in his Romans commentary, notes that the apostle Paul “vehemently inveighs against the proud, arrogant persons who glory in their works” (Martin Luther, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, trans. J. T. Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976) 28.

theology. Though many of his writings have been lost, occasional glimpses of how he understood the law and its role remain.

One such glimpse is found in his debate with Marcion. Tertullian there argues that Paul remembered that the time was come of which the Psalm spake, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast off their yoke from us;” since the time when “the nations became tumultuous, and the people imagined vain counsels;” when “the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ,” in order that thenceforward man might be justified by the liberty of faith, not by servitude to the law, “because the just shall live by his faith.” Now, although the prophet Habakkuk first said this, yet you have the apostle here confirming the prophets, even as Christ did. The object, therefore, of the faith whereby the just man shall live, will be that same God to whom likewise belongs the law, by doing which no man is justified.15

Chrysostom (mid 4th c.). Despite being born into wealth in Antioch of Asia Minor, John Chrysostom eschewed the pleasures of the world, choosing instead to live a very simple life in the study of Scripture and preaching. It is said that he was easily “recognized in his sober exegesis, occupied with determining the literal sense of his text.”16

His sermons, some of which provide glimpses into his understanding of Paul and the law, cover almost every book of the Bible. In his sermon on Rom 1:17, he notes that man’s righteousness is “not thine own, but that of God... For you do not achieve it by toilings and labors, but you receive it by a gift from above, contributing one thing only from your own store, ‘believing.’”17

In his Rom 3:31 homily, he contends that good works are the result of justification by grace: “But since after this grace, whereby we were justified, there is need also of a life suited to it, let us show an earnestness worthy the gift.”18 Speaking on Rom 4:1ff, he interprets the apostle Paul as arguing that it was impossible to be saved otherwise than by faith. He is now intent upon showing that this salvation, so far from being matter of shame, was even the cause of a bright glory, and a greater than that through works.... For reflect how great a thing it is to be persuaded and have full confidence that God is able on a sudden not to free a man who has lived in impiety from punishment only, but even to make him just, and to count him worthy of those immortal honors.19

Augustine (mid 4th c.). Like Tertullian two centuries earlier, Augustine

18Ibid., 11.380.
19Ibid., 11.385-86.
The Reformers’ Understanding of Paul and the Law

originated from near Carthage, North Africa. Having had little childhood instruction in the Christian faith, he took great delight in criticizing the OT Scriptures, scorning the sacraments of the church, and holding frequent debates with believers. However, after his conversion to Christianity in his early thirties, he turned his intellect and extensive education toward writing and defending the faith.

Augustine believed that the OT law had three expressions: the eternal, unchanging laws; the ceremonial laws that foreshadowed the coming of Messiah and His redemptive work; and the moral law, encapsulated in the Decalogue minus the Sabbath command.

Augustine was quite explicit as to his perspective of first-century Judaism. Speaking of Rom 3:20, he remarks, “The law brings the knowledge, not the overcoming, of sin.” In Rom 9:31-32 Paul writes that Israel, in their pursuit of “a law of righteousness,” “did not arrive at that law … because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.” This passage, Augustine taught, indicates that they thought they could “establish their own righteousness.”

Thus it is clear that Augustine taught justification by God’s grace apart from any personal works or merit.

Justification in the Middle Ages

Thomas Aquinas. Born outside of Rome in 1225, Thomas Aquinas was first educated at a nearby monastery and then later studied in Germany with Albertus Magnus. Under the influence of this famous philosopher, Aquinas was introduced to the Greek philosophers, filling the framework of Aristotle with the dogmas of the church.

It can be argued that Roman Catholic theology, from the Middle Ages until the

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20While Augustine credits his mother for much of what he later became, “she was not always the ideal of a Christian mother that tradition has made her appear” (Friedrich Loofs, “Augustine,” in The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1951] 1:365). He adds: “Her religion in earlier life has traces of formality and worldliness about it; her ambition for her son seems at first to have had little moral earnestness and she regretted his Manicheanism more than she did his early sensuality” (ibid.).

21Even his exposure to the allegorical interpretations by Ambrose (Milan) did not placate his ridicule and antagonism for the Scriptures.


The Roman Church. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Roman Church continued to teach justification by grace through faith. Although it mistakenly held to a faith that is made active through good deeds (contra sola fide), it continued to hold onto a form of justification by grace. Remarkably, while embracing a form of justification that required a works-based “cooperation,” they still maintained that Paul was teaching against a works-based justification in Romans and Galatians. Catholic theologian D. M. Crossan observes,

In the Pharisaic theology, … emphasis was placed on a growing and expanding system of laws and prescriptions. Two evils came from this change. The mass of Mosaic legislation took on the appearance of a burden, of an obligation, forced upon man from outside his own being; and secondly, the faithful, exact, and minute fulfillment itself of all these many prescriptions became the basis for one’s union with God, the cause rather than the effect of one’s relationship with Him….

Commenting on Phil 3:6, Crossan writes, “If one accepted Pharisaic norm that justification arises from a flawless fulfillment of all the law’s requirements, he was perfect. According to such a theory, man really accomplishes his own justification…. Paul refers to the theory repeatedly as justification ‘in’ or ‘from’ or ‘by’ the Law and/or its works (Gal 2.21; Rom 3.20; 8.3; 10.5; 11.31).”

Given the works-based justification that is so indelibly imprinted on Roman Catholic theology, one might expect Romanists to understand Paul in accord with the NPP perspective. But that is not the case. Surprisingly, like many of the church fathers of the first fifteen centuries before, they believed that the apostle viewed first-century Judaism as teaching a justification by human merit.

Augustine, considered by many to be the “Father of Western Christianity,” also left an indelible mark on Christianity some 800 years earlier.

Seeberg, “Thomas Aquinas” 426.

According to the Council of Trent: “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and be disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema” (Council of Trent, “Decree Concerning Justification,” [1547], Canon 9). Also cf. Georg Kraus, “Justification,” in Handbook of Catholic Theology, eds. Wolfgang Heinert and Francis Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 418.


Ibid. Crossan adds: “The Judaizers apparently argued for the continuing value of the Mosaic Law, based on a theory of justification through its works” (8:79).
Justification in the Reformation

Martin Luther’s Perspective. The Reformers are charged by NPP proponents with misreading and misconstruing Paul’s instructions on the role of the law in justification. That accusation is directed against the Reformers in general, but the attack is aimed most decidedly at the writings of Martin Luther. Luther’s firm stand against the ecclesiastical giant of his day, his theological acumen, his articulate preaching, and his prolific pen placed him at the vanguard of the Reformation, and thus put him in the crosshairs of all who might take issue.

The impact of this former monk for more than half a millennium, together with his contribution to the discussion of Paul and the law, cannot be underestimated. Though reared in the strict religious environment of the Roman Catholic Church, Martin Luther gained little biblical knowledge in his early years. Greatly fearful of the wrath of God in his youth, a feeling that was intensified by the death of a friend, he left behind his law studies and entered the Augustinian monastery in 1505.31 During this time, Luther became greatly influenced by the twelfth-century Bernard of Clairvaux, an influence that prompted Luther to pursue a life of inner piety. At the same time Saint Augustine of Hippo was also leaving his mark on this young monk. While the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux ignited Luther’s passion for piety and a longing for freedom from guilt, the thinking of Augustine a millennium earlier impacted his eventual understanding of the role of the law and its distinction from salvation by grace through faith.

A year after his ordination to the priesthood in 1507, Luther was assigned to Wittenberg, first as a professor of philosophy and later as a lecturer in theology. His lectures on Romans and Galatians began to influence him profoundly. Though he remained devoted to the Roman Catholic Church for more than a decade,32 his study in these Pauline epistles led him to embrace the doctrine of sola fide—a justification by faith alone apart from any works of the law. The impact of this newly discovered doctrine became, for Luther, the principal teaching of Paul’s epistles and the central issue of his ultimate struggle with the Roman Catholic Church.

There is little ambiguity regarding Luther’s perspective of the apostle Paul’s teaching on the law. In his Introduction to the Epistle to the Romans, a book that he calls “the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel,” Luther provides a reasonable summary:

Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works…. The Scriptures, in Genesis 15, declare that he was justified by faith alone, even before the work of circumcision. But if the work of circumcision contributed nothing to his righteousness, though God commanded it and it was a good work of obedience; then, surely, no other good work will contribute anything to righteousness…. Then he brings forth another witness, viz., David, in Psalm 32, who says that a man is justified without works…. Then he gives the


32Initially his concerns were not directed specifically at the church, but at the sale of indulgences and the teaching that these indulgences were effective to reduce time in purgatory. That issue led him to nail the Ninety-five Theses to the Wittenberg church door and soon thereafter to confront directly a growing litany of the church’s teaching.
illustration a broader application, and concludes that the Jews cannot be Abraham’s heirs merely because of their blood, still less because of the works of the law, but must be heirs of Abraham’s faith, if they would be true heirs. For before the law—either the law of Moses or the law of circumcision—Abraham was justified by faith and called the father of believers…. Therefore, faith alone must obtain the grace promised to Abraham.33

Four major tenets of Luther’s view of Paul and the law34 are germane to this study.35

1. The law is meant to crush self-righteousness and to drive sinful mankind to seek the mercy of the Savior.

Luther taught that the law was designed as a “great hammer” used by God to drive man to utter despair and show man his need for the Savior. He writes that the law “is the hammer of death, the thundering of hell and the lightning of God’s wrath, that beats to powder the obstinate and senseless hypocrites. Wherefore this is the proper and absolute use of the law, … to beat down and rend in pieces that beast which is called the opinion of righteousness…”36 To Luther, this was the primary use of the law.

2. Mankind is justified before God, not by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

To Luther, Gal 2:16 is the apex of Paul’s soteriology, highlighting God’s provision in Christ as the only means of deliverance from sin’s condemnation. Commenting on this verse, he writes,

*The Law is a good thing. But when the discussion is about justification, then is no time to drag in the Law. When we discuss justification we ought to speak of Christ and the benefits He has brought us. Christ is no sheriff. He is ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). We must know that we are nothing. We must understand that we are merely beneficiaries and recipients of the treasures of Christ.*37

“In faith we approach Christ as a bride would her groom, for a marriage in which all possessions are shared: Christ, the Bridegroom, acquires our ‘sins, death, and

33Luther, Romans xx.
34It must be understood here that Luther is not speaking of the God-ordained civil laws (usus politicus) that are applied to all of God’s creation and serve as the foundation of human law (e.g., Rom 13:3-4). Rather, he is speaking of those laws of God (usus theologicus) that show man his hopeless despair and his need for the redemption. “Civil laws and ordinances have their place and purpose. Let every government enact the best possible laws. But civil righteousness will never deliver a person from the condemnation of God’s Law” (Martin Luther, Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, trans. Theodore Graebner [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949] 106).
35The four are adapted from Westerholm, Paul 23.
36Luther, Romans 139-41.
37Luther, Galatians 68.
damnation’ while we receive his ‘grace, life, and salvation.’”

3. Believers, though declared righteous in the eyes of God, remain sinners throughout their earthly lives.

   Luther views sin as a present fact of life for the believer. The believer is both sinner and righteous at the same time (simul justus et peccator). “Sin is always present, and the godly feel it. But it is ignored and hidden in the sight of God, because Christ the Mediator stands between.” The Christian is a new creature and thus counted righteous, but the “old man” will always be there, attempting to pull one back under the law.

4. Believers’ relationship with God is not determined by the law, though the law continues to identify and judge their sin.

   As was noted earlier, Luther believed that the law had a twofold purpose. First, it was given to all mankind to govern civil life in general. Second, it was designed to show mankind their inability to keep the law and arouse them to the peril of their hopeless condition. In spite of his occasional remarks to the effect that “the righteous need no law to admonish and constrain them,” Luther did concede that, within this second use, the law could show the believer his sin and call him to repentance. Speaking of the Ten Commandments in his Large Catechism, he writes, “Let all wise men and saints step forward and produce, if they can, any work like that which God in these commandments so earnestly requires and enjoins under threat of his greatest wrath and punishment…”

   Luther’s past struggles with the guilt of his sin and his need for personal piety inevitably led him to view the law in a largely negative way. “His focus centered on the law as condemnatory and as pointing up humanity’s depravity, with little note of any beneficial function of the law beyond that of restraining sin.” In general, he held tenaciously to the two uses of the law, conceding only slightly that

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38 Martin Luther, The Freedom of a Christian, in Luther’s Works, trans W. A. Lambert, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957) 31:351. “It is in fact an arranged wedding, planned by God so that when he looks at us, sinners though we are, he need see only the righteousness of Christ; and seeing us so, he can welcome us as his children into his kingdom” (Westerholm, Paul 31).

39 Luther, Galatians 26:133. Cf. Westerholm, Paul 36-37.


41 Luther, Galatians 27:96.


the law might be of any benefit to the believer. “Justification by faith” and “the works of the law” were considered to be absolutely antithetical. Whether his focus was on first-century Judaistic thought or directed toward the Roman Church of his day, he was adamant that sinners are unable to propitiate God’s wrath and merit divine favor by means of good works.

*John Calvin’s Perspective.* Whereas Luther began his education by studying law and only later began to engage in theological pursuits, Calvin began preparing for the priesthood and then later switched to study law. A child prodigy by many accounts, by the age of twelve he became a chaplain at his hometown cathedral about 60 miles northeast of Paris. At nineteen, he left the priesthood to pursue a law degree and, having come under the influence of humanism, left a few years after that to begin studying the humanities.\(^{44}\)

While studying the humanities in Paris, he came under the influence of Professor Melchior Wolmar, a highly-regarded humanist who spoke favorably of the Reformation. This encounter was one of the factors that led to his “sudden conversion” and his renewed study of the Scriptures.

Like Luther, he had no intention of leaving the Roman Church at this time. But the growing persecution of Protestants in France led him to reconsider, as he suddenly found himself being driven from place to place within France, Germany, and Switzerland. While passing through Geneva, his close friend Farel convinced him to stay.

Calvin was more of a quiet type, desiring to find a place of solitude where he might study and write. However, hearing that his French countrymen were being falsely accused and subsequently burned at the stake for their faith, Calvin concluded that he had no choice but to support them to the utmost of his ability. In the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, he reveals his motivations:

> This was the consideration which induced me to publish my Institutes of the Christian Religion. My objects were, first, to prove that these reports were false and calumnious, and thus vindicate my brethren, whose death was precious in the sight of the Lord; and next, that as the same cruelties might very soon after be exercised against many unhappy individuals, foreign nations might be touched with at least some compassion towards them and solicitude about them.\(^{45}\)

Although Calvin is often remembered for his strong theological perspectives, he viewed practical theology as preeminent. He felt passionately about the need to live according to the Word. Warfield writes: “Ethics and theology were handled in the closest connection…. In opposition to the lax views of sin and grace which the Roman Church inculcated, he revived the Augustinian doctrine in order by it to conquer Rome.”\(^{46}\)

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\(^{46}\)Warfield, “John Calvin” 356.
Two aspects of Calvin’s understanding of the law call for delineation—first, his definition of “law,” and second, his perspective on the uses of the law.

Calvin defined “law” in two different ways. In one sense, he believed that it could refer to “the whole ‘form of religion handed down by God through Moses.’ … This Mosaic religion was a reminder (or renewal) rather than a replacement of the covenant of mercy God made with Abraham…. Thus, when the ‘entire law’ is in view, the gospel itself must be seen as confirming, not supplanting, it.” 47 Calvin pointed to Psalm 19, where the psalmist gives a glowing tribute to the law, as an example of this type of the law.

In a narrower sense, however, Calvin argued that “law” could have reference to God’s righteous requirements, given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, in contrast with the gospel of God’s grace. 48 The apostle Paul, according to Calvin, speaks of this type in Rom 8:2 as “the law of sin and death.”

Calvin concludes that it is this narrower sense that Paul has in mind when he discusses the law. “Although the covenant of grace is contained in the law, yet Paul removes it from there, for in opposing the Gospel to the law he regards only what was peculiar to the law itself, viz. command and prohibition, and the restraining of transgressors by the threat of death. He assigns to the law its own quality, by which it differs from the Gospel.” 49

In addition to these two definitions of the law, Calvin contends that the law has three primary uses or roles in the lives of mankind. His perspective in this regard is, generally speaking, a reflection of Martin Luther and other early Reformers. For the most part, Calvin borrows Luther’s view of the two uses of the law (though in reversed order), 50 and then adds a third use.

Calvin believes the first use is to reveal mankind’s sinfulness and depravity in the searching headlights of the righteousness of God. 51 Justification before God is unattainable apart from divine intervention in regeneration. “This punitive function of the law serves both to terrify the wicked and make the believer realize how dependent upon God one really is.” 52

The second use, according to Calvin, is to restrain the lawlessness of mankind, protecting society in general from the criminal element of the unregenerate. He writes,

The second office of the law is to cause those who, unless constrained, feel no concern...
for justice and rectitude, when they hear its terrible sanctions, to be at least restrained by a fear of its penalties. And they are restrained … because, being chained as it were, they refrain from external acts, and repress their depravity within them, which otherwise would have wantonly discharged.\textsuperscript{13}

Calvin adds a third use that encompasses the dimension of exhortation and admonition for believers. Luther only alluded to the idea that the law could instruct believers on how to live. After all, he was writing to a people who felt the full burden of the wrong use of the law under Roman Catholicism. He wanted to avoid having people feel that, after they had believed, they would again need to work at obtaining heaven.\textsuperscript{14}

Calvin, on the other hand, makes this third use the principle role of the law. He writes that this use “finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns…. To this flesh the law serves as a whip, urging it, like a dull and tardy animal, forwards to its work; and even to the spiritual man, who is not yet delivered from the burden of the flesh, it will be a perpetual spur that will not permit him to loiter.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus for Calvin, the law has a much more prominent role in the life of the believer than it does for Luther. For Luther, the law does not prompt good works within the believer—that is the role of the Spirit of God.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Are the Reformers guilty as charged by the advocates of NPP? Was Luther’s reaction to Paul the consequence of his own guilt-ridden conscience? Did Calvin view Pauline literature through the lens of medieval struggles with the Roman Church? Are the Reformers mistaken about Paul?

The evidence clearly indicates otherwise. Luther and the Reformers were not merely reacting to the medieval philosophies of their day. On the contrary, they were reacting to the Roman Church’s growing endorsement and embracement of the same doctrinal fallacies that were rampant in first-century Judaism.

There is little doubt that, to a degree, the Reformers compared some of Paul’s words in his epistles, especially Romans and Galatians, to the current situation of their day. Luther, for example, applied the Galatians arguments both to Paul’s opponents and to the circumstances of his own day. He remarks: “If the law of God is weak and useless for justification, much more are the laws of the pope weak and useless for justification.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13}Calvin, \textit{Institutes} 1.321.

\textsuperscript{14}Paul M. Moyer, “Law and Gospel” 194. Later, Luther would write that “the law is to be retained so that the saints may know which works God requires” (Quoted from Luther’s “Second Disputation Against the Antinomians” [Jan. 13, 1538] by Werner Elert, \textit{Law and Gospel}, trans. Edward H. Schroeder [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967] 1)


Though Calvin does not discuss the works of the law with the same focus as Luther, he does reject any hint of man’s ability to propitiate the demands of a righteous God through human merit. In the matter of justification by faith alone, Luther and Calvin walked side by side. As with Luther, Calvin understood justification by faith as “the main hinge upon which religion turns.”

Wright, along with other NPP proponents, has claimed that the Reformers’ perspective of Paul is mistaken. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that their understanding of Paul, so eloquently stated and warmly embraced for the past 500 years, has been the predominant understanding throughout NT history, from the days of Christ until now.

The accusation that Luther’s theology of Paul was misguided by his guilt-ridden conscience misses a greater point, namely, that the Reformation’s perspective of the “works of the law” in Pauline literature was not something new. Rather, it was a continuation of understanding that permeated the perspective of the first-century church and reverberated in the pulpits of the early-church fathers. Its sometimes-flickering flame was carefully fanned down through the Middle Ages to the Reformation, where valiant, faithful men put their lives on the line to re-ignite it in the hearts of men.

The evidence is undeniable. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is not just 500 years old. It is a sacred legacy that has been passed down over the past two millennia. May all who come behind us find us faithful.

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57 Calvin, Institutes 3:14.
THE NEW PERSPECTIVE’S VIEW OF PAUL AND THE LAW

Jack Hughes*

Scholars have not reached a consensus concerning Paul’s view of the law. Disagreement prevails even among those who believe in verbal plenary inspiration. Paul’s frequent references to the law come in many different contexts. Interpreting each reference accurately within its own context and synthesizing the interpretations into a systematic whole are difficult challenges. The New Perspective [NP] on Paul has amplified the existing problem. Founders of the NP take a historical, higher-critical, covenantal approach to interpreting Paul. Their low view of Scripture and their high view of extra-biblical literature have produced an entirely new way of understanding Paul’s view of the law and have led many to redefine key theological terms related to both law and gospel. The NP on Paul leads those who subscribe to it outside the limits of orthodox theology.

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Introduction

Macedonian legend tells of a poor man named Midas who lived during a time of universal unrest. One day Midas entered town with his ox-cart, weary and despondent over the future that lay ahead of him. Little did he know but on that very day the Phrygian elders had called a council to discuss an ancient oracle that told of a man pulling an ox-cart who would bring peace and prosperity to their people. The council spotted Midas and appointed him king.

Thankful for his good fortune, Midas erected a shrine and dedicated it to Zeus. The shrine contained his wagon, hitched to a pole. On the pole hung a large knot with hundreds of tightly interwoven strands of rope made from bark. No ends

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were exposed. After many months the bark hardened and eventually the knot was moved to the nearby town of Gordium, which was ruled by Gordius, Midas’ father. Eventually, an oracle prophesied that whoever loosed the Gordian knot would become lord and ruler of all Asia. Many attempted to unravel the knot, but failed. In fact, visiting Gordium without attempting to loosen the knot was considered bad luck.

Eventually the son of Philip II, King of Macedonia visited Gordium. He was a young military man facing the conquest of Persia. Not wanting to have bad luck, the young man went to the shrine of Zeus and for two hours tried to undo the Gordian knot while the people of the city watched. Finally, in a fit of frustration he pulled out his sword and slashed at the knot, exposing its hidden ends which allowed him to unravel it. The young man went forth to conquer the known world. His name was Alexander the Great.

This story illustrates the difficulty in understanding Paul and the law. The subject is a theological Gordian knot. Its complexities are great. Its scope broad. Its implications deep. Theological presuppositions and hermeneutical alliances radically affect how one understands Paul’s views of the law. Walt Kaiser has said, “The way to test the greatness and incisiveness of any truly evangelical theology is to ask how it relates biblical law to God’s gospel of grace. The history of the Church’s achievement on this issue has not been remarkable or convincing.”

This writer is not deluded into thinking that he can cover thoroughly the New Perspective’s views on Paul and the law in a single journal article. Many voluminous tomes have discussed and are still discussing Paul and the law. The purpose of this article is first to state some of the problems encountered when studying the subject; second, to survey the founders of the New Perspective [hereafter, usually NP] and their views of Paul and the law; and finally, to offer some pastoral perspectives on theological issues like the NP.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED WHEN STUDYING PAUL AND THE LAW

Before the NP, scholars took one of three general approaches in an attempt to unravel the theological knot of Paul and the law. At one end of the spectrum was the No-Law View. The No-Law View sees little continuity between the Old and New Testaments when it comes to law and grace. This camp is typically dispensational and asserts that Christians are not under any law. It would champion texts like Rom 6:14, “[Y]ou are not under law, but grace.” The No-Law View believes Christians


have died to the law—all law. Various NT texts, without reference to their contexts, seem to state emphatically that the Christian is under no law at all.

The No-Law View has come under fire primarily from two directions. First, those who hold to the No-Law View are accused of being antinomians. If there is no law that a Christian must obey, it is argued, then Christians live in a state of lawlessness. Thus the Christian is free from any law to do anything he wishes without consequence. In order to sin, one must have law, for sin is a violation of law. Paul affirms this in Rom 4:15, “[F]or the law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.” The No-Law View is difficult to reconcile with 1 John 3:4 which says, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”

Related to the first objection is the difficulty in trying to explain how all the commands in the NT directed toward believers are not law. Jesus in the Great Commission of Matt 28:20 calls the church to “make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that He commanded” (emphasis added). Paul writes in 1 Cor 7:19, “What matters is keeping the commandments of God” (emphasis added). In 1 Cor 9:21 Paul describes himself as being “under the law of Christ” (emphasis added). In Gal 6:2 Paul calls on readers to “fulfill the law of Christ” (emphasis added). Clearly, certain texts teach that the Christian is under obligation to obey the commands or laws of Christ. How, one wonders, can those who hold to the No-Law View continue to do so in light of this?

One writer, representative of the No-Law View, explains what governs the NT believer with these words: “According to dispensationalists, the rule of life for the Christian is living in submission to the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18) and in His power (Gal 5:16, 18, 25), manifesting His fruit (vv. 22–23), a higher rule of life than the Law.” This is an unsatisfactory explanation for many who are quick to point out that Christians would not know how to walk in “submission to the Spirit” or live according to the “rule of life for Christians” if it were not for the commandments or laws found in the Bible and particularly the NT.

At the other end of the spectrum is the view that may be called the Old-Law-Edited View. Calvin, though having slightly a different perspective on the law, might be in this camp. This view sees more continuity between Old and New

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Testaments when it comes to law and grace. Those in this camp believe Christians are to some extent bound by law. For example, C. E. B. Cranfield in a classic *Scottish Journal of Theology* article argued for the enduring nature of the law of Moses. He systematically attempted to show that neither Jesus nor Paul argued that the law of Moses has been abolished. His conclusion is that believers are still under the law of Moses, but in an edited way.

First, the law has been edited in that Christ has taken away the curse of the law. Second, it is edited in that the sacrificial portions of the law have been fulfilled in Christ. The moral aspects of the law, it is argued, are still binding on the Christian, not as a means of salvation but as God’s holy rule of life. Some in the Old-Law-Edited camp have divided the law into three distinct categories, moral, civil, and ceremonial. They argue that the moral aspects of the law of Moses are still binding, but not the civil and ceremonial. The Ten Commandments, the heart of the moral law, still governs the Christian as a rule of life.

This view overcomes some of the weaknesses of the No-Law View by avoiding the impression that Christians are antinomians directed subjectively by some mystical inner moving of the Holy Spirit. It places the Christian under the moral law of God found in the objective text of Scripture, but not under the sacrificial or civil regulations which governed Israel as a theocracy or theocratic monarchy.

The weaknesses of this view are that texts in the NT seem to state directly that Christians are not under the law of Moses: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal 5:18). “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity” (Eph 2:14-16).

Obviously, a tension exists when trying to synthesize texts which seem to say Christians are not under the law of Moses and the texts which teach that they must obey commands found in the law of Moses. This tension has given rise to a mediating view of the law which might be called the New-Law View. This view agrees with the No-Law View, saying Christians are not under the law of Moses at all. It also agrees with the Old-Law-Edited View saying that Christians are still under law—the teachings of Christ which make up “the law of Christ,” “the royal law,”

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Jesus, after training the twelve, sent them out to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all He commanded (Matt 28:19-20). The apostles and their disciples communicated the law of Christ in the text of the NT. It is Christ’s law that the NT believer is to obey (see 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2; Jas 1:25; 2:8, 12).


The Author was first introduced to the New-Law View by John S. Feinberg in 1999 when he lectured at The Master’s Seminary in The Distinguished Scholars Series on “Continuity and Discontinuity.”
law of Christ as a moral rule of life, the strength of the Old-Law-Edited View.

The three views above are all non-NP views, held by Protestants who believe in verbal plenary inspiration, the inerrancy, authority, and infallibility of the Word of God and who subscribe to historical-grammatical exegesis. Regardless of which of the three camps one finds himself in, most non-NP Protestants agree on seven crucial points of doctrine which relate to Paul’s view of the law.

1. Most believe the ceremonial aspects of the law foreshadow Christ and were fulfilled by Christ.

2. Most believe that the moral aspects of the law, which express and are derived from God’s nature, are for God’s people of any age and are profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

3. Most believe that the demands of God’s moral law are beyond the ability of fallen man to fulfill.

4. Most believe that a primary purpose of the law is to reveal sin and a need for a Savior, and hence to serve as a tutor to lead one to Christ.

5. Most believe that justification is by faith alone and that those who are justified escape the wrath of God and the curse of the law.

6. Most believe that the justified are enabled by the Holy Spirit to obey God’s commandments.

7. Most believe that justification is a one-time act whereby a believer is declared righteous before God based on the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Almost universal agreement among all branches of conservative Protestantism prevails in these areas, but the tangles in the theological Gordian knot of Paul and the law are often worse than the beginning student of the law realizes. Some critical questions will facilitate a closer look at the knot.

1. When Paul uses the word “law,” what specifically was he referring to? Some have argued that Paul had a single definition in mind when he used the word “law.” Cranfield, on the other hand, sees five different uses. John Walvoord sees

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1Cranfield, “St. Paul and the Law” 44.
six different uses in the book of Romans alone.\textsuperscript{11} What Paul means by the word “law” in each context is a fundamental question to be answered.

2. What did Paul mean by the phrase “under law?” Did he mean under any law system or a specific law system such as the law of Moses? Did he mean that those “under law” have to obey the law and/or are under the curse or condemnation of the law, or something else? In each context where the phrase appears, one must reach a conclusion about what Paul meant by the phrase “under law.” Interpretations abound.

3. What does it mean to be “under grace?” At first, this may seem to be a simple question, but it is not. Does it imply that OT saints were not under grace? Does it mean that OT saints were saved by works? Does it mean OT saints were saved and sanctified by works? Does it mean that OT saints were saved by grace and then abandoned by God to live the rest of their lives trying to please God in the flesh? Does “under grace” mean not under any law, even the law of Christ? Or maybe Paul is speaking to people who have adopted false views of the law, and when he says, “We are no longer under law, but grace,” he is not saying, “God previously placed people under law but now He has placed them under grace.” Rather he is saying, “God never placed us under law, but we (Jews) placed ourselves under law, but now that we know the truth, we are where we should have been all along, under grace.” One must ascertain the meaning and implications of the phrase, “under grace.” Interpretations and their explanations are like the sand on the seashore.

4. What is meant by the phrase “works of the law”? Does it mean, obeying the law for the glory of God? Does it mean obeying the law for sinful reasons, e.g., legalism? Does it mean obeying the law while the curses of the law remain? Does it mean obeying the law as a means of salvation or sanctification, or both? Does it describe what the law does to a person or what a person does in compliance to the law? One must answer these questions. What does Paul mean by the phrase “works of the law?” Interpretations are almost as numerous as the stars of heaven.

5. In Jeremiah’s description of the new covenant (Jer 31:33), God says, “I will put My law within them” and “on their heart I will write it.” In Ezek 36:27 He adds, “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” If Christ inaugurated the new covenant with His death,\textsuperscript{12} what law, statutes, and ordinances are referred to? What would the original audience have understood Jeremiah to mean? Was Jeremiah referring to the law of Moses, the law of Christ, the two great commandments, the Ten Commandments, or some other law or law system that would be given in the future? If one can answer this question with certainty, it will provide immense help in unraveling the


Questions, like the sampling above, reveal the complexities related to Paul and the law. Every one of the questions must be answered with careful exegesis, and then all texts must be synthesized into a system as they are properly interpreted within their given contexts. All that has been said is to demonstrate that even before the NP came along, the theological complexities of Paul and the law were overwhelming. The introduction of NP views has increased the size of the knot. The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, commenting on the state of Pauline studies since the NP, says, “[T]he plethora of new proposals spawned by this paradigm shift suffers as much from internal dissent as from external critique, since no consensus has yet emerged concerning the reason(s) why Paul actually rejected Judaism and the ‘works of the Law,’ nor concerning the actual meaning of ‘works of the Law’ in Paul’s writings.”

After a survey of some of the complexities concerning Paul and the law, one realizes that the subject presents an interpretive challenge of great proportions. With this background, a look at NP views of Paul and the law is in order.

NEW PERSPECTIVE VIEWS OF PAUL AND THE LAW

Before a general survey of NP views of Paul and the law, several factors must be understood. First, the NP is not a monolithic theological system. There is no one “NP Theology” or “NP view of Paul and the law.” The NP is really composed of two primary historical perspectives that have significant theological implications: Sanders’ view of Second-Temple Judaism and Dunn’s view of “the works of the law.” NP views vary greatly depending on: (1) a person’s assessment of the two NP historical views; (2) which aspects of the NP are accepted or rejected; (3) to which texts to apply the NP views; and (4) hermeneutical and theological biases which one brings to bear on the issue. These variables spawn a plethora of NP theologies. This makes the NP a moving and ever changing target for those attempting to critique it. When one aims at and blows one view out of the water, other views emerge to which the critique does not apply.

Books are being written on the topic of Paul and the law faster than anyone can read them. The books are often very detailed, with redefined words, new jargon, and totally foreign approaches to Pauline theology which leave even seasoned theologians baffled. So what or whose NP view/ views of Paul and the law should be singled out? It is best to lay the ax to the root of the tree. Though many branches grow on the NP tree, they all rely upon the historical assumptions of the root.


Though others may have written more persuasively, E. P. Sanders and James Dunn compose the root of the NP tree. Though a couple of scholars before E. P. Sanders had NP ideas, Sanders’ writings on second-temple Judaism have popularized the NP. James Dunn has latched on to Sanders’ research, and though they disagree at points, both subscribe to Sanders’ basic conclusions about second-temple Judaism.

As mentioned in this issue’s article by David Farnell, the NP has as one of its worst and culminating effects the overthrow of Reformation soteriology. The adoption of NP views has led some to accept a gospel different from the gospel preached by the Reformers. Some have tried to argue that if one redefines justification, rejects imputation, rejects perseverance, redefines righteousness, and redefines the church, he hasn’t changed the gospel. Critical theological terms such as justification and righteousness are being redefined. Other theological concepts like imputation and perseverance are being rejected. Could it be that these terms have nothing to do with redefining the gospel? This writer strongly asserts that they do. By redefining and rejecting critical doctrines, a scholar strikes at the very heart of the gospel and how one is made right before a holy God.

The NP seems rather harmless at first because it concerns itself with historical studies. All faithful students of the Bible are concerned with historical studies. Every hermeneutics book worth its salt teaches the importance of historical background. But historical background has ramifications for NT words. In this case, in defining words like justification, righteousness, law, and works of the law, Sanders and Dunn, like most who reject verbal plenary inspiration, tend to put equal and sometimes more weight on select, uninspired historical texts than on the inspired text of God’s Word. That is because they have a low view of the Bible, leading them to judge the Bible by history rather than vice versa. Remembering that the NP is not a unified theological system but a historical, higher-critical approach to interpreting the Bible, one realizes that it leads to a wide variety of unorthodox positions. Some of the more common branches in the NP tree are:

15N. T. Wright, for example, is one of the more winsome, articulate, and voluminous NP writers. Though he does not agree with Sanders and Dunn in every area, he relies upon their initial research. If Sanders and Dunn can be compared to the root of the NP, Wright is the trunk of the tree.

16N. T. Wright (What Saint Paul Really Said [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997]) argues for a new definition of righteousness (95-111) and a new definition of justification which does not include imputation (113-33). He then summarizes these views (151-65). See also N. T. Wright’s entries on “Justification” and “Righteousness” in New Dictionary of Theology (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988) 359-61, 590-92. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., discusses Wright’s and Dunn’s rejection of imputation in “Review Essay of James D. G. Dunn’s Paul the Theologian,” Westminster Theological Journal 61/1 (Spring 2000):140. Sanders denies the doctrine of perseverance in Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983) 7.

1. Legalism was not a problem in first-century Judaism and Paul did not address it. Sanders argues that Paul did not believe the law was impossible to obey. Both Sanders and Dunn argue that first-century Judaism was not legalistic and Paul did not argue against legalism. Ironically, Moisés Silva observes that Sanders does not seem to understand what legalism is. He argues,

Otherwise, how does one explain the fact that Sanders actually quotes passages from Early Jewish literature that are clear evidence of “legalism” (in the sense that matters the most) yet he shows no awareness of the problem at all? The clearest example comes from the Wisdom of Joshua ben Sirach, which Sanders discusses in the third chapter of his work. Under the heading of atonement, Sanders tells us that “Ben Sirach shared the general belief that atonement is possible. Among good deeds, two are singled out which atone for transgression. They are honouring one’s father and giving alms.” Sanders then proceeds to quote the relevant texts: “Whoever honours his father atones for sins... Water extinguishes a blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin” (Ecclus 3.3, 30). Astonishingly, Sanders overlooks altogether the theological implications of those statements and moves on to discuss the “precise significance attached by the author to the sacrificial system.” Sanders offers no explanation for—indeed, shows no awareness of—what looks like a fairly blatant view of self-salvation.

Dunn understands “works of the law” to refer to circumcision, Sabbath observances, and food laws. According to Dunn, Paul is not refuting “works which earn God’s favor, as merit-amassing observances. They are rather seen as badges...[that] serve to demonstrate covenant status.” Dunn believes that what Paul attacks in Galatians is an attitude toward the law that distinguishes Jew from Gentile. N. T. Wright, following Dunn and Sanders, says:

Paul’s argument, “has nothing to do with a specious attitude towards good behavior. On the contrary. Paul expects his converts to live in a manner appropriate for members of the covenant (Rom. 6 etc.), and this is in fact necessary if faith is not to appear a sham (2 Cor. 13:5). His polemic against “works of the Law” is not directed against those who attempted to earn covenant membership through keeping the Jewish Law (such people do not seem to have existed in the 1st century) but against those who sought to

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3Silva, “The Law and Christianity” 348.
4Ibid., 346.
5Ibid., 347.
demonstrate their membership in the covenant through obeying the Jewish Law. 

A strange legalistic irony is evident here. Both scholars deny legalism and at the same time affirm it! Where does this come from? It comes from a covenantal view of the church. Those who subscribe to dispensational theology often have more difficulty trying to understand the NP. The reason for this is that they are often unfamiliar with covenant theology which sees more continuity between Israel and the church. The church is seen as the “Israel of God.” Hence the church in the NT is viewed in a very similar way as Israel under the Mosaic law.

The people of Israel were God’s covenant people. But merely being in the covenant community of Israel did not guarantee an individual’s salvation, but it did put them in the right circumstances to be saved as God’s Word came to those within the covenant community. The church, in like manner, is seen as the “covenant community” of God, in Christ. One should think “church” when reading NP advocates who speak of “the covenant community,” and things will become clearer.

Being part of the covenant community (the church) does not guarantee the salvation of individuals, but it puts them into the right circumstances to be saved. Believers have the hope of future salvation as long as they continue to obey. In other words, one enters the covenant community by faith and stays in the covenant community by works. Sanders’ has coined the phrase “covenantal nomism” to describe this view. Sanders, like Dunn, argues that second-temple Judaism taught a form of justification by faith and that righteousness by works was not a problem addressed by Paul. Scott Hafemann, commenting on Sander’s work, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, remarks, “Thus, for Palestinian Judaism at the time of Paul, ‘the intention and effort to be obedient constitute the condition for remaining in the covenant, but they do not earn it’ (Sanders, 180, emphasis his).” This means that Christians in the covenant community are under a bilateral covenant, entered by faith, but maintained by works.

David Watson describes Dunn’s view of “covenantal nomism” as follows:

[C]ovenantal nomism is a term used to describe a kind of Jewish self-identity in which the covenant relationship between God and God’s people begins with God’s gracious election and is maintained by adherence to the Law. In this view, the Law isn’t viewed as a burden or a way to earn righteousness. Rather, it’s how one exemplifies and preserves one’s place within the covenant community.

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25S. J. Hafemann, “Paul and His Interpreters,” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters 673.

Dunn clearly rejects the doctrine of perseverance. Through faith in Christ a person is placed into the covenant community (the church), but if he fails to obey, he perishes in hell.

The similarities to Roman Catholic theology are very striking. Roman Catholic theology teaches that infant baptism places one into the “covenant community” and as long as that person continues to observe the sacraments, he will preserve himself and be saved. That is legalism, salvation by works.

In short, the proponents of the NP deny legalism was a problem with Paul, and then teach that the assurance of salvation depends on obedience. This seems to explain, in part, their blindness. The question which needs to be asked and answered is this, “Does the Bible teach legalism was a problem among the Jews in the first century?”

The answer is clearly, “Yes.” In the parable of “The Pharisee and the Publican,” Jesus taught that the Pharisees “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9). Jesus’ indictment of the scribes and Pharisees in Mark 7:8-9 is clear, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” This is a form of legalism.

To say every Jew, Jewish leader, or Pharisee was a legalist may be wrong, but it is clear that according to the Bible, many who opposed Jesus were. Those who had true faith in God accepted Jesus as the Messiah. The ones who did not were legalists and were the target of Jesus’ censure and rebuke.

A higher-critical approach to Scripture like that of Sanders and Dunn, who follow the pattern of the Jesus Seminar, makes it easy to deal with such death knells to NP by denying the authenticity of Jesus’ words. Jesus did not say these things; they were added later! Sanders writes, “Of the material which depicts legal conflict, what actually goes back to the historical Jesus? I continue to think that relatively little does.”

Anyone who endorses verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible should be alarmed at such a statement, a statement that reveals a fundamental flaw of the most serious nature, a blatant denial of biblical authority. Those who accept a high view of Scripture, who believe in the Bible’s authority, inerrancy, and sufficiency must

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28 For a visual example of this view, one can examine a chart Sanders provides in Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, which shows that after someone by faith is “righteoused” (Sander’s word for justified), reconciled, washed, sanctified, cleansed through Christ’s death, he enters into the “covenant community,” but if he sins (there is transgression) and does not repent, he goes to hell (Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People 7).

29 Ibid, 45-46.

30 See article by William D. Barrick in this issue.

31 E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 175.

32 Ibid., 93.
consider the folly of such a statement. The founders of the NP have no regard for the that view of the Word of God. When a Scripture takes their faulty preunderstanding out at the knees, they conveniently deny its authenticity, making them unassailable. Statements such as “Paul was wrong,” “Paul was confused,” “Paul conflicts with himself,” or “Paul did not even write it” are not acceptable to those who believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Denying the authenticity of texts which undermine a system may be an invincible response for some, but not for those who accept verbal plenary inspiration. The Bible’s pronouncement is clear concerning those who add or subtract from the Word of God.

Though historical research is important, the Bible must take priority over extra-biblical literature. The Bible is always right because it is the Word of God. To say Moses is wrong is to say God is wrong. To say Paul was confused is to say the Holy Spirit is confused. Sanders and Dunn reject what is fundamentally essential concerning the Word of God. One must not be lured into the NP by incidental details with which on the surface he might agree. The Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Bible, faith in Christ, and Jewish and Gentile distinctions are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom, but they are being used as theological bait to capture the unsuspecting.

What Sanders attempts to do is to make a person choose between a totally legalistic second-temple Judaism or a totally non-legalistic second-temple Judaism. After showing extra-biblical historical evidence that some Jews were not legalists, he tries to force the conclusion that no Jews were legalists. The weakness of his view is that the Bible says some Jews were legalists. May God be true, though every man a liar. Dunn tries the same tactic in relation to Paul. On one side he places “Jewish legalistic law-keeping,” and on the other side “Jewish law-keeping as a badge of identity” for those in the covenant community. Krister Stendahl uses the same all-or-nothing tactic. Paul’s “question was not ‘How can I be saved?’, but, ‘How can Gentiles be included within the Messianic community of Israel?’” In other words, pick one or the other. This kind of argumentation is often an attempt to force the reader to choose between the better of two wrong views. In the end, no matter what view he takes, it is still wrong because the right view has not been offered or defended.

The NP argues that badges which show status in the covenant community are what Paul is addressing, not legalism and works righteousness. But why would someone want to be included in the Messianic community of Israel? Obviously, in order to be saved! The concepts of being included in the covenant community (the church) and being saved are not mutually exclusive. The only way someone can be saved is by being in the church. No one outside the church is saved, and if one is

33Stallard, review of Theology of the Apostle Paul 231-32.
35Silva, “The Law and Christianity” 352.
kept in the covenant community by works, this means salvation is by works. The issue of being in the covenant community (the church) is an issue of salvation. Again, the primary authority on this issue is God’s Word. If it can be shown that Paul discusses legalism, salvation, and national identity together in the same context, the NP illusion is exposed.

In Eph 2:8-9 Paul presents a strong denial of works righteousness: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Paul then continues talking about God bringing both Jews and Gentiles together in the church through faith in Christ. He denies legalism and affirms salvation by grace through faith, and then proceeds to discuss national identity.

Before Christ, Israel was to be a light to the nations. Paul says in Eph 2:12, that Gentiles who were not part of Israel, “were . . . separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” No hope of what? Salvation! To be saved, one needs to have God’s Word which was originally given to the covenant community of Israel. It is a nonsequitur to argue that national identity, salvation, and legalism are mutually exclusive.

In Rom 4:4-5 Paul argues, “Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Of course, the context argues against legalism. Keeping the law of Moses does not save anyone, as Abraham’s life proves. All three concepts (national identity, salvation, and legalism) are taught together.

In Rom 11:6 Paul says, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” The context is about God’s sovereign choice of individuals within national Israel for salvation. Legalism, salvation, and national identity are again addressed together.

Paul, speaking of his hope in Phil 3:9, says, “and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.” In the preceding context Paul speaks of his privileged Jewish heritage, circumcision, tribe, association with the Jewish sect of the Pharisees, and his blameless obedience to the law of Moses. He thought those things earned him a righteousness of his own. Legalism, salvation, and national identity come together.

Here is another example of the confusion that surrounds the NP. One finds himself agreeing with many things they say, but then he is enticed to make an either/or, all-or-nothing choice which leads to false theological conclusions, basing his theology on the views of those who reject the veracity of the Word of God. Adapting the words of Yoda to Luke Skywalker, “The rejection of verbal plenary inspiration leads to the theological dark side.” In the case of the NP, its supporters advocate the heresy and dark doctrine of salvation by works. Silva correctly states,
Legalism is but the human cry for personal autonomy. Doing things our way as distinct from trusting God’s power is illustrated just as clearly in modern evangelicalism as it is in the narrative of the wilderness wanderings. The inclination toward self-righteousness is thus not a unique Jewish problem: it is endemic to the human condition, and even the most deeply sanctified believer is vulnerable to its power. 36

The dark side of the NP is that it teaches that legalism was not a problem with NT Judaism and that Jesus in his Gospel teachings and Paul in his epistles, were not arguing against legalism. Supposedly they were arguing against those who were trying to make distinctions between Jew and Gentile by observing things like the Sabbath, dietary laws, and circumcision. The two dark paths then lead to other hellish doctrines. The church is redefined as “the covenant community,” which one enters by faith and yet is kept in by works. As long as someone continues to do good works, he preserves his status within the covenant community, but if he fails, he perishes in hell. Certainty of salvation is impossible, hence perseverance of the saints is rejected. Justification is merely the hope of future vindication for those who continue in good works. The NP denies that justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness based on the merits of Christ. That leads to the rejection of imputation which is described as a pious fiction invented by Reformers who were reacting against Roman Catholic theology. Righteousness is a synonym for covenant community, which is a synonym for the church. In the end, the Reformers had it all wrong. They preached a false gospel and the true gospel has finally been rediscovered after two thousand years. The NP historical views create an avalanche of theological consequences which are pronounced anathema (Gal 1:6-9).

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

My heart has always been for normal pew-sitters in the local church and for pastors who will shepherd them. Because of this, I would like to close with some parting exhortations which I hope will serve as warnings for those who are dabbling in the NP or for those who are tempted to do so.

(1) Don’t be distracted from your ministry to submerge yourself in bad doctrine and theology. Remember that bad theological company corrupts good theology.

(2) Don’t forget that those who do not know Christ are sons of the devil. They do the work of their father the devil (John 8:44). They are held captive by Satan to do his will (2 Tim 2:26). Satan works in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:1-2). They are devoid of the Spirit, spiritually dead, unable to appraise the things of the Spirit of God, and they cannot please God (Rom

36Ibid., 349.
8:5-8; 1 Cor 2:14; Col 2:13; Jude 19). Unbelievers do not make acceptable theological mentors. Sitting at the feet of the children of Satan to learn doctrine is both foolish and dangerous.

Though all have to read a certain amount of false doctrine so we can warn, guard, and obey the Lord’s command to protect the flock and refute those who contradict, if we major in false doctrine, we are playing with anthrax. To think someone can go to school with the spiritually dead and not end up smelling like a corpse is a serious mistake. Puritan Thomas Watson put it this way: “Suppose that you had a friend in the hospital with a deadly and contagious disease. If you spent many hours next to your friend, what do you suppose is more likely to occur, that you would infect him with your health, or that he would infect you with his disease?”

(3) Any pastor quickly discovers that many people in the local church need salvation. If they are saved, they need help with the basic Christian disciplines like Bible reading, prayer, giving, and serving. They want to know how to honor Christ in their marriage, in their parenting, in their jobs. It is the shepherd’s primary responsibility to tend to his flock. Be warned. A never-ending stream of theological distractions waits to derail the pastor from his primary responsibilities. When the next “new doctrine” comes along, everyone starts talking about it. Emails start flying, and journal articles get written, then lots of books are published. Don’t be distracted from your calling by those who reject what you hold to be fundamentally essential. Paul in warning Timothy of false teachers said, “For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (1 Tim. 1:6-7).

(4) Remember that we are called to “earnestly contend for the faith once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). This means we are proclaimers of old doctrines, not new ones.
THE NEW PERSPECTIVE AND “WORKS OF THE LAW” (GAL 2:16 AND ROM 3:20)

by
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The New Perspective on Paul (NPP) differs from a traditional understanding of Paul’s references to the “works of the law.” Traditionally, Paul’s references to such works has been seen in a negative light, but the NPP takes a very opposite view of the works. Pre-NT references to works of the law show that they cannot be limited to circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary restrictions the way NPP advocates propose. Broadly considered, NT references to the same works show the same impossibility. Two crucial passages, Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:20, when analyzed in detail, indicate the grave error in the NPP position. Three occurrences of “works of the law” in Gal 3:20 show that they are the direct opposite of faith in matters pertaining to salvation. The context of Rom 3:20 shows that “works of the law” refer to human deeds to earn merit with God and are not limited to circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary restrictions. Rather, they simply demonstrate how guilty human beings are before a righteous God. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone and not by the “works of the law.”

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A landslide of writings from the viewpoint of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) are like boulders and debris that have littered the road leading to an accurate understanding of salvation. However, in spite of the massive amount of literature aimed at destroying two millennia of clarity regarding the relationships of works, righteousness, faith, and salvation, the road is yet passable and the obstructions avoidable. NPP proponents have failed to block the way completely. Granted, some adherents of the NPP never intended such damage, but they nonetheless have contributed to the current dilemma within evangelicalism. A crux in the debate over the NPP involves Paul’s use of the phrase “works of the law,” especially in Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:20. The discussion below will focus on these verses.

Introduction to the Problem
Two basic questions are at the heart of this issue: What does Paul mean by “the works of the law”? And, what is the NT believer’s relationship to “the works of
the law”? Traditionally, the church has held that Paul spoke negatively of the Judaizers’ use of the law. Throughout church history theologians have identified the Judaizers with a legalistic approach to salvation. Thus, the phrase “works of the law” refers to those works believed to be necessary for salvation. According to the adherents of the NPP, however, the traditional view smacks of anti-Semitism and reflects a forced exegesis that they believe exemplified the Western Reformation. Since a major thesis of the NPP is that salvation in first-century Judaism was not based on works, NPP proponents often define “works of the law” as those works that mark the people of the covenant, identifying them ethnically and socially. Specifically, those works are circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary restrictions. Obviously, both positions (traditional and NPP) cannot be correct. The two are diametrically opposed and contain very different theological corollaries.

Pre-NT References to “Works of the Law”

In order to understand the NT phrase “works of the law” best, the exegete must first examine its usage in Judaism, especially in the OT and the intertestamental period. OT texts like Lev 18:3-4 speak of “works,” but do not qualify the term with the phrase “of the law.” However, as Ringgren points out, the contextual reference and contrast are significant: “When ma'āšēh refers to deeds or actions, the reference is occasionally to conduct as such and its manner. For example, Israel is warned not to do as the Egyptians and Canaanites do and follow their ḥaqqāq (Lev. 18:3).” Therefore, such works have a connotation of being in accord with certain standards, customs (ḥaqqāq), and regulations, be they social or legal. In some contexts the phrase “do/perform the law” (רַקְשִׁי, ḥattōrāh) refers to specific regulations. For example, in Num 6:21 the phrase is employed with reference to the Nazirite regulations. Thus, the Nazirite performs a work of the law in keeping his vows.

In passages like Deut 28:58 (cf. 29:29 [Heb 29:28]; 31:12; 32:46), Josh 1:7 (cf. 22:5; 23:6) and Neh 9:34 (cf. 2 Chr 14:3; 33:8), “do/perform the law” has reference to the entire law, not to one particular ordinance. These same passages call for the implementation of covenant curses for disobedience to the law. By context these texts do not refer to ethnic or social markers identifying Israel. Instead, they refer to the entire Mosaic legislation including every facet of that law. The point is

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1The term is drawn from Gal 2:14 (τοὺς τὰ δόξης ἤνακάς εἰς ioudaiç eis, “how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”), the only NT use of the verb.

2“Legalism is both the attempt to earn righteousness by obedience to the Law, and it is human pride in the accomplished obedience” (J. V. Fesko, “N. T. Wright and the Works of the Law,” Faith & Mission 22/1 [Fall 2004]:69).


4See Stephen Westerholm, Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1998) 143.

that such references to works of the law are virtually identical with Paul’s use of “works of the law” in both Galatians and Romans (further support will be offered in later sections of this article).

In the intertestamental period, sectarian authors at Qumran spoke of the members of their community as “doers/workers of the law” (‘ôšê hattôrâh, 1QpHab 7:11; 8:1; 12:4). They did not indicate that “the law” in such cases was limited to circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, or dietary regulations. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, one of the world’s leading authorities on Qumran, Aramaic, and the intertestamental period, concludes that Qumran materials especially 4QMMT 3.29 rule out “the suggestion of both Dunn, about a restricted sense of erga nomou, . . . , and Gaston, that the gen. nomou is a subjective gen[itive].”7 Fitzmyer goes on to declare that

The Qumran usage makes it clear that “deeds of the law” refers, indeed, to things prescribed or required by the Mosaic law. To the extent that a “works righteousness” would be indicated by the phrase in question, this reading reveals that Paul knew whereof he was speaking when he took issue with contemporary Judaism and its attitude to legal regulations. In 4QMMT the phrase is used precisely in a context mentioning sdqh, “uprightness,” and employs the very words of Gen 15:6 that Paul quotes about Abraham in 4:2c.8

He is clearly at odds with the NPP’s limitation of the works to circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary regulations in a context dealing with righteousness or justification. As will be demonstrated, the NT depicts first-century Judaism as continuing to employ “works of the law” and similar phraseology with the same broad reference as the OT and the Qumran texts.

NT References to “Works of the Law”

Paul uses νómoς (nomos) approximately 74 times in Romans and 32 times in Galatians—more than all the rest of his letters combined (14 times). “Works of the law” (Εγγα νόμου, erga nomou) is a phrase occurring 8 times in Paul’s epistles to the Galatians (2:16 tris; 3:2, 5, 10) and Romans (3:20, 28). Similar expressions appear elsewhere:

Gal 2:21, εἰγ γαρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη (εἰγ γαρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη), “for if righteousness comes through law”
Gal 3:11, εἴναξ νόμω/ οὐ δικαίουται (Εν νόμῳ οὐ δικαίος δικαίος), “by the law no one is made righteous”
Rom 2:15, τὸ έργον τού n νόμου γραπτόν ὲν ταις καρδίας αὐτῶν (to ergon tou nomou grapton en tais kardiais

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7Ibid., 11:402.
9Ibid., 338-39. In addition to 4QMMT 3.29, references such as 4QFlor 1.7, 1QS 5.21, 6.18, 1QpHab 7.11, 8.1, 12.4-5, and 1QTemple 56.3–4 demonstrate that the phraseology indicates the entirety of the law. See Thomas R. Schreiner, Romans, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 173, on this point.
A look at “the works of the law” and “law” in Rom 3:20-21 shows that the two are interchangeable. The passage contains no hint that the meaning should be limited to specific statutes in the law. All of the references occur within contexts dealing with justification or righteousness with regard to salvation rather than sanctification. A careful examination of the first of the cruxes, Gal 2:16, will demonstrate that it also deals with salvation.

**Galatians 2:16**

Placing the verse within its greater context helps to give a clearer view of Paul’s intended meaning. According to Richard Longenecker and Robert Rapa, a consistent first-century Greek rhetorical analysis of Galatians results in the following schema:

I. Salutation (1:1-5)
II. Rebuttal Section, including autobiographical details and theological arguments (1:6-4:11)—forensic rhetoric prominent
   A. Occasion for Writing/Issues at Stake—*Exordium*¹¹ (1:6-10)
   B. Autobiographical Statements in Defense—*Narratio*¹² (1:11–2:14)
   C. The Proposition of Galatians—*Proposito*¹³ (2:15-21)
   D. Argumentum in Support—*Probatio*¹⁴ (3:1–4:11)
III. Request Section, including personal, scriptural, and ethical appeals (4:12–6:10)—deliberative rhetoric prominent (*Exhortatio*)

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¹See Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith* 118.

¹¹*Exordium* = An introduction establishing the identity and credentials of the speaker.

¹²*Narratio* = The statement of the case the writer is making.

¹³*Proposito* = Points of agreement and disagreement.

¹⁴*Probatio* = Development of the defense.
IV. Subscription (6:11-18).  

This analysis indicates that all of the occurrences of “works of the law” in Galatians occur in the “Rebuke Section.” That suggests that the meaning in Galatians possesses specific negative overtones. Taking into consideration Paul’s negative understanding of the character of his opposition (the Judaizers), one sees clearly that the distinction is not purely ethnic or sociological. Consider the following characteristics of Paul’s opposition:  

- They preach a different (ἐτερός, heteros) gospel (1:6).  
- They are “disturbing” Paul’s converts and “distorting” his gospel message (1:7).  
- They demand circumcision of Gentiles (2:3; 5:2-3; 6:12-13).  
- They are “false brethren” (Ψευδάδελφοι, pseudadelphoi) seeking bondage rather than freedom (2:4; 5:1).  
- They belonged to the “party of the circumcision” (τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς, tous ek periromêns, 2:12).  
- They compel Gentile Christians to live like Jews (τα ἐν θνητικαίες ιουδαίας, 2:14).  
- They accuse Paul’s Christ of promoting sin (αμαρτίας διακόνος, 2:17).  
- They cause the Galatian believers to be spellbound and drawn away from the gospel (3:1).  
- The Gentiles must accept their ethic in order to be saved (4:17, “they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them”).  

Paul’s antagonists were not simply first-century Jews with a grace perspective practicing so-called “covenantal nomism” nor were they “‘right wing’ Jewish Christians.” Clearly, they were first-century enemies of the faith and opponents of the gospel in particular. It is not an issue of admitting the Gentiles into the faith, but of the Judaizers themselves not being in the faith.  

E. P. Sanders’ opinion that “the quality and character of Judaism is not in view” is inconsistent with what we know from Scripture itself. Jesus describes the Jews of His day as “hypocrites” (Matt 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29) who do not...
“enter” (note the choice of terms used by the Savior—the issue is one of entrance into rather than maintenance within) the kingdom of heaven nor do they “allow those who are entering to go in” (v. 13). Their proselytes are “twice as much a son of hell” as they (v. 15). Their condemnation comes upon them because they “have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (v. 23). Jesus does not refer to such things as circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary laws. The first-century Jews were so perverse and rebellious against God that they partook of and exceeded the sins of their ancestors by murdering God’s prophets (vv. 30-37). Christ sums up His evaluation of the spiritual condition of first-century Judaism by the rhetorical question, “How shall you escape the sentence of hell?” (v. 33). Sanders’ picture of first-century Judaism contradicts that of Jesus. That factor alone should destroy permanently the foundational premises supporting the NPP.

If Sanders’ view of first-century Judaism is correct, one might expect that he would find widespread agreement from adherents to Judaism. How do Jewish scholars look at Sanders’ view? One of the world’s leading Jewish experts on Judaism, Jacob Neusner, describes Sanders as a writer with a “rich capacity to make up distinctions and definitions as he goes along, then to impose these distinctions and definitions upon sources that, on the face of it, scarcely sustain them.” According to Neusner, the Gospels

claim that, with the coming of the Messiah, the Temple had ceased to enjoy its former importance, and those who had had charge of Israel’s life—chief among them the priests, scribes, and Pharisees—were shown through their disbelief to have ignored the hour of their salvation. Their unbelief is explained in part by the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and self-seeking.

What is Neusner’s bottom line regarding Sanders’ attempt to redefine first-century Judaism? According to Neusner, the Judaism which has Sanders’ approval “turns out to be a Judaism in the model of Christianity (in Sanders’s pattern). So if Sanders’s Pharisees result from a mere tinkering with some details of mine, his ‘Judaism’ represented as kosher to Liberal Protestantism is only a caricature and an offence. With friends like Sanders, Judaism needs no enemies.”

Though Sanders believes that Paul rejected covenantal nomism, James D. G. Dunn interprets Paul’s position as in agreement with it. Dunn believes that “works of the law” refers to “badges” of membership in the covenant people. In other words,


23All English Bible citations occurring without a reference to the Greek are from NASB Updated (1995). When Greek is given together with an English translation, the translation is this author’s.


25Ibid., 76.

26Ibid., 75.
deeds that mark out “the Jews as God’s people; given by God for precisely that reason, they serve to demonstrate covenant status.”

He proposes that Paul replaced these identity markers or badges (circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary regulations) with faith in Christ.

The conjunction ὅτε (de, “but,” Gal 2:16) presents a contrast with the immediate context (v. 15, “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles”). According to John Eadie, this indicates “a transition from a trust in Judaism, so natural to a born Jew.”

Paul declares that he is by nature a Jew and not a sinner among the Gentiles. Furthermore, Eadie observes that Paul’s reference to “sinners” is “a designation of all who were beyond the limits of the theocracy.”

In other words, Paul is saying, “Though we are Jews by descent, and not Gentiles who as such are regarded by us from our elevation as sinners, yet our Judaism, with all its boasted superiority, could not bring us justification.”

“Sinners” is almost a synonym for “Gentiles” (ἔθνος, ethnē) in the religious phraseology of the Jews (cf. 1 Macc 2:44).

In the Gospels Luke uses “sinners” (6:32-33) similar to Matthew’s use of “Gentiles” (5:47) and Matthew uses “sinners” (26:45) similar to Luke’s use “Gentiles” (18:32). It is safe therefore, to see the same equivalency employed by Paul in Gal 2:15.

“Knowing” (εἰδότας, eidotes, Gal 2:16) is a causal participle standing in antithesis to “though we are Jews by nature” in order to provide the reason for “we have believed in Christ Jesus.”

Paul is describing his conversion and that of believers in the Galatian church. What was the content of that knowledge that brought them to Christ? Paul says that it was that “a man is not justified by the works of the law.”

By “a man” (άνθρωπος, anthrōpos) Paul indicates a generic, non-ethnic reference. The truth embodied in the knowledge that brought him and the Galatians to Christ applied equally to Jew and Gentile. Hogg and Vine took this as another indication of the nature of Paul’s opposition, observing that “the Judaizers had too readily forgotten that a common humanity underlies all merely national
In other words, Jew and Gentile alike need justification, because all alike are sinners estranged from a righteous God.

Commenting on this same element of universality and the tendency for people to trust in a merit system of works, Moisés Silva, in a recent publication of essays taking the NPP to task, says,

> It is no less ill-advised, however, to deduce that first-century Judaism was free from the universal human tendency to rely on one’s own resources rather than on God’s power. Why should it be thought that ethnic pride and (personal) self-confidence are mutually exclusive factors? The attempt to work for, or at least contribute to, one’s own salvation by means of good deeds was hardly absent in the Jewish communities with which Paul interacted (cf. Sir 3:30 NRSV, “As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin [ἔλεγχος κατά κάψις].”) And if a modern Jewish writer can openly admit that he grew up worrying that his good deeds would not outweigh his sins, why should it be difficult to believe that people in the first century could experience similar fears?

In an earlier review of one of Dunn’s volumes, Silva also wrote that legalism belongs to the heart of sin in its universality; indeed, legalism is but the human cry for personal autonomy. Doing things our way as distinct from trusting God’s power. . . . The inclination toward self-righteousness is thus not a unique Jewish problem: it is endemic to the human condition.

Paul writes that a man “is not justified” (οὐ δικαιοῦται, ou dikaioutai). What is the meaning of “justified”? Does its sense confirm the view that salvation is involved? In his commentary on Romans, Charles Hodge explains that “justified” is “a forensic term; that is, it expresses the act of a judge . . . a judicial act.” The Greek verb (both here and in a second form later in the verse) is passive, a theological passive: God is the understood agent of justification. Indeed, as John MacArthur writes, this forensic term refers to “the free and gracious act by which God declares a sinner right with Himself.” This is consistent with the context of Paul’s statement. Galatians 2:16 refers to salvation for sinners, not the sanctification of believers. As Hodge warned, justification should never be confused with

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sanctification, since it “is always used in the sense antithetical to condemnation.”

Contrary to traditional exegesis and theological understanding, Dunn’s interpretation of “justified” is that Paul was “not thinking of a distinctively initiatory act of God. God’s justification is not his act in first making covenant with Israel, or in initially accepting someone into the covenant people. God’s justification is rather God’s acknowledgement that someone is in the covenant.” Wright takes a similar stance when he explains, “It is not ‘how you become a Christian,’ so much as ‘how you can tell who is a member of the covenant family.’”

In an apparently mediating viewpoint, Rapa concludes that Paul intends “both the relational forensic category of acquittal for sins and the consequent ethical ‘right’ behavior pattern of God’s people.” At first reading this might appear to be applying two meanings to a single occurrence of the term (“justification” or “justify”), but Rapa’s point is that the behavioral sense of justification rises out of the forensic sense. In addition, he concludes that the Judaizers must have believed the law to be salvific. He suggests that the Judaizers were in accord with “mainstream Judaism of Paul’s day.” He seems to contradict this conclusion when he writes that “it is an injustice to the greater Judaism of Paul’s day to attribute indiscriminately the attitude of one part to the whole.” To which part did the Galatian Judaizers belong? In response Rapa indicates that Paul’s Judaizers were perhaps Pharisees and represented one faction outside of what might be termed as “normative” Judaism. In other words, legalistic segments or groups existed within first-century Judaism.

It is just this kind of Jew (legalistic) with whom Paul deals. Once again, the view of the NPP is contradicted by the exegetical data. Why does the NPP have such a difficult time understanding this? Perhaps it is because adherents to the NPP too often equate OT biblical theology with the actual beliefs and practice of first-century Jews. What the OT teaches is one thing; what first-century Jews actually expressed and performed was something quite different. If their theology and life were consistent with the OT, why was it necessary for God to reject them and send them into exile again? Were there those Jews in the first-century who preserved correct, biblical theology? Of course. But, were they a majority? Absolutely not.

Justification, according to Paul, is not obtained “by works of the law” (εἰς ἔργαν νόμου, ex ergōn nomou). F. F. Bruce declares that the phrase refers to “the actions prescribed by the law” that indicate “a spirit of legalism” that believes that

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39Hodge, Romans, 82. “To justify, then, is not merely to pardon and restore to favour; nor is it to make inwardly just or holy, but it is to declare or pronounce just; that is, judicially to declare that the demands of justice are satisfied, or that there is no just ground for condemnation” (ibid., 84).

40Dunn, Jesus, Paul, and the Law 190.

41N. T. Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 122.


43Ibid., 167.

44Ibid., 173 n. 18.

such works “will win acceptance before God.” Bruce’s assessment is in agreement with that of Ernest de Witt Burton, who concludes that “law” is employed here “in its legalistic sense, denoting divine law viewed as a purely legalistic system made up of statutes, on the basis of obedience or disobedience to which men are approved or condemned as a matter of debt without grace. This is divine law as the legalist defined it.” It is also clear, as Ronald Fung points out, that the reference is to the law in its entirety.

Paul repeatedly and emphatically speaks of the contrast between “works of the law” and faith. In Gal 3:2 he asks the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” This is salvific language, the language of entrance into salvation. In Gal 3:10 Paul cites Deut 27:26 to prove that the works of the law bring only a curse. More specifically, every single individual (πᾶς ὁ Ἰσραήλ, pas hos, is not national language) who fails to keep “all things written in the book of the Law” is under a curse. In Phil 3:9 the apostle prays that he “may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.” Paul does not speak of maintenance or sanctification, but of salvation. The language of sanctification employs “found by Him” (cp. 2 Pet 3:14, οὐτῶ καθαίρεται, autō kathairetai); the language of salvation employs “found in Him” (εὑρέθη ἐν οὐτῳ, heurethē en autō) in Phil 3:9.

If these observations are insufficient to convince the reader, Titus 3:5 is food for thought: “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (emphasis added to mark the salvific content). “Deeds done in righteousness” is a legitimate equivalent for “the works of the law.” Verse 7 ties the passage to the concept of justification as well as re-emphasizing salvation by Paul’s reference to “eternal life.”

Back to Gal 2:16. Paul continues with the words, “but through faith in Jesus Christ” (ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ean mē dia pisteōs Iesou Christou). F. F. Bruce comments that Dunn’s treatment of ean mē as introducing an

46F. F. Bruce, _The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text_, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 137.

47Burton, _Galatians_ 120.


49Contra N. T. Wright, _Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology_ (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 146. See, also, the individual emphasis even in Deut 27:15 (Ψαλτήριον τοῦ Λαός, χρηματίζεται, “cursed is the man.”

50Sanders proposes that the force of Gal 3:10 rests with the words “law” and “cursed” and that the word “all” just “happens to appear” (Sanders, _Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People_ 21). It is partially on this point that he concludes: “The argument seems to be clearly wrong that Paul, in Galatians 3, holds the view that since the law cannot be entirely fulfilled, therefore righteousness is by faith” (ibid., 22-23). Cp. A. Andrew Das, _Paul, the Law, and the Covenant_ (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001) 153, for the individual focus of Deuteronomy 27–30.
exception clause (“except through faith”) runs “counter to Greek idiom.” As Silva observes, “this was Bruce’s gentle way of stating that such a translation was an unbearable solecism.” The apostle’s phraseology contains a clear antithesis between works and faith—in the traditional view, faith that has as its object Jesus Christ.

Emphatic “we” (ἡμεῖς, ἡμεῖς) resums the focus begun in v. 15. The emphatic pronoun lays stress on the fact that the apostle and the Galatian believers chose the path of being justified by faith rather than by works of the law. The plural pronoun associates the apostle with even “the lowly members of the church in Galatia.”

The concluding portion of the verse offers a citation from the OT as the basis for such a choice: “for by works of the law no flesh will be justified” (ὁτι ἐξ ἐργῶν νόμου οὐ δικαιωθῆσαι πᾶσα σάρξ, hoti ex ergon nomou ou diakathesetai pasa sarkx). It appears to be a free citation of or verbal allusion to Ps 143:2. Evidence for such a free citation is as follows:

1. Addition: Paul added ex ergon nomou (“by works of the law”) in order to give “the general expression of the psalmist a particular application.”
2. Omission: The apostle omitted the prepositional phrase ἐν προσώπῳ σου (enprosou, “before you”) since it might be assumed by the reader anyway. Note its inclusion in Rom 3:20 where Paul cites the same verse, echoing the psalmist’s confession of his inability to vindicate himself.
3. Alteration: Paul substituted pasa sarkx (“all flesh”) for πᾶς ζῶν (pas zón, “all living”), employing the more familiar Hebraism. “All flesh” suits his argument well since it has overtones of rebellion and disobedience (Gen
In the Greek “justified” (dikaiothêsetai) is a future indicative passive verb. As a theological passive it indicates that God is the agent of the action. Its future tense, as Silva notes, does more than refer generally to individual justification in the present. It has an eschatological implication as well. The context of Ps 143:2 does not refer directly to an eschatological situation, but the pericope at Rom 3:19-20 implies it. Indeed, the concept “is grounded in that final judgment, so that our sense of assurance (cf. Gal. 4:6-7) is not a psychological strategy that by-passes reality, but rather a proleptic manifestation of God’s righteous verdict.” Likewise, as Silva later adds, “It is precisely because we enjoy God’s righteousness at the present time that we can with confidence await (ἀπεκδεχομέθα, apekdechometha, Gal 5:5) the final and definitive verdict.” It would violate the texts in both Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:19-20 to ignore either the immediate or the future aspects of justification.

In regard to the phrase “no flesh,” Wright argues that it demonstrates that Paul speaks of the imposition of covenant curses (viz., Deuteronomy 27–28) on the disobedient nation of Israel so that it appeared that the nation’s role in bringing blessing to the Gentiles would never be fulfilled. In other words, because the nation was under the curse of the law, it seemed that justification could not come to “all flesh.” Translating the clause as “no flesh shall be justified,” Wallace takes the Greek to mean that “Paul did view the law as impossible to obey (contra Sanders) and as something brought in precisely to cause the nation to reflect on the total inadequacy of a works-righteousness.”

“By works of the law” (ex ergon nomou) occurs three times in Gal 2:16. The occurrences are progressive: (1) General (“a man is not justified by the works of the law”), (2) personal (“we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law”), and (3) universal (“by the works of the law no flesh will be justified”).

Romans 3:20

Much of what has been concluded in regard to Gal 2:16 applies equally to...
this passage, so repetition is unnecessary. As for the context of Rom 3:20, Wallace makes a valuable observation concerning a major difference between the two epistles: “Romans is a refinement and articulation of the seminal thought of Galatians, but is not in conflict with Galatians.” Silva reaches basically the same conclusion stating that the evidence “suggests strongly that Romans consists of a systematic answer to the objections raised . . . by the Judaizers. What Galatians sets forth with great urgency in the heat of battle, the letter to the Romans develops more calmly and fully during a lull in the midst of Paul’s stormy ministry.”

The reader can expect, then, a more complete treatment of the meaning of the law and “the works of the law” in Romans. Fitzmyer rightly concludes that Rom 3:10-20 wraps up the apostle’s negative development of the thesis he proposed back near the start of the epistle in 1:16-17. Paul spends the intervening chapters developing the concepts of both righteousness and law. From the start he speaks of salvation vs. condemnation. The focus in 1:16–3:19 is not on either sanctification or identification. To read the text as speaking of anything but salvation is to break it from its contextual moorings and set it adrift at the mercy of the winds of NPP doctrines.

In the immediate context (vv. 10-18), Paul cites OT passages as proof that Jews are only hearers, not doers of the law. Verse 19 is the logical summary of and conclusion to the OT citations. They are taken mostly from Psalms (one text is from Isaiah). All of them speak of obedience to the law. Paul cites the testimony of Scripture to prove that “all human beings, Jews and Greeks alike, are enslaved to sin.” The first occurrence of “law” (v. 19) cannot be limited dogmatically to the law of Moses. After all, none of the citations are from the Pentateuch. Schreiner issues a caution, however: “Nonetheless, a definite distinction should not be made since those who are branded as wicked in the Psalms and Isaiah are evil precisely because they did not observe the law of Moses.” It would be safe to conclude, though, that the references in Psalms and Isaiah do not limit the law to its regulations on circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary restrictions. Thus, Paul’s citations are not supportive of NPP adherents who insist on arguing that the apostle was only referring to the markers for Jewish identity or covenant relationship.

Within the flow of the epistle to the Romans it is clear that OT texts “that distinguished between the righteous and wicked are now turned against Jews who believed they were righteous, in order to prosecute the theme that all are guilty

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47Silva, Explorations in Exegetical Method 155.
48Fitzmyer, Romans 334. Schreiner likewise interprets the function of vv. 19-20 “as the conclusion to all of 1:18–3:20” (Schreiner, Romans 168).
50Ibid., 70.
52Fitzmyer, Romans 333.
53Schreiner, Romans 168.
before God. By abolishing the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, Paul overturns the Jewish concept of covenantal protection.\footnote{Ibid., 167.} Even Sanders agrees that the topic is salvation in Romans: “[I]t is clear [in Romans 1–4] that one of Paul’s major concerns is to assert that salvation is for both Jews and Gentiles and that it must be based on the same ground.”\footnote{Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism 488 (cf. 515-16, emphasis in the original).} Once more, one can only conclude that the primary theme is salvific in nature.

Verse 20 presents the reason for v. 19’s declaration that everyone must stand silent before God when faced with evidence from the law indicating their guilt.\footnote{Shedd, Romans 71; Hodge, Romans 81.} Martin Luther, writing on Rom 3:27-28, presents the traditional understanding of the phrase: “What the apostle means by works of the law are works in which the persons who do them trust as if they are justified by doing them, and thus are righteous on account of their works.”\footnote{Martin Luther, Lectures on Romans, trans. and ed. Wilhelm Pauck, Library of Christian Classics 15 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 119.} By “deeds prescribed by the law” Paul “means thereby that no one will attain the status of uprightness before God’s tribunal by performing deeds mandated by the Mosaic law, or by ‘all that the law says’ (3:19).”\footnote{Fitzmyer, Romans 337.} In other words, good works are not the primary meaning. Obedience to the law of Moses is the primary focus. Since there is no such thing as perfect obedience, there is no way anyone can earn a way into God’s presence or merit His forgiveness for his/her sins. As in Gal 2:16, the apostle has chosen to employ Ps 143:2 in order to express the universality of sin.

The final clause in 3:20, “for through the law is the knowledge of sin” (ὅταν γὰρ νόμον ἐπίγνωσις ἀμαρτίας, dia gar nomou epignosis hamartias) explains that the purpose of the law is to provide knowledge of sin, not justification. Nor is its purpose to sanctify, but to reveal sin’s presence.\footnote{Schreiner, Romans 169.} To be consistent, NPP proponents who limit the works of the law to the badges of membership in the covenant community would have to read the verse as follows: “For by circumcision, kosher food laws, and the Sabbath, no human being will be identified as a member of the covenant, since through the covenant badges comes knowledge of sin.”\footnote{Fesko, “N. T. Wright and the Works of the Law” 74.} Nowhere does Paul make such a limitation. Instead, he demonstrates that the knowledge of sin comes through commandments like the tenth one in the Ten Commandments (Rom 7:7). In fact, as the context (1:16–3:19) has already demonstrated, the entire law is in view. Are Sabbath-keeping, circumcision, and dietary laws the sole basis for obedience in 2:13? Are Sabbath-keeping, circumcision, and dietary regulations the law written on the heart in v. 15? Is stealing a fourth “badge” in v. 21 or adultery in v. 22? If circumcision is negated by breaking the law, how can circumcision be the statute that was broken (v. 25)? Can “whatever the law
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says” (3:19) be limited to the three markers of the covenant? \(^{83}\) There is no room for such an artificial restriction. Yet that is exactly what the NPP does. \(^{84}\)

Even though Dunn now supposedly recognizes that “works of the law” cannot be limited to circumcision and food laws, \(^{85}\) Schreiner cautions on reading too much into Dunn’s apparent reversal, because Dunn “simply thinks that the focus is on works that distinguish Jews from Gentiles, but this admission is not integrated appropriately in his exegesis.” \(^{86}\)

**Conclusion and Application** \(^{87}\)

For the meaning of “works of the law” biblical testimony is more authoritative than the declarations of theologians, whether they are from the early church, the Reformation, or the 20th or 21st centuries. The testimony of the OT, Jesus, and Paul is contrary to the viewpoint of the NPP. Part of the confusion created by NPP is due to the fact that its adherents too often misidentify the spirituality of first-century Judaism with that required in the OT. If the Jews in the first century had exhibited the spirituality demanded by the OT, they would not have rejected the Messiah and they would not have been judged by exile and dispersion.

The NPP premise that the law can sanctify is also misleading. As Luther observed in his comments on Rom 3:20, “Indeed, neither the good works that precede justification nor those that follow from it make a man righteous—how much less the works of the law!” \(^{88}\) Indeed, “works of the law” can neither save nor sanctify (cf. 6:12-14). For the believer, faith produces good works, not the reverse (cf. Eph 2:8-10). \(^{89}\)

For those who might believe that the NPP provides an option to what they perceive as an antinomianism in the traditional interpretation of both “works of the

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\(^{83}\) Schreiner, Romans 173. As an additional argument, Schreiner comments that “the linkage between 3:27-28 and 4:1-8 suggests that there is not even a focus on ‘identity markers,’ but that ‘works of law’ is a general designation for all the works commanded in the Mosaic law, so that ‘works of law’ refers to the actions or deeds required by the Mosaic law” (ibid.).

\(^{84}\) See further, Fitzmyer, Romans 338.


\(^{86}\) Schreiner, Romans, 173 n. 19.

\(^{87}\) “This is a fitting point to recommend to the reader an excellent treatment of the NPP: Guy Prentiss Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004). He is extremely helpful in his treatment of the views of N. T. Wright, who has become the pied piper leading young evangelicals off into dangerous theological territory. Especially helpful is Waters’ discussion of Wright’s view on baptism (145-46), which is consistent with sacramental baptismal regeneration. Wright’s clearest statements on baptism are to be found in his “Romans,” in New Interpreter’s Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002) 10:533-35. Why would an evangelical want to base his soteriology on the teachings of someone who is soteriologically challenged? It is fascinating that so many adherents to the NPP are either theologians or pastors in denominations identified with baptismal regeneration.

\(^{88}\) Luther, Lectures on Romans 108.

\(^{89}\) Again, it was Luther who wrote with regard to Rom 3:19-20, “[J]ustification does not need the works of the law, but it needs a living faith that produces its own works” (ibid., 102).
law” and “justification by faith,” Jesus Himself made it abundantly clear that freedom from the law does not mean freedom from the demands of righteous living. Six times in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said “you have heard” (Matt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) before citing an element of the law. Six times Jesus proceeded to add, “but I say to you” (vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) as he expressed an even higher standard that He demands of those who follow Him. In fact, He said, “unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20). Such high standards make salvation even more difficult, if it comes by works. No better commentary can be offered on Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:20. The apostle merely filled out the teachings of Christ by repeatedly specifying that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone and not by the “works of the law.”
HERMENEUTICS OF
THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

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Recent changes in evangelical hermeneutical principles have opened a wide door for new-perspective (NP) proposals on Pauline literature and more basically NP proposals about second-temple Judaism. Setting aside the time-honored ideal of objectivity, the proposals have raised questions about longstanding views of Augustine and Luther and of the nature of first-century Judaism. E. P. Sanders has been a major figure in raising these questions. The questions arise in part through an allegorical versus a literal handling of God’s OT covenants with Israel, i.e., through devising a system known as “covenantal nomism.” The NP system also seeks support through a neglect of the established principle of single versus multiple meanings for a given passage and through disregarding the importance of immediate context in interpretation. The NP builds on an erroneous base of wrong-headed conclusions about first-century Judaism and commits multiple hermeneutical errors in its approach to Pauline literature.

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As one has appropriately put it, the new perspective on Paul is more accurately termed a new perspective on second-temple Judaism,¹ which inevitably results in a new perspective on Paul. This new perspective brings to the surface a number of hermeneutical principles that twenty-first-century evangelicalism desperately needs to avoid if it is to maintain a high view of biblical inspiration.

¹Stephen Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 178. Westerholm writes, “The conviction most central to the ‘new perspective on Paul’ pertains in the first place to Judaism, not Paul: first-century Jews, it is claimed (in dependence on E. P. Sanders’ Paul and Palestinian Judaism), were not legalists who supposed that they earned their salvation (or membership in the people of God) by deeds they did in compliance with the law.”
Preunderstanding Versus Objectivity

Elsewhere I have dealt with the highly significant change that occurred in evangelical hermeneutics in the 1970s and early 1980s, a change which most basically incorporated a new first step in biblical interpretation. That new beginning point is the preunderstanding of the interpreter that then theoretically undergoes correction as he studies a biblical text. Until the 1970s, traditional grammatical-historical principles dictated that the interpreter repress whatever opinion about what he thought the text should teach and adopt a firm goal of letting the text speak for itself, in other words, the goal of objectivity. As harmless as the difference in starting points between traditional evangelical hermeneutics and the new evangelical hermeneutics may seem, it has wrought havoc in the way many evangelicals are now reading and interpreting the Bible.

New-perspective proposals offer a classic example of the drastic effects of preunderstanding on the interpretation of Pauline literature as well as the rest of the NT. The impact of this hermeneutical principle on new-perspective scholars is visible in two areas, in rethinking the interpretations of Augustine and Luther and in rethinking the nature of first-century Judaism.

Rethinking the Interpretations of Augustine and Luther

A 1977 work by E. P. Sanders in which he advanced a radically new view of first-century Judaism gave birth to the new perspective. The new-perspective (hereafter NP) views Augustine as having introduced an “introspective conscience” into an interpretation of Paul’s writings, a conscience that was not present in the writings themselves. Sanders does not see guilt as the main problem with Paul; the problem Paul dealt with was that of people not recognizing the lordship of Christ. Martin Luther allegedly erred the same way as Augustine. As Paul deals with the problem of circumcision in Galatia, N. T. Wright—another NP advocate—sees the issue Paul faced as far different from the questions debated between Augustine and Luther.

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3I have elaborated on this extensively in various parts of *Evangelical Hermeneutics.*

4E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). Two of the purposes of the work was “to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship” (xii) and “to establish a different view of Rabbinic Judaism” (ibid.).

5The customary abbreviation for the new perspective on Paul is “NPP,” but since the issue has more to do with first-century Judaism, this essay will use the abbreviation “NP” to designate the new-perspective position on both.

Pelagius or between Luther and Erasmus.  

In essence, Sanders—the godfather of the NP—and his followers say that Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and others have been wrong in their reading of Paul. Such later Christian voices have read into Paul doctrines—justification by faith, the doctrine of imputed righteousness, and other related doctrines—that Paul did not teach. That NP understanding of Luther and company anachronistically attributes to them the more recent development of preunderstanding which affected their interpretation of Paul’s writings. Luther allegedly interpreted Paul as though he were writing about issues of later times instead of the ones he was actually facing. According to NP proponents, the well-known advocates of justification by faith—such as Luther and Calvin—imposed their own biases on the text rather than letting the Pauline text speak for itself.

Such proponents as Sanders fail to acknowledge that a basic hermeneutical principle of the Reformers, of whom Luther was one, was to exclude their own biases and follow the principle of *tabla rasa* (“clean slate”). This meant to study the text with an open mind in applying grammatical-historical data to arrive at the meaning intended by the original author and understood by the original readers. Sanders and company say that the Reformers failed in the process because of their preunderstanding of what they felt the text *should* say. Yet preunderstanding was not a hermeneutical principle in orthodox Christianity until a time much later than the Reformers. It is Sanders’ own preunderstanding of second-temple Judaism that forced him into attributing preunderstanding to interpreters who consciously attempted to avoid it.

### Rethinking the Nature of First-century Judaism

#### Critique of Sanders’ view of rabbinic literature. Sanders summarizes his view of Judaism as follows:

> On the assumption that a religion should be understood on the basis of its own self-

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9. R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977) 105. Sproul writes, “The interpreter was expected to strive as hard as possible for an objective reading of the text through the grammatico-historical approach. Though subjective influences always present a clear and present danger of distortion, the student of the Bible was expected to utilize every possible safeguard in the pursuit of the ideal, listening to the message of Scripture without mixing in his own prejudices.”

10. Ramm describes orthodoxy thus: “The true philological spirit, or critical spirit, or scholarly spirit, in Biblical interpretation has as its goal to discover the original meaning and intention of the text. Its goal is *exegesis*—to lead the meaning out of the text and shuns *eisogesis*—bringing a meaning to the text. . . . Calvin said that the Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at will. Rather it is the Word of God whose teachings must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text” (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970] 115-16).
presentations, as long as these are not manifestly bowdlerized, and not on the basis of polemical attacks, we must say that the Judaism of before 70 kept grace and works in the right perspective, did not trivialize the commandments of God and was not especially marked by hypocrisy. The frequent Christian charge against Judaism, it must be recalled, is not that some individual Jews misunderstood, misapplied and abused their religion, but that Judaism necessarily tends towards petty legalism, self-serving and self-deceiving casuistry, and a mixture of arrogance and lack of confidence in God. But the surviving Jewish literature is as free of these characteristics as any I have ever read.15

Through use of his three sources, particularly the Tannaitic literature, Sanders reaches several conclusions about the rabbinic teaching.

(1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God’s promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God’s mercy belong to the group which will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God’s mercy rather than human achievement.16

A closer look at the sources cited by Sanders reveals, however, that Sanders’ reading of the rabbinic material is totally biased.

For example, he says that election was “totally gratuitous without prior cause in those being elected,”13 which cannot be true. Even he himself acknowledges three reasons assigned by the rabbis for God’s choice of Israel, only one of which said election was totally gratuitous.14 The other two reasons given by the rabbis involved Israel’s earning election, thereby making election “at least partially grounded on the merits of the patriarchs or Israel’s foreseen obedience.”15

Sanders argues that obedience to the commandments in rabbinic literature is the result of God’s election and that the rabbis included the intention, not just the outward act, in this obedience.16 Though humans have a tendency to disobey, they do not have a sin nature that requires divine enablement in order to obey.17 In reality, however, sometimes rabbis taught that God’s judgment would depend on a

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1 Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism 426-27.
2 Ibid., 422.
3 Ibid., 87.
4 Ibid.
6 Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism 107.
7 Ibid., 114-15.
majority of good deeds. Other times they taught that condemnation would come on the basis of one transgression. Still others said that salvation would result from one righteous act. The rabbis were in complete disagreement among themselves on this issue too.

According to Sanders, salvation comes by membership in the covenant community and by atonement provided for every transgression. Yet the means of atonement for the rabbis was elusive. Sometimes they said it was through repentance, other times through OT sacrifices, in still other cases through sufferings and even through death.

With such widespread differences of opinion in rabbinic literature, only minimal parts of which are biblical, Sanders has to pick and choose among conflicting statements to come up with his system of covenantal nomism. For example, as Waters notices, “In two distinct arguments (‘the rabbis are not systematic theologians’ and ‘there are numerous “fulfillment of one command” statements as well as “majority of deeds” statements’), Sanders dismisses the significance of the ‘majority of deeds’ comments.’ To grasp the inconsistencies of the rabbis takes no systematic theologian; any person with common sense can tell that a unified system of belief was nonexistent in their writings. Though Sanders has provided a fuller picture of first-century Judaism, his interpretation of that evidence is flawed. When taking into account all the evidence he cites, he has not established a case that proves Judaism contemporary to Paul was a system based on grace. The origin of covenantal nomism is therefore traceable to Sanders, not to the rabbis. But such an observation is not nearly as alarming as the way Sanders dismisses the four canonical Gospels.

**Sanders’ view of the Gospels.** Since the “Sanders revolution” has affected so many, who is E. P. Sanders? His self-identification is,

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18Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives* 42-44.
19Ibid., 44-45. Waters expresses this in another way: “In summary, Sanders has corrected the portrait of Judaism as a religion of pure Pelagianism, and has demonstrated that this religion is semi-Pelagian in nature. In election, human ability, obedience, atonement, and acceptance at the judgment, rabbinic opinion is universally and incontrovertibly synergistic. Human actions and endeavors have preeminence over divine grace.”
20Ibid., 45-47.
23Ibid., 46.
24Ibid., 55.
25Wright reflects the opinion of many when he writes, “But the scholar who has affected current Pauline scholarship more than all the rest put together is Ed P. Sanders, a former colleague of mine in Oxford, now Professor at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina” (*What Saint Paul Really Said*...
I am a liberal, modern, secularized Protestant, brought up in a church dominated by low christology and the social gospel. I am proud of the things that that religious tradition stands for. I am not bold enough, however, to suppose that Jesus came to establish it, or that he died for the sake of its principles.26

A person with his perspective of a “low christology” would not, of course, have a high view of the Jesus of the NT. That expectation turns out to be accurate.

Sanders’ forte has been his investigation of rabbinic literature. His sources have included rabbinic (Tannaitic) literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical writings, from Ben Sirach to IV Ezra.27 On the basis of these studies, he concludes,

By consistently maintaining the basic framework of covenantal nomism [the name assigned to Judaism’s beliefs by Sanders], the gift and demand of God were kept in a healthy relationship with each other, the minutiae of the law were observed on the basis of the large principles of religion and because of commitment to God, and humility before God who chose and would ultimately redeem Israel was encouraged.28

Stated in other terms, Sanders’ view was that “Judaism in Paul’s day was not, as has regularly been supposed, a religion of legalistic works-righteousness. If we imagine that it was, and that Paul was attacking it as if it was, we will do great violence to it and to him.”29 Judaism was rather similar to Paul in its advocacy of grace: “God took the initiative, when he made a covenant with Judaism; God’s grace thus precedes everything that people (specifically, Jews) do in response. The Jew keeps the law out of gratitude, as the proper response to grace—not, in other words, in order to get into the covenant people, but to stay in. Being ‘in’ in the first place was God’s gift.”30

In formulating his opinion about second-temple Judaism, however, Sanders in his 1977 work conspicuously fails to use the historical books of the NT, the four Gospels and Acts. In a later work, however, he clarifies this omission. In one such clarification he writes,

We know about Jesus from books written a few decades after his death, probably by the people who were not among his followers during his lifetime. They quote him in Greek, which was not his primary language, and in any case the differences among our sources show that his words and deeds were not perfectly preserved. We have very little

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27Ibid., 24-29.
28Ibid., 426-27.
30Ibid., 19 [emphasis in the original].
information about him apart from the works written to glorify him. Today we do not have good documentation for such out-of-the-way places as Palestine; nor did the authors of our sources. They had no archives and no official records of any kind. They did not even have access to good maps. These limitations, which were common in the ancient world, result in a good deal of uncertainty.

Recognizing these difficulties and many others, New Testament scholars spent several decades—from about 1910 to 1970—saying that we know somewhere between very little and virtually nothing about the historical Jesus.31

Through consistent application of tools of historical criticism, Sanders concludes that “very little or virtually nothing” in the Gospels is factual.

Scholars who follow in his NP train entertain similar views regarding NT historical books. Wright, for example, describes the Gospels as combinations of “neither simply biography nor simply religious propaganda, yet sharing the main characteristics of both.”32 He pictures the following as the current stage in the Third Quest for the historical Jesus: “First-century Judaism and the Gospels are opposite edges, and all discourse about Jesus must take place between them.”33 Wright and other “questers” along with NP advocates exemplify an extremely low view of biblical inspiration of the Gospels. The Gospels are at best only on the “edge” of truth, they say, and are less reliable than rabbinic writings in their portrayal of first-century Judaism.

The View of Jesus and John the Baptist. Among scholars—evangelical scholars not excluded—that trend of viewing the Gospels as only the edge of truth is occurring right before the eyes of contemporary Christians and is cause for great alarm. Now it has affected Pauline writings as well as the Gospels. In contrast to the positive portrait of Judaism painted by the NP, recall some of the statements by John the Baptist and Jesus about second-temple Judaism:

- John the Baptist saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized by them and called them a “brood of vipers” (Matt 3:7). That characterization of

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31E. P. Sanders. The Historical Figure of Jesus (New York: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1993) xiii. Note how Sanders dismisses Gospel descriptions of Jesus because of their tendency to glorify Jesus, but takes rabbinic writings at face value without recognizing their tendency to glorify Judaism.

32N. T. Wright. The Contemporary Quest for Jesus (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 73.

33Ibid., 73. Regarding Wright, Waters writes, “A second reason that one should study Wright is that he has done more than any other single individual to mediate NPP exegesis into the mainline and evangelical churches . . . Wright’s popularity among evangelicals is also due to his general respect for the integrity of the New Testament. His scholarship on Jesus stands out from contemporary lives of Jesus and theologies of the Gospels in at least one respect. Wright purposefully approaches the Gospels as credible historical records, sidestepping many of the source-critical and redaction-critical concerns that New Testament scholars often bring to the text.” (Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives 119-20 [emphasis added]). Waters’ opinion notwithstanding, Wright—like all other “third questers”—is far from accepting the historical reliability of everything in the Gospel accounts.
second-temple Judaism hardly fits the description advanced by the NP.

- Matthew 5–7, Jesus’ Sermon the Mount, whose theme verse is Matt 5:20: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were rabbis. The whole sermon heralded the apostasy of rabbinical Judaism’s leadership.  

- Mark 2:1–3:6 records a series of five “conflict” stories in which Jesus’ opponents were the scribes, Pharisees, and/or Herodians. Sanders dismisses these episodes of Jesus’ disagreements with Judaism as having been read back into the life of Jesus by Mark, a previous author, or the early church.  

- Mark 7 and Matthew 15 record Jesus’ disagreements with first-century Judaism regarding the washing of hands. Sanders flatly pronounces, “Deadly enmity over handwashing is, I think, historically impossible.” He takes issue with Jesus’ attack on the Pharisaic view of korban by writing, “No Pharisee would justify using a semi-legal device to deprive his parents.”  

- Matt 23:13-36 records Jesus’ opinion of second-temple Jewish leaders in His woes pronounced against them. He calls them snakes and a brood of vipers (23:33), blind guides (23:16), and blind fools (23:17; cf. Matt 15:14). That is hardly a description of a “covenantal nomism” that guards the truth.

- Jesus consistently portrayed Judaism of His day as a religion of externals only. One example is in Matt 23:27-28: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” That is just the opposite of NP descriptions of the covenantal nomism of first-century Judaism which says that the system “was not especially marked by hypocrisy” and describes its faith as “the badge of covenant membership, not something someone ‘performs’

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34 About the Sermon on the Mount, Sanders writes, “Only modern New Testament scholars have thought that part of the Sermon on the Mount expresses opposition to the Mosaic law, but that is because they have not considered the numerous levels of legal agreement and disagreement” (Sanders, Historical Figure 212). He misses Jesus’ point. Jesus did not speak against the law; He spoke against the scribal and Pharisaic interpretation of the law.

35 Ibid., 216-17.

36 Ibid., 219.

37 Ibid.

38 Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism 427.
as a kind of initiation test.”

Rather, the badge of covenant membership for the Judaism of Jesus’ day was compliance with outward Pharisaic prescriptions.

- In John 8:44a Jesus addressed the Jews who opposed Him with these words: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire.” This is hardly a fit description for loyal upholders of the religion of the OT as Sanders and others of the NP want to portray Judaism in Jesus’ day.

The Gospels and Acts provide many examples of Judaism’s inclination toward an external kind of religion and toward the neglect of internal matters of godliness.

**First-century Judaism.** New-perspective proponents seem to have lost sight of the fact that the Judaism of Jesus’ day was not the religion of the OT. It was largely a product of Israel’s captivity years in Babylon. Because of circumstances that brought a cessation of the temple sacrifices, a study of the law took the place of the temple sacrifices. That increased attention to the law brought into existence the office of the scribe or teacher of the law who became as important to the religious life of the people as the priest had been while the temple was still standing. For the most part, the scribes, most of whom were Pharisees, were the rabbis of the first century A.D.

The new set of circumstances also created a need for a new center of worship, the synagogue. The widespread dispersion of the Jewish people during the exile necessitated local forms of gathering, i.e., synagogues in various locations. The synagogue became a firmly established institution wherever ten men were available to form a regular congregation. The synagogue adapted older rites and observances of Judaism to the new conditions under which the people had to live. Synagogues continued to function even after the temple was rebuilt.41

Before the captivity, sin was evaluated and judged on a communal scale rather than individually. The uprooting of the nation destroyed the connection of reward and punishment with national responsibility, thereby reaffirming individual responsibility. Messianic hope for the advent of a political deliverer remained strong during this period.42

The troops of Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple of Solomon in 586 B.C. A second temple was begun and completed by the returning remnant in 516 B.C., only to be plundered by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C. In 165 B.C. Judas Maccabaeus cleansed and repaired the second temple. The repaired structure remained until 37 B.C. when Herod the Great took Jerusalem and burned some of the temple structures. In 20-19 B.C. Herod started to rebuild the temple, work that

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41Ibid., 83-84.

42Ibid., 85-89.
was not completed until A.D. 62 or 64. It was in this rebuilt second temple that Jesus and His disciples taught and preached and Saul of Tarsus offered sacrifices. The Roman army destroyed this temple in A.D. 70.\(^4\)

The synagogue was the social center where Jewish inhabitants of a city gathered weekly to meet each other. It was also the educational medium for keeping the law before the people’s attention and served as a substitute for temple worship, which was impossible because of distance or poverty. The synagogue service consisted of five parts: a recitation of the Shema (Deut 6:4), a ritual prayer concluding with an opportunity for individual silent prayer, the reading of the Scriptures, a sermon which explained the Scripture that had been read, and a blessing pronounced by a priestly member of the congregation. Such a sequence eventually became influential in the services of the early church.\(^4\)

Five of the Jewish feasts had their origin in the OT: Passover or Unleavened Bread, Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets or the New Year, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The other two feasts originated during the intertestamental period: the Feast of Lights, commemorating the cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus, and the Feast of Purim, commemorating the deliverance of Israel during the time of Esther.

All the sects of Judaism originated during the captivity: the Pharisees (the largest and most influential), the Sadducees (the priestly party during the days of Christ), the Essenes (an ascetic brotherhood), the Zealots (fanatical nationalists who advocated violence to obtain liberation from Rome), the Zadokites (a priestly element who wanted to reform the priesthood), and the Herodians (a left wing of the Sadducees who favored perpetuation of the Herodian dynasty).\(^5\)

The dispersion of Jewish people began in 721 B.C. with the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel. It spread gradually until Jews were found in almost all the large cities of the Mediterranean and Middle East, including North Africa, and many smaller cities too. Within the dispersion there were two distinct groups: (1) The Hebraists retained the religious faith of Judaism and utilized the Aramaic language and the Hebrew customs. Paul was a Hebraist (Phil 3:5). (2) The Hellenists were far greater in number than the Hebraists and had absorbed the Graeco-Roman culture, but had ceased to be Jewish except in matters of faith. They spoke only Greek or whatever happened to the local language of the area where they settled.\(^6\)

Sanders says very little if anything about such facets of first-century Judaism as resulted from the Babylonian exile. In his 1977 work on rabbinic literature, his “Index of Subjects” has no entry for “synagogue” which was the

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4Ibid., 89-92.

5Ibid., 93-95.


rabbī’s main locus of operation. His entry on Pharisees is relatively brief, and the Day of Atonement is the only feast that has an entry. One can only conclude that the rabbīnic literature consulted by Sanders is a poor source for reconstructing a picture of first-century Judaism. And with crumbling of the foundation for the “Sanders revolution” falls the case for a new perspective on Judaism and, consequently, that for the new perspective on Paul also. The system falters because it is based on an unsupported preunderstanding, not on allowing the biblical text to speak for itself. Following the dictum of “all truth is God’s truth,” it seeks to integrate rabbīnic tradition with Scripture, thereby reducing the voice of Scripture to a whisper. Wright describes how Sanders reasons from solution to plight:

What is the key, the focal point around which everything else organizes itself? And where did Paul begin his train of thought. The answers Sanders offers to these questions are as follows. First, Paul began with the solution, and worked back to the problem: that is to say, he did not . . . begin with a problem in search of a solution and then perceive Christ as that solution, but came to the matter the other way around. His statements, and still more his arguments, about the plight of man and the inadequacy of other methods of salvation are not therefore the base of his scheme, but the result of it, and their various inconsistencies may thereby be more easily understood. Based on Paul’s alleged reasoning from the solution back to the problem solved by the solution, Sanders and other NP advocates have built into their explanations of Paul’s writings an understanding of second-temple Judaism that is fraught with misinformation about Paul’s relationship to the Judaism of his day, i.e., that he could not have differed with Judaism on soteriological grounds. In implementing

47 James D. G. Dunn acknowledges the role of preunderstanding in his Jesus Remembered (vol. 1 of Christianity in the Making [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003]): “In short, if we sum up the hermeneutical issues by responding to the postmodern question ‘Is there meaning in the text?’, the answer has to be either a qualified Yes or a qualified No. . . . The truth has to be somewhere in between, indeed precisely in the integration of these two too simplistically separated terms, in the ‘fusion’ of these two polarities. . . . As with the critically realist approach to the history of Christianity’s beginnings, so with the hermeneutics of reading the NT, there is neither an absolutely objective meaning ‘in’ the text, nor an absolutely subjective meaning imported to the text by the reader” (124-25). Wright does likewise when he denies the existence of an antithesis between objective and subjective: “Instead of the spurious antithesis between ‘objective’ and subjective,’ we must hold to the proper distinction between public and private” (Contemporary Quest 80).


50 Waters expresses the same fact as follows: “It is simply not true (unless our narratives deceive us) that there is a virtually seamless continuity between the Judaism(s) of Paul’s day and the specimen of religion that he adopted and promoted subsequent to his encounter on the Damascus Road” (Justification and the New Perspectives 157); cf. Richard B. Gaffin, “Paul the Theologian,” Westminster Theological Journal 62 (2000):134.
grammatical-historical principles of interpretation, one must get the history right. Otherwise, his exegetical conclusions will be thoroughly flawed.

**Allegorical Versus Literal Handling of the OT**

Illustrations of such flaws in the case of the NP are plentiful. Covenantal nomism makes much over God’s OT covenants with Israel, beginning with the Abrahamic covenant. Wright’s words are typical:

> Romans 4, in which Paul discusses the faith of Abraham, is not, as is so often suggested, a detached ‘proof from scripture’ of an abstract doctrine. It is an exposition of the biblical covenant theology which has now been unveiled in the gospel. Genesis 15 is the backbone of the whole chapter—Genesis 15, that is, seen as the chapter in which the covenant with Abraham was established in the first place.\(^{51}\)

That covenant, with along the other OT covenants with Israel, was God’s promise to ethnic Israel. In the original statement of the Abrahamic covenant, God promised,

> Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12:1b-3).

In the context of Genesis 12, Abraham understood God to promise him a physical lineage that would become a great nation. The fulfillment of those promises and the promises of the other OT covenants with Israel can come only to ethnic Israel, Abraham’s physical descendants. NP proponents have allegorized the promises in such a way that they apply to those in the body of Christ, most of whom are not physical descendants of Abraham.

As an example of this allegorization, Wright writes about “the Christian, the fulfilled-Israel, line”\(^{52}\) and speaks of “Paul’s message to the pagan world” as “the fulfilled-Israel message: the one creator God is, through the fulfilment of his covenant with Israel, reconciling the world to himself.”\(^{53}\) Speaking of the predominantly Gentile church as the “fulfilled-Israel” or the “new Israel” is in clear violation of principles of literal fulfillment for which grammatical-historical interpretation stands. Traditionally, non-dispensational systems have followed the same non-literal understanding of Israel’s OT covenants, but that does not mitigate the seriousness of the hermeneutical flaw.

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\(^{51}\text{Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 129.}\)

\(^{52}\text{Ibid., 85.}\)

\(^{53}\text{Ibid., 91.}\)
The NP approach also necessitates the conclusion that national Israel has no future in God’s program: “‘Resurrection’ was, in Ezekiel 37, a metaphor for the return of Israel from exile. When Paul was faced with the fact of Jesus’ resurrection, he concluded that the return from exile had in fact happened . . . It meant that Israel had in principle been redeemed, in the person of her anointed representative.”54 For the NP, the first coming and resurrection of Jesus were the fulfillment of God’s promises to ethnic Israel. Yet God’s promises to Israel in the OT contained no indication of figurative language. To read those promises in an allegorical sense is a severe breach of their plain meaning.

Single Meaning Versus Multiple Meanings

Romans 1:1

In assigning more than one meaning to a word, phrase, or sentence, the NP clearly places itself into the camp of the extreme subjectivism of the new evangelical hermeneutics. Traditional grammatical-historical principles emphasize the importance of assigning one meaning and one meaning only to each aspect of a given text,55 but Wright wants at least two meanings for the word “gospel” (εὐαγγελίαν, euangelion) in Rom 1:1: a Jewish word of comfort regarding Israel’s return from exile and a pagan announcement of a great victory and a coming ruler. He wants somehow to combine the two meanings:

Which is these backgrounds, then, is the appropriate one against which to read the New Testament evidence? Is ‘the gospel’, for Paul, an Isaianic word of comfort or an imperial proclamation?

I suggest that the antithesis between the two is a false one, based on the spurious either-or that has misleadingly divided New Testament studies for many years.56

In calling the separate meanings a false antithesis, however, he has committed the error of assigning two meanings to the same word. The two meanings are antithetical.

He does the same with the Greek word for “Lord” (Κύριος, Kyrios), assigning one meaning in connection with Paul’s Jewish upbringing and another in connection with his Greco-Roman audience.57 With the latter group Paul used it to connote Jesus as lord of the whole world, but in the context of his Jewish lineage he used the word to refer to the sovereignty of the one true God of Israel (Isa 43:23).

54Ibid., 51.
55For further elaboration, see Thomas, Evangelical Hermeneutics 141-64.
56Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 42-43, especially 43.
57Ibid., 56-57.
For Wright the term has both meanings in Phil 2:11.58

Romans 1:17
Wright also assigns a double meaning to the word often translated “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosynē) in Paul’s writings. From a Jewish perspective he sees “the righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, dikaiosynē theou) in such passages as Rom 1:17; 3:20; 10:3 as referring to God’s faithfulness to His covenant with Israel (cf. Isaiah 40–55).59 In addition, he sees the same phrase in the same passages as a forensic term, the picture of the judge in a law court pronouncing a defendant not guilty.60 In the former case the genitive in “the righteousness of God” is a possessive genitive—“a quality in God”—and in the latter case it is a subjective genitive—“an active power which goes out” from God.61 Wright sees both senses as intended in each passage,62 in other words, two meanings for the same expression in each text, another hermeneutical flaw.

Dunn follows essentially the same line of reasoning in assigning a double meaning to the expression dikaiosynē theou in Rom 1:17. Like Wright, he views dikaiosynē as a relational term because of its background in Hebrew usage. In other words, he views “righteousness” as the meeting of obligations laid upon the individual by the relationship of which he or she is part.63 On the basis of such a definition, he sees the genitive in dikaiosynē theou as both a subjective genitive—“an activity of God”—and an objective genitive—“a gift bestowed by God.”64 Though he defines the genitives differently from Wright, he commits the same hermeneutical blunder as Wright by assigning two meanings to the same expression in the same text.

Regarding ὁ δικαιόω (dikaiōō), the verb form of dikaiosynē, Dunn draws a similar conclusion:

The other dispute . . . was whether the verb dikaiōō means “make righteous” or “reckon as righteous.” But once again the basic idea assumed by Paul was of a relationship in which God acts on behalf of his human partner, first in calling Israel into and then in sustaining Israel in its covenant with him. So once again the answer is not one or the

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58Ibid., 56-57, 66.
59Ibid., 96-97.
60Ibid., 97-98.
61Ibid., 101, 103.
62Ibid.
64Ibid., 344.
other but both.65

Since a person needs good works to remain in the covenant family, in addition to reckoning a person as righteous, God must also make him righteous in order for that person to obtain deliverance from final destruction,66 according to Dunn.

**Romans 5:12, 18-19**

In discussing the last clause of Rom 5:12—“because all sinned”—Wright prefers to translate the aorist tense of the verb “all sinned” (ἡμαρτον, ἡμαρταν) referring to the prinal act of Adam, at the same time preferring not to place too much weight on the tense of the verb. His inclination in downplaying the tense of the verb results from equivocating on the meaning of the clause.67 As a result, he comes up with the following two meanings for the clause:

Paul’s meaning must in any case be both that an entail of sinfulness has spread throughout the human race from its first beginnings and that each individual has contributed their own share to it. Paul offers no further clue as to how the first of these actually works or how the two interrelate.68

The two meanings are in obvious conflict with one another: does Paul refer to personal sin or to sin as transmitted from generation to generation? Wright explicitly answers “both” and, in so doing, assigns two meanings to the passage. In the process, he ignores what has been the clause’s predominant interpretation, that when Adam committed his sin in Genesis 3, he did so as the federal (or seminal) head of the human race. He avoids mention of Adam’s federal headship because it would involve imputation of Adam’s sin to the whole race. When Paul continues this line of thought in Rom 5:18-19, the converse doctrine would be imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers, a doctrine that Wright staunchly rejects. He admits that the two verses speak of status, but interprets status as pertaining to the last day, at the final judgment,69 not to imputed righteousness presently attributed to believers. He puts it this way: “Justification, rooted in the cross and anticipating the verdict of the last day, gives people a new status, ahead of the performance of

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65Ibid.; cf. James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1–8, vol. 38A of Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988) 43, where the author writes, “‘dikaiosynē, ‘to justify’: does it mean ‘to make righteous’ or ‘to count righteous?’ . . . Since the basic idea is of a relationship in which God acts even for the defective partner, an action whereby God sustains the weaker partner of his covenant relationship within the relationship, the answer again is really both . . .”

66Dunn, Romans 1–8 39.


68Ibid., 527.

69Ibid., 529.
appropriate deeds.” In accord with covenantal nomism, he sees the necessity of good deeds to complete the justification. Absent from Wright’s discussion is any reference to the universal guilt of man through Adam, which would create the need for Christ’s imputed righteousness.71

At this point in his discussion of Rom 5:19 Wright notes his rejection of the view that Jesus’ perfect obedience to the law (His active obedience) acquired for Him a righteousness that is then imputed to those in Christ through His death on the cross (His passive obedience).72 Drawing upon Isa 53:11 regarding the suffering servant of the Lord, he sees Christ’s obedience in death as an act to replace Israel’s disobedience.73 For Wright, Christ’s life of obedience has no place in His representation of those in Christ. On the contrary, however, to divorce Christ’s passive obedience from His active obedience renders His passive obedience meaningless. Romans 5:19 points to Adam’s life of disobedience as representative of the whole human race and to Christ’s life of obedience, including His death, as representative of all believers. The imputation of a righteousness derived both from Christ’s active and from His passive obedience contradicts NP teaching.

The conspicuous habit of the NP to assign multiple meanings to single terms, phrases, or clauses in an individual passage signals the utter confusion generated by the system as a whole. Along with its assignment of multiple meanings, the NP also disregards biblical context.

Disregard for Biblical Context

Representatives of the NP repeatedly violate the hermeneutical principle of giving closest attention to the immediate context of a given passage. They invariably jump from passage to passage without a thorough consideration of the various contexts. The result is that they read into a given passage something that is not in that passage’s immediate context, thereby violating the original author’s intention and the original reader’s understanding of what was written.74 Terry warns against such a practice: “We must avoid the danger of overstepping in this matter [i.e., the matter of using cross-references too carelessly]” and “There may be a likeness of sentiment without any real parallelism [i.e., in regard to verbal parallels between separate passages].”75

70Ibid.
71Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives 182.
72Wright, “Romans” 529.
73Ibid.
74Elsewhere I have called this “hermeneutical hopskotch” (Thomas, Evangelical Hermeneutics 363).
Several citations will illustrate violations of this principle that are very widespread among NP proponents.

“Gospel” in Rom 1:1, 16
Regarding “gospel” (εὐαγγελίον, evangelion) in Rom 1:1, Wright comments, “In Paul’s Jewish world, the word looked back to Isa 40:9 and 52:7, where a messenger was to bring to Jerusalem the good news of Babylon’s defeat, the end of Israel’s exile, and the personal return of YHWH to Zion.”76 Wright draws his meaning of the word from an OT context, a prophecy of Isaiah regarding national Israel, to define a meaning in Rom 1:1, a letter addressed to a church composed predominantly of Gentiles. He does this, of course, to support his theory of covenantal nomism.

Traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutical principles dictate that this is a use of cross-references which is too careless because no real parallelism exists between the two passages. The proper approach would have been to draw the meaning of the word from Rom 1:9, 15, 16, passages in the same chapter. In Rom 1:15 Paul expresses his willingness to preach the gospel to the predominantly Gentile church in Rome, and in 1:16 he defines the gospel as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. How would Gentiles in Rome relate to the end of Israel’s exile and YHWH’s return to Jerusalem? Wright would contend that covenantal nomism, the alleged rabbinic-based system, had already by the year A.D. 55 permeated Gentile thinking in faraway Rome. Such a theory is at best farfetched and at worst ridiculous.

Romans 1:16 indicates clearly the individual salvific connotation of Paul’s gospel. To read that verse otherwise involves a redefining not only of “gospel” but also of “salvation.” Wright would have his readers believe that justification was not “so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.”77 not how to become a part of the people of God as it is about how one can tell who is a part of that community. He can hardly say contextually that justification is not salvific when the word for salvation is in this very context, but he does so anyway by defining salvation as the rescue of Israel from pagan oppression,78 a concept that is completely foreign to the context of the book of Romans. National salvation is hardly in view when Paul individualizes its recipients with the words “everyone who believes” (1:16). Such a series of redefinitions stems from a preunderstanding imposed on the text of Romans, not from the context of Romans itself.

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76 Wright, “Romans” 415; cf. idem, What Saint Paul Really Said 40-44.
77 Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 119.
78 Wright, “Romans” 424.
Romans 2:6, 14-15, 28-29

Wright multiplies his contextual errors in comments on Romans 2. Two illustrations must suffice. (1) He treats vv. 1-16 as dealing primarily with the judgment of God even though the chapter falls squarely in a section of the epistle (1:18–3:20) that emphasizes universal human sinfulness. The section deals with mankind’s guilt, but in it Wright finds proof that justification is based on works, a clear contradiction to a later section where Paul deals directly with the subject of justification. Romans 3:20 says plainly that no one will be justified by works. Regarding Rom 2:6, Wright writes, “To the surprise . . . of those whose traditional readings of the letter lead them to expect that Paul will here simply declare that all are sinners, so that justification can be by faith alone apart from works of the law, he announces on the contrary that justification will be on the basis of works (v. 6). . . .” Regarding 2:13, he writes, “For the moment, he is content to assert the point: Israel’s ethnic privilege, backed up by possession of Torah, will be of no avail at the final judgment if Israel has not kept Torah. Justification, at the last, will be on the basis of performance, not possession.” He discounts the possibility that Paul, in the middle of his discussion of human guilt, introduces a hypothetical or theoretical illustration of a human feat that is absolutely impossible to accomplish. In essence, he admits the contextual isolation of his position when he writes, “Throughout the section so far Paul has been saying things that cry out for further explanation, which he will provide as the letter moves forward.”

Also, in his disregard for immediate context, he finds references to justified Gentiles in chapter 2, before the epistle has reached the point of discussing justification. Regarding 2:14-15, he writes, “[H]ere he is hinting at a theme he will explore later in the letter, namely that the people in question are Christian Gentiles (vv. 14-15—indeed, Christian Jews and Gentiles alike (vv. 7, 10).” Regarding 2:28-29, he writes, “Paul now transfers the name, and the validation, to a different group. In the previous verses he has referred to Gentiles who, though uncircum-cised, keep the law’s regulations; he can only mean Gentile Christians, since this passage, explaining what has gone before, is clearly about membership in the new, . . .

7Ibid., 438.
8Ibid. He writes, “[H]e [i.e., Paul] announces on the contrary that the last assize justification will be on the basis of works (v. 6), and that there will not only be tribulation and wrath for all wrongdoers, but glory, honor, immortality, eternal life, and peace for all who seek for these things in the appropriate way (vv. 7, 10).”
9Ibid., 439.
10Ibid., 440.
11Ibid., 441.
12Ibid.
13Ibid.
14Ibid.
or renewed, covenant." All this results from importing his covenantal nomistic preunderstanding into Romans 2, which in turn results in his importing teaching from later parts of Romans into the passage.

(2) In 2:17-29 he applies references to Israel’s sinfulness corporately rather than individually when he writes about 2:17, “We should beware of the natural tendency, within our individualistic culture, to assume that when Paul uses the second-person singular (‘If you, singular, call yourself a Jew’) he is referring to a typical individual.” He sees this as a reference to “the national boast of ethnic Israel.” In so doing, he masks the utter corruption of first-century Judaism by focusing on Israel’s failure as a nation to be a light in the world. Yes, Israel did fail in her national responsibility, but at this point in developing his case for universal guilt, Paul is speaking of individual sins within Judaism of that day.

Covenantal nomism would have readers believe that Judaism was not so corrupt that widespread stealing, adultery, robbery of temples, and the like existed within the system, that it was a system that kept faith and works in proper balance. Yet that is not the picture of Judaism derived elsewhere, nor is it the picture Paul paints here. Wright’s allegiance to the Sanders-defined picture of a refined religious system forces him to read into the present context elements that are not present, elements that Paul certainly did not intend.

**Romans 3:21-26**

Regarding Romans 3, Wright writes,

Paul’s purpose in 3:21-26 is not, then, to give a full “doctrine of the atonement,” a complete account of how God dealt with the sins of the world through the death of Jesus. Rather, as one part of his argument that on the cross the righteousness of God was unveiled, he is content to state, not completely how, but simply that this had been accomplished.

Wright’s interpretation of “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” in v. 22a is equivalent to “God’s saving justice through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” He arrives at such an unusual rendering of ἰδικαίουσιν (dikaiosynē, “righteousness”) and πίστις (pistis, “faith”) by alluding to Paul’s reference to Abraham in Galatians 3, which he uses as a springboard to pull in the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 15:5, 13-16. Admitting that the word “covenant” does not

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86 Ibid., 449.
87 Ibid., 445.
88 Ibid., 467.
89 Ibid., 465, 470.
90 Ibid., 464.
occur in this immediate context—nor does it occur anywhere in Romans until 11:27—Wright seeks to build a case that 3:21–4:25 affirms that what God has done in Jesus the Messiah is the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. Paul does refer to Abraham in Rom 4:1, 2, 3, 9, 12, 16 and to the promise God gave him (Rom 4:13, 14, 16, 20), but emphasizes the importance of Abraham as example of “faith,” a word that occurs 35 times in Romans and nine times in chapter 4.

To arrive at such an interpretation of Rom 3:21-26, Wright must redefine “righteousness”—a word occurring 30 times in Romans—as well as “faith” in ways that are foreign to the context in which they occur. As one has put it, he must “strain Paul through an imposed biblical-theological grid supposedly deduced from the Second Temple literature.” In fact, in seeking to prove his point regarding 3:21-26, Wright pulls in Leviticus 16, 4 Maccabees 17:22, and Isa 52:13–53:12 to support his rendering of Jesus’ faithfulness, all of this to the neglect of the context of Romans 3, which so plainly speaks of human sin and guilt and God’s remedy of an imputed righteousness available to people (Rom 3:9-21, 23-26).

**Romans 3:27-28**

To continue his “imposed biblical-theological grid” in Rom 3:27-28, Wright must disregard the immediate context again. He admits that the “therefore” in 3:27 normally would draw a conclusion from the section just completed in 3:21-26, but since that sense does not suit his superimposed scheme, he must refer the “therefore” all the way back to Rom 2:17-24, a very unnatural leap to a faraway context.

He says that in 3:28 Paul resolves the antithesis between “the law of works” and “the law of faith” by declaring that a person is ‘justified by faith apart from works of the law.’ In this verse Wright reports “on a calculation that has taken place, not in the present passage, but elsewhere, which he will shortly unveil.” In essence, this commentator admits that he must go outside the immediate context to derive meanings for these two verses, meanings to accommodate his preunderstanding of first-century Judaism.

**Romans 4:4-5**

Wright’s preference for noncontextual factors in his interpretation comes...
through in a striking fashion in Rom 4:4-5. In his system of thought, faith is not the way one becomes a Christian but is a badge of covenant membership, and imputed righteousness is nonexistent. In vv. 4-5 he acknowledges the bookkeeping metaphor of employment and wage-earning in vv. 4-5a, but says Paul reverts to a metaphor of the lawcourt and the covenant in v. 5b. In connection with 4:3 in the same chapter, he assures his readers that “righteousness” has nothing to do with moral goodness and that “faith” is not a means for obtaining that “righteousness.” Rather, he says, “righteousness” is the status of being a member of the covenant, and “faith” is “the badge, the sign, that reveals that status because it is its key symptom.”

He rejects reading v. 5 as a direct contrast of v. 4, the picture that “[w]orkers get paid not by grace but by debt, but believers get paid not by debt but by grace.” He prefers the following explanation:

The two sentences are not in fact balanced, partly because Paul pulls himself out of the bookkeeping metaphor halfway through v. 5 and returns to his main points, the lawcourt and the covenant. What Paul says in v. 5 not only contrasts with v. 4 (“working” and “not working”), but also deconstructs the whole frame of thought: The alternative to “working” is to “trust the one who justifies the ungodly.”

His unstated reason for reading in a deconstruction between v. 5a and v. 5b is his embracing of the NP on first-century Judaism as characteristic of the Pauline perspective also. Neither Judaism nor Paul taught justification by faith. With them justification was only a badge of covenant membership, and final justification—i.e., vindication—was by works. To accept v. 5 as a straightforward reversal of v. 4 would teach justification by faith, thereby condemning the NP to deconstruction.

In applying the term “ungodly” to Abraham in v. 5, Wright points out Abraham’s pagan background as explaining that ungodliness, thereby acknowledging

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98 Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said 125; his words are, “Faith is the badge of covenant membership, not something someone ‘performs’ as a kind of initiation test.”
99 Ibid., 98; his words are, “If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom. . . . To imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge’s righteousness is simply a category mistake. That is not how the language works.”
100 Wright, “Romans” 491-92.
101 Ibid., 491.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 491-92.
the moral connotations of “righteousness” which he has denied on the page before.\textsuperscript{104} He further complicates his own inconsistencies by noting that God established His covenant with Abraham while he was still ungodly and by continuing to contend that faith is a badge of covenant membership.\textsuperscript{105} As Waters notes, “It may be, then, that Wright considers ‘ungodly’ to mean an imperfectly covenantally faithful person.”\textsuperscript{106}

Historically speaking, God’s covenant with Abraham came before Abraham’s justification by faith. The initial statement of the covenant came in Genesis 12, but the statement of Abraham’s justification did not come until Genesis 15. So a span of three chapters of Genesis separates Abraham’s covenant membership and his receiving of the alleged indispensable badge of covenant membership. In Rom 4:4-5 the NP runs into a hopeless quagmire from which escape is impossible, all because the system reads an ill-defined understanding of Judaism into the passage.

\textbf{Romans 6:1-11}

As a follow-up to his discussion of 5:12-21, Wright asks, “Do Christians find themselves now in the Adam solidarity or in the Christ solidarity?”\textsuperscript{107} He answers, “Christians, he [i.e., Paul] says, have left the old solidarity, and belong to the new; they must behave accordingly. The transfer is effected by dying and rising with the Messiah. And the event in which this dying and rising is accomplished is baptism.”\textsuperscript{108}

Wright labors the point that water baptism, not faith, is the means by which anyone becomes a member of the covenant community. Paul, he says, “understood baptism in terms of the new exodus,” having made such a link already in 1 Cor 10:2 when he spoke of the wilderness generation as “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”\textsuperscript{109} Wright views Christians as a “new exodus” people and that baptism was “both a dramatic symbol of the new exodus and a sign of Jesus’ death.”\textsuperscript{110} Faith must be based on water baptism in his view of Rom 6:11.\textsuperscript{111} Viewing Christians as a new-exodus people does not come from Paul in the context of Romans 6; it is rather a product of Wright’s NP dream world.

In paralleling Christians with the wilderness generation under Moses, however, Wright fails to note a significant difference. The generation under Moses

\begin{footnotes}
\item[104]Ibid., 492.
\item[105]Ibid.
\item[106]Waters, \textit{Justification and the New Perspectives} 148.
\item[107]Wright, “Romans” 533.
\item[108]Ibid.
\item[109]Ibid. 533-34.
\item[110]Ibid., 534.
\item[111]Ibid., 535.
\end{footnotes}
passed through the Red Sea bone-dry (cf. 1 Cor 10:2); with the new-wilderness
generation—as Wright calls Christians—baptism calls upon them to be drenched
from head to toe. It is also notable that just after Paul dismisses one external
rite—circumcision—as meaningless in relation to the covenant (Rom 2:25-29),
Wright would have him introducing another external rite as a means for becoming
a covenant member. Water does not appear in the context of Romans 6, nor does
water baptism play a prominent role in Paul’s writings elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor 1:14-17).

Suggesting that water baptism is the means for becoming a covenant
member is another example of reading into a context elements that are foreign to the
writer’s thoughts.

The Hermeneutical Upshot of the New Perspective

A review of a few of the numerous hermeneutical escapades of the NP has
illustrated the utter bankruptcy of the system. It has drawn heavily upon a certain
preunderstanding about first-century Judaism and has on that basis proceeded to
follow an inevitable trail of wrongheaded conclusions in various portions of Paul’s
writings. It has fallen into the fallacious pattern of subjectivism promoted by the
new evangelical hermeneutics rather than applying time-tested principles of
grammatical-historical interpretation.

A word of caution is in order regarding those who have been somewhat
swayed by the NP, those who say they see some value in it, but who have not bought
into the system as a whole. Anyone who has embraced even a small aspect of the NP
has endorsed the starting point of Sanders’ covenantal nomism which defines the
nature of first-century Judaism. That person cannot free himself from the system’s
degenerative hermeneutical approach, because without Sanders’ covenantal nomism
the NP does not exist. A person cannot embrace traditional grammatical-historical
principles and take even a first step toward the NP. The two approaches to Pauline
literature are utterly incompatible.

Brief Summary of New Perspective Errors

The following summary of the articles derived from the Winter 2005 Faculty
Lecture Series states some of the erroneous positions advocated either explicitly or
implicitly by the New Perspective on Paul. Whenever sound, grammatical-historical
principles of biblical interpretation are violated, error is the inevitable result. NP
proponents do not always agree with one another. In cases where they disagree
among themselves, therefore, I have tried to reflect the position of N. T. Wright in
the summary, because he is finding widest positive acceptance among contemporary
evangelicals.

1. First-century Judaism was not a salvation-by-works religion.
2. First-century Judaism was not especially marked by hypocrisy, petty legalism,
self-serving, self-deceiving casuistry, arrogance, and a lack of confidence in God.
3. God has chosen Israel and given them the law which He enables them to keep.
4. Until the death and resurrection of Christ, by virtue of God’s election, any physical descendant of Abraham is a member of the covenant people and thereby justified.
5. Those who maintain the covenantal nomism relationship by obedience are the ones who will be saved.
6. First-century Judaism had a correct balance between faith, grace, and works and was not just a religion of externals.
7. Covenantal nomism provides a means of atonement if a person does break the Mosaic law.
8. Paul retained his covenantal nomism after his Damascus Road experience.
9. From that point on, his mission was to dispense with circumcision, sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions of the Mosaic law as boundaries that limited who could be a member of the covenant people.
10. Human beings do not have a sin nature because of the original sin of Adam.
11. Paul did not have an introspective conscience, i.e., no guilt because of his sinfulness
12. Guilt was not expressed in Paul’s writings, but was introduced by Augustine and Luther.
13. Justification by faith and imputed righteousness was read into Paul by Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Calvin because of their contemporary situations.
14. Paul was a Shammaite who retained covenantal nomism in his theology but added the Lordship of Christ to the system.
15. Faith is not the means of justification or of joining the covenant community; it is rather a badge of covenant membership. One joins the covenant community through water baptism.
16. Justification is a process that is completed only at the final judgment; therefore, no one has eternal security.
17. Final justification is based on works of obedience to the Mosaic law so that any justification a person enjoys at present is only preliminary and can be reversed.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS
ON THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

Compiled by Dennis M. Swanson
Seminary Librarian

In the last several years a revision of an old theological error has become popular within evangelicalism. The adopted name is The New Perspective on Paul, or New Perspective Theology (see F. David Farnell’s earlier article, “The New Perspective on Paul: Its Basic Tenets, History, and Presuppositions,” for details). This issue of The Master’s Seminary Journal consists of the Seminary’s Faculty Chapel Lecture Series of January and February 2005. The following bibliography contains the fruit of the lecturers’ collective research plus some additional sources.

The listing is not exhaustive but is an effort to facilitate further research and study by TMSJ readers. It is divided into four sections: (1) Reference Works; (2) Monographs and Multi-Author Works; (3) Journal and Periodical Literature; and (4) Unpublished and Internet Resources.

Reference Works (Including Lexical Sources)


Monographs and Multi-Author Works


Luther. “The Smalcald Articles, A Reprint from the “Concordia Triglotta.” in Commemoration of the Four-Hundredth Anniversary of the Presentation of This Confession of the Lutheran Church at Schmalkalden, Germany, in 1537. St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1937.


______. *The Historical Figure of Jesus.* New York: Penguin, 1993.


### Journal and Periodical Literature


*Unpublished Materials and Internet Resources*

BOOK REVIEWS


This book argues for meditation in silence, clear for example in Ps 62:1, 5, and views this as a great key to a transformed life. Barton’s version of contemplative prayer has some roots in monastic desert reflection, a tradition from the fourth century of the Christian era forward. Elements such as repeating a word or phrase to induce a silent state are akin to pagan Eastern mystic contemplation. Barton does not go as far as the latter; she does not teach the blanking out of the mind (an altered consciousness).

Scripture’s references to silence are parts of a vital, believing life, but not the main, overall catalyst for life blessing that Barton seems to make of these. In the Word, verses on being silent or still (for example, Ps 46:10; Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13) are occasional and may not mean silence per se, but desisting/ceasing from some attitude or action such as frenzy, anxiety, or fretfulness, and trusting the Lord as a refuge and not fearing, as in Ps 46:2 (cf. Gerald Wilson, Psalms, Vol. 1, in The New Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 721). In contrast to occasional silent prayer, which is needed, overwhelmingly frequent in the Bible is spoken prayer. Barton does not integrate quiet reflection/prayer with other factors in a life of victory. Biblical balance and perspective are missing. What about being led by the Spirit, being built up in God’s Word, speaking prayer in praise/thanks, confession, petition, intercession, affirmation, or witnessing, using one’s gifts to edify others, obediently showing deeds of loving service, giving to God’s causes, and the like?

Barton endorses Thomas Merton, a trappist monk from Kentucky. Before death by accidental electrocution (1968), Merton wrote much to define and back “contemplative” or “centering prayer.” Merton has had a very wide, profound influence on many in Roman Catholic, and even Protestant churches. He articulates his ideas, at length, for example, in his Contemplative Prayer (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, Doubleday, 1971). “Centering” in Merton’s sense refers to meditating on Scripture and praying in other forms of prayer such as petition, then using devices such as repeating words to hone into a special meditation. In this, one shuts out and leaves behind all concepts, thoughts, or other uses of the mind. Another tack is to go without prior prayer or meditation and just “center” directly on this state minus thought but stayed on God. This is seen as higher, purer, or superior to medita-

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tion/prayer in any regular aspects such as praise/thanks, confession, petition, intercession.

Because of Barton’s lack of clarity, one wonders how far she agrees with this. A problem is that God’s Word never explicitly distinguishes regular meditation from any form of meditation, prayer, or fixation that fosters love, light, or seeing God’s face (some of Merton’s aims). Of course, some cases are distinct from the normal in God’s giving special visions and other venues of supernatural revelation.

A Roman Catholic abbot, M. Basil Pennington, has been an articulator/defender for the Mertonian “centering” (Centering Prayer, Renewing an Ancient Christian Form [New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1982]; also Centered Living, The Way of Centering Prayer [Liguori, Mo.: Liguori/Triumph, 1999]). This is relevant to evangelicals, for many Protestant churches have bought into contemplative prayer practices, drawing upon some Eastern and monastic features. Richard Foster has argued for what he feels is a valid Protestant version of this “contemplation” in his best-selling Celebration of Discipline (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) and in his Prayer, Finding the Heart’s True Home (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992). Several other authors express similar views. Those who claim some forms of contemplation/prayer may or may not drift away from a biblical kind of meditation (cf. reviews in this issue of TMSJ on Ray Yungen and Brian Flynn).

Barton’s twelve chapters reason that her main secret for finding rest in body, mind, and soul is in silence as she sees God. Vital silent communion is good, but a wider venue is better. Biblically, a vital godly life is found in a blend of trust, the Spirit’s control, a healthy relation with God’s Word, a refreshing, balanced life of prayer in all its facets, not just in silence. Barton often and at length tells of her exhaustion as a Christian speaker, emptiness of life, sins within herself and against her family, and a need to find a solution. In her mind, answers to her dilemma came from her solitude/silence. But this is a very limited part of what the Bible mentions as components of a healthy prayer, let alone the whole Christian life. Being alone and silent before God took her higher and deeper into enjoying Him, yet that oversimplifies matters.

Another problem is misinterpretations of her main Bible text. On Elijah’s flight from Jezebel to a desert cave, she notes the Lord’s mighty wind, earthquake, and fire, then the “sound of a gentle blowing” (or whisper). To her, the latter is a proof-text for “silence.” That is not all. The silence is within Elijah himself (his meditative practice), rather than an external phenomenon from God just as He caused the first three phenomena. So she casts Elijah here as an example of entering contemplative silence. She allegorizes many other details of 1 Kings 19 throughout the book.

Barton magnifies solitude/silence as her chief resource from God for various special blessings in a godly walk. In true biblical examples, prayer leading to spiritual success is not exclusively in silence, but is the spoken kind. This is true in the Pentateuch, historical books, wisdom books, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation. Silence is mentioned (Ps 62:1, 5, for example) and can be helpful, but it is an exception to what is by far the usual case, spoken words. Blessings of godly living are not chiefly or especially from times in silence, as if what happens in such instances is the main or only key.
The authoress also does not show how meditation/prayer in silence integrates in overall balance with aspects of prayer the Bible says the most about. The aspects are such as praise/thanks, confession, petition, intercession, affirmation (e.g., “I will love Thee, O Lord . . .” Ps 18:1).

The book often has arbitrary claims. One is Barton’s meaning for the biblical “wait” as if this works only in silence (14). In Hebrew thought, to “wait on the Lord” is to trust or hope with patient, expectant reliance, as an attitude of life (Ps 27:14; Isa. 40:31). Of course, one can trust while praying in silence or vocally. A reader can also question Barton’s apparent belief about “demons of desire to perform, to be seen as competent (at least!), productive, culturally relevant, balanced” (18).

The book reflects often about the benefits of solitude and silence. Frequent erroneous and arbitrary opinions, misinterpretations as on Elijah in 1 Kings 19, and the imbalanced importance assigned to silence with no explanation of the content are disturbing. This reviewer cannot recommend the book. True biblical meditation is at its core an absorbing reflection on God, His Word, and life’s aspects. Christians must saturate themselves with all parts of a godly life, including prayer. The great majority of prayers in the Bible are vocal.


Ergun and Emir Caner are two brothers of Turkish descent who were reared in Sunni Islam. They trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as young men through the faithful witness of a best friend from high school. Ergun is now Professor of Theology and Church History at Criswell College in Dallas. Emir is currently Assistant Professor of Church History and Anabaptist Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. They are eminently qualified to speak authoritatively about Islam.

Assurance of salvation is among the first topics the Caner brothers discuss (“Security, Politics, and Jihad,” 30-38). They point out that even Muhammad questioned his own salvation (32). Demonstrating their willingness to speak plainly, they contradict the strained, but “politically correct” view of newscasters and politicians, who claim that jihad is nothing more than an “internal struggle for piety” and not military engagement (36). Indeed, the military nature of Islam under Muhammad places him in stark contrast to Jesus who was peaceful and merciful. Jesus’ character “offers continuous, unassailable compassion. Muhammad was both erratic and hostile to those who would not follow him” (52). In later chapters (“The Illusion of Religious Liberty: Terrorism from Within,” 172-80, and “The Bloodshed of Jihad,” 181-99), the authors continue their frank discussion of the true character of Islam.

In “The Story of Islam: A Trail of Blood” (66-81) the Caners unmask the historical naïveté and collective amnesia of most Westerners. With “the notable exception of the Crusades, Muslims have initiated almost all wars” (78) from the time of Muhammad to the present global war on terrorism. In spite of this history,
however, if Christians hope to be successful in preaching the gospel to Muslims, they must “persuade Muslims compassionately, wait for them patiently, and pray for them earnestly” (80).

Valuable (and accurate) information about various facets of Islam fill the chapters of this volume. Besides an excellent chapter on Muhammad (39-65), others deal with the Islamic holy book (82-94), the extra-Qur’anic books (94-101), the names of Allah (102-19), the five pillars of Islam (120-31), the religious calendar of Islam (152-60), and the various divisions within Islam (161-71).

The nature and identity of Allah as compared with the God of the Old and New Testaments is a controversial topic (102-8). The Caners reach a conclusion slightly at odds with that of Timothy George (“Is the God of Muhammad the Father of Jesus?,” Christianity Today 46/2 [Feb. 4, 2002]:28-35) and Imad N. Shehadeh (“Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?,” Bibliotheca Sacra 161/641 [January-March 2004]:14-26). Based upon this reviewer’s fifteen years of ministry among Muslims in Bangladesh and exhaustive study of the Scripture, the view of George and Shehadeh is preferable to that of the Caners.

Nearly everything a Muslim does is different from the way Westerners do things. This is partially due to the fact that “[v]irtually every action taken by Muslims, from how they approach your home to how they brush their teeth, has precedent in the Hadith” (101). After making such an observation, the Caners offer some sound advice for Christians in doubt about what they should do: “to avoid offense . . . allow the Muslim to act first” (101).

Providing one citation after another from the Qur’an and the Hadith, the authors expose the radically chauvinistic philosophy of Islam in regard to women (132-41). The chapter highlights the tragedy of Western women who marry a foreign Muslim without understanding Islamic theology or Islamic history. Again, this contrasts with Jesus who elevated women.

Not only does this significant volume provide two former Muslims’ view of Islam, it provides a look at Christianity from the perspective of a Muslim (200-211). Five different perceptions are discussed and then a Christian response is offered that will aid the Christian in witnessing to Muslims. A concluding chapter (223-34) provides superb advice on witnessing. One of the soundest suggestions is to “[e]mphasize the forgiveness of Christ” (228).

The volume concludes with four informative appendixes: “Topical Index to the Qur’an” (235-40), “Free Will, Fatalism, and the Qur’an” (241-42), “Christianity and Islam: A Comparison of Beliefs” (243-47), and “Glossary of Arabic Islamic Terms” (248-51). A subject index to provide greater access to the volume’s material would make a valuable addition for readers.


Handbook on the Prophets is one of the latest contributions of Robert Chisholm (Professor of OT Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary) to the study of
the Hebrew prophets. Baker’s choice of *Handbook* as a title for volumes in this series (cf. Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 2001) is somewhat misleading since they are really commentaries. The introduction to each of the prophetic books is very brief and, by the publisher’s design, neglects major issues relating to date, authorship, unity, and canonicity. For example, the introduction to Isaiah does not delve into the debates over unity and authorship (13-14). The introduction to Daniel does contain a helpful section on “Historical Problems” (293-94). This reviewer was surprised that Chisholm’s discussion of Darius the Mede did not mention John Whitcomb’s *Darius the Mede* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959).

Baker’s format presents extensive bibliographies, helpfully dividing them into “Commentaries” and “Recent Studies.” The latter is subdivided into “General” and major sections of text for the major prophets (e.g., “Isaiah 1–12”). The vast majority of the volume is a well-written concise commentary offering many sound interpretations and suggestions for new approaches to old cruxes that will make the volume valuable to its readers. One example is the prophecy concerning Cyrus in Isa 44:24–45:8. Chisholm, responding to critics who would post-date the text, points out that “the sovereign Creator who speaks so eloquently of his greatness in this passage is certainly capable of foretelling and determining the future” (108). His interpretation of Isa 49:1–54:17 is an excellent exposition of messianic prophecy with only a few glitches—something we expect of any human commentator (111-23). Dealing with Isa 56:1-8, he provides a clear explanation for the end of Mosaic law and the church’s relationship to the new covenant (126-27). He states that Jesus the Messiah fulfilled the shepherd-king prophecy in Ezekiel 34 (278, 348). Few OT scholars have voiced the same suggestion that perhaps Isaiah (2:2-4) and Micah (4:1-3) might be drawing on a common source rather than one being dependent on the other (421 n. 212). In addition, he takes a passionate anti-abortion stance in his illustrations and comments (166 n. 31, 387).

Chisholm’s commentary reveals his love for the text and for the study of ANE history that forms its backdrop. Therefore, when he discusses texts like the oracle about the invasion of Moab (Isa 15:1–16:14) he looks for extrabiblical corroboration for the biblical record of historical events to help his readers see such ties when they exist and to inform them when such corroboration does not exist (55). However, ANE historiography and literary characteristics have led him and others to treat some of the large numbers in the OT as hyperbolic. Thus, Chisholm believes that a number like 185,000 for the Assyrian dead in Isa 37:36-38 is far higher than reality (89)—a conclusion this reviewer does not believe is necessary.

The publisher’s approach to the bibliographies is both a help and a hindrance. Baker limited most bibliographic entries to post-1990 publications (10). True to this standard, Chisholm’s entries in “Recent Studies” were all (with but one exception: Holladay’s *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage*, Eerdmans, 1978) published after 1990. The helpful aspect is the rich trove of mainly periodical literature carefully chosen to give the avid college student the inside track. However, the limitation is a hindrance because it eliminates significant evangelical works to which the target audience should be exposed: Sir Robert Anderson (reprint of *The Coming Prince*, Kregel, 1975; reprint of *Daniel in the Critics’ Den*, Revell, n.d.), David Baron (reprint of *Commentary on Zechariah*, Kregel, 1988; reprint of *The Servant of Jehovah*, Wipf & Stock, 2001), Robert Culver (*The Sufferings and the
Glory of the Lord’s Righteous Servant, Christian Service Foundation, 1958; Daniel and the Latter Days, Moody, 1977), Charles Feinberg (The Prophecy of Ezekiel, Moody, 1969), Alva McClain (Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, Zondervan, 1960), Robert Dick Wilson (especially his Studies in Daniel, Putnam’s Sons, 1917), and Leon Wood (Commentary on Daniel, Zondervan, 1973). Chisholm could have referred to some of these works within the body of the text and its footnotes, but the ambitious nature of the enterprise requires a brevity imical to a wider exposure to significant sources.

In this reviewer’s opinion, a few excellent evangelical commentaries should not have been omitted from the bibliographies’ “Commentaries” sections. The following are but a few select examples in addition to Feinberg’s Ezekiel and Wood’s Daniel already mentioned above: Unger’s Zechariah (Zondervan, 1970), Barker and Bailey’s Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah (NAC; Broadman & Holman, 1998), Harrison’s Jeremiah and Lamentations (TOTC, IVP, 1973), Hubbard’s Hosea (TOTC, IVP, 1989), as well as Feinberg’s “Jeremiah,” Wood’s “Hosea,” and Patterson’s “Joel” from Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Zondervan, 1978-1992). In the footnotes Chisholm does cite a few commentaries omitted from the bibliographies.

Chisholm’s treatment of some traditional messianic texts as indirectly messianic rather than exclusively messianic will be disconcerting to some readers (including this reviewer). He concludes that the prophet intended Isa 9:6-7 to refer to a mere human king for whom he ascribes hyperbolic titles (38-40). Isaiah was not aware that another descendant of David would arise who would ultimately fulfill even the hyperbolic language in the prophetic announcement. Chisholm believes that the context of Zech 12:10 and 13:7 requires a non-messianic interpretation (474-75). He explains that John 19:37 refers to the OT passage as a metaphor tied to Christ’s spear wound only as “a specific example of Israel’s rejection by God” (475). As for Jesus’ own apparent application of the text (Matt 26:31), He “utilized it in a proverbial manner” (475), not as an indication that it was directly messianic. This reviewer agrees with Will Varner’s conclusion that it should be interpreted as a direct messianic reference (The Messiah Revealed, Rejected, Received, Author House, 2004, 98-103).

Chisholm interprets Mal 4:5 as “essentially fulfilled in the person and ministry of John the Baptist” (483). He does not clarify exactly what he means by “essentially.” He does not reveal whether he thinks of the traditional interpretation that sees Elijah still returning just prior to Christ’s second advent (often associated with Rev 11:1-13; cp. Matt 17:1-8).

Archetypal interpretation plays a major role in Chisholm’s hermeneutic. It is one of the recurring refrains in this volume. It appears in his treatment of passages like Isa 11:10–12:6 (46). He identifies Assyria (59), Egypt (59), Edom (80), Babylon (53), Moab (69), and Tyre (64) as archetypes. This reviewer has the impression that “archetypal” is Chisholm’s code word for “eschatological” (cp. 406, with regard to an eschatological context for Obad 15-21, and 453, concerning Hag 2:6-7). Chisholm nowhere indicates whether identifying a nation like Assyria as an archetype allows for its historical involvement anywhere in prophecy. The impression the reader receives is that, if the national entity does not exist today (e.g., Tyre, 64), then it is not possible for any future existence of that nation. Indeed,
Chisholm charges interpreters who take the prophecies as a reference to a revived Assyria (or Babylon or Edom) with hyperliteralism (424). For the oracle concerning Babylon in Isaiah 13–14, the author rejects the possibility that absence of an immediate historical fulfillment could be an indication that the prophecy belongs to the still future realm of eschatology (53). He refers to the language of Jeremiah 50–51 as “undoubtedly stylized and exaggerated” (213). Chisholm does consider the eschatological option in some passages like Isa 19:1-25, but leaves the impression that eschatological fulfillment is actually “an essential, rather than literal, realization of the prophet’s vision” (59). Only in his commentary on Jer 22:17-19 does the reader find, concerning apparent unfulfilled prophecy, that “[w]hile the evidence does not corroborate the fulfillment of the prophecy, neither does it preclude it” (181). Instead of taking the reference to “Gog and Magog” in Ezekiel 38–39 as historical and that in Rev 20:7 as archetypal, he takes the earlier reference as archetypal (283).

Both Chisholm and this reviewer firmly believe that God is able to resurrect a body that has been burned to ashes and scattered to the four winds, assimilated into plants and animals. However, this reviewer is more comfortable than he about applying that doctrinal concept to the revival of Assyria or Babylon. As far as a sustained ethnic identity and continuous occupation of virtually the same geographical territory is concerned, the current inhabitants of Iraq and Iran might be nearer descendants of the ancient Assyrians or Babylonians than modern Israel is of ancient Israel. Eschatological “Assyrians” do not need to be called by the same name or have the same identical political boundaries to be the legitimate national heirs to the ancient Assyrians. In fact, in a striking parallel to the Jewish diaspora, there are thousands of “Assyrians” living in Pasadena and the Central Valley of California who claim exactly that and insist on being called “Assyrians” because of their ethnic heritage.

Since Chisholm states that “the exiles of the northern kingdom disappeared as a distinct ethnic entity as they were assimilated into the surrounding culture of their new homes” (46), he concludes that “a future reunion of Israel and Judah and the implementation of a new covenant with both cannot be literally fulfilled” (197, 280). Without clarification in this volume, the reader is left to wonder what Chisholm envisions for the future restoration of national Israel, which he fervently believes on the basis of NT texts like Romans 11.

In the author’s attempt to recall that the message of Jonah cannot be destroyed by liberals who deny the book’s historicity, he declares, “Unlike the exodus and the resurrection of Jesus, the historicity of the Book of Jonah is not foundational to redemptive history and biblical faith” (408). It is unfortunate that the readers of this volume will have to seek out Chisholm’s other writings on Jonah to discover that he truly does adhere to its historicity.

In his commentary on Ezekiel 28’s reference to a guardian cherub, Chisholm states that “we must assume that Ezekiel draws on an extrabiblical Eden tradition” (269). This reviewer would prefer to describe the interaction another way. The revelation that Ezekiel received was not colored by ANE traditions. ANE traditions, rather, were colored by the Eden history. The memory of those wonderful beings remained in the minds of the ancient peoples and they incorporated them into their art and architecture. The culture reflected the older reality from Eden. Divine
revelation provided Ezekiel with a firsthand confirmation of the reality of those beings and provided details no longer retained by the collective ANE memory, in addition to providing a corrective for some of the errors that had accumulated around the original kernel of truth.

“Seventy years” (Jer 25:11, 12; 29:10; 2 Chr 36:21; Dan 9:2), according to Chisholm, is a non-literal, stereotypical number (185). “Seventy weeks” (Dan 9:24) is likewise a symbolic number (317). He attributes the latter to the imprecision of “the apocalyptic literary genre” (317). He makes no attempt to identify viable options that would indicate that the number “seventy” could be literal rather than symbolic.

Lastly, without providing any clarification or disclaimer, a positive citation of Richard Rice regarding the nature of God (372) leaves the reader with the impression that Chisholm might agree with open theism. Readers would have to have read already his discussion of Jer 4:28 (161, esp. n. 25) and of the Cyrus prophecies in Isaiah (108) to know that their impression would be in error. Since the volume is written as a commentary, most will come to it piecemeal to look up a specific reference, rather than to read it through from start to finish as carefully as a reviewer might. It would have been of help for Chisholm to give at least a footnote reference back to his excellent statement on page 108 (which this reviewer quoted in the second paragraph of this review).


The late Edmund Clowney, who died earlier this year, was a longtime advocate of redemptive-historical preaching. Clowney was ordained to the preaching ministry in 1942. From 1952 to 1984, he served as professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and was president of that seminary from 1966 to 1982. From his seminary ministry, he influenced two generations of preachers of the “Westminster tradition.” Even in his years of retirement, Clowney maintained an active preaching ministry, finally centered at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, Virginia. It is fitting that in the providence of God, this book, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, was his final written work published for the church.

Clowney clearly states the thesis of his book in the preface: “Preachers who ignore the history of redemption in their preaching are ignoring the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in all the Scriptures” (10). For this author, every sermon preached should take into account the full drama of redemption and point to its realization in Christ. Anything less is not a Christian sermon. This book opens with two introductory chapters. The first chapter is the longest in the book and seeks to show that Christ is presented in the OT (11-44). The writer concentrates upon the OT since the NT explicitly speaks of Christ. Chapter two offers help in preparing a sermon that presents Christ (45-58). The following thirteen chapters give examples of actual messages that the author has preached showing how particular biblical
texts, seen in their context, do present Christ (59-179). Three of the messages are based on NT texts, eight on OT texts, and the final two are based on multiple biblical texts. A general index (181-84) and a Scripture index (185-89) conclude the book.

As noted above, the author begins this book by seeking to show how Christ is revealed in the OT. Surprisingly, he does not begin with the explicit OT prophecies of Christ like Isa 7:14 or Mic 5:2. Rather, Clowney begins by stating that Christ is the Lord of the Covenant. For him, that covenant is what traditional Reformed theology has termed the “Covenant of Redemption” (16). This covenant between the Father and the Son established God’s plan of redemption. This redemption is revealed in the Bible as progressing through seasons or epochs marked by major events in the unfolding of God’s plan that climaxed in Christ and His death and resurrection. Clowney takes issue with traditional dispensationalism; he interprets it as stating that differing ways of salvation were offered during the different epochs. Rather, he believes that the emphasis should be on the continuity of God’s plan of salvation throughout the ages (16-17). However, this reviewer would aver that traditional dispensationalists have been just as concerned to relate the OT to Christ and the cross as Reformed expositors. Even Clowney admits that present leading dispensational writers clearly teach that all of Scripture teaches salvation by grace (17).

The greater thrust of how Christ is found in the OT is in the author’s discussion of symbolism and typology (20-44). Here, the writer argues that persons, events, and ceremonies found in the OT point to Christ. Clowney described many of these “types” in his earlier book, The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988). In the present volume, he calls the preacher to discover Christ in the OT symbols and types. The author particularly emphasizes Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method by Sidney Greidanus (Eerdmans, 1999) as a further source to aid in this task.

The process of preparing a sermon that presents Christ is given in a quick overview. The foundation of the process is the realization that Bible study leads us into the presence of Christ and the Lord Himself speaks in preaching (46-48). According to Clowney, Christ is Himself both the explanation and application in every sermon. He writes, “Presenting Christ in the message dissolves the problem [i.e., the division between explanation and application in the sermon], for now we present Jesus both in what he says to reveal himself, and what he says and does to direct us” (49). The sermon structure should present Christ in the story of redemption or directly present Christ when preaching from a Gospel. A final challenge is given to practice the presence of the Lord as the preacher seeks to present Jesus.

One example presented by the preacher/author will suffice to demonstrate his model of preaching Christ in all of Scripture (109-16). In his sermon, “Surprised by Devotion,” Clowney describes David’s surprise recorded in 2 Sam 23:13-17 when three of his warriors satisfied David’s desire for water from Bethlehem. David in turn poured out the water to the Lord; he offered to the Lord the devotion his men brought to him. The preacher sees in David a picture of Jesus, the one to whom Christians are to bring devotion. The Lord Jesus not only receives the devotion, He then pours it out before the Father in heaven. But, further, the warriors also picture
Christ as the anointed Warrior who breaks through the hosts of darkness to bring believers the cup of the New Covenant in His blood. The reader of Clowney’s message may rightly ask, what biblically allows both David and his warriors to be seen as “types” of Christ in this Scripture. The answer is not clear in the sermon.

Edmund Clowney has provided contemporary expositors with an insightful and challenging book. However, though not denying “typology,” the method can be taken too far in preaching the OT. All preachers should make sure they do not miss preaching Christ, but must also be careful not to force Christ into a context where He may not be present. Thankfully, the reminder of Preaching Christ in All of Scripture is good even when Clowney’s examples of how He is found in certain texts are not always well taken.


Is there room for yet another book concerning the New Perspective on Pauline (NPP) studies? After all, the volumes produced since 1977 now number in the hundreds. In Paul, the Law, and the Covenant, Das, Assistant Professor of Theology and Religion at Elmhurst College in Illinois, suggests a third way to look at the NPP. He takes some of the results of the NPP, combines them with the traditional view, and produces a viable alternative to NPP without abandoning the traditional viewpoint. His work challenges the views of James D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright.

At the very start of the volume, in “Acknowledgements,” Das sets the tone for the book by observing, “The ultimate test of a proper understanding of Paul is whether that reading conforms to the rest of his letters” (xi). This strikes at the very heart of the NPP. His first chapter dismantles Sanders’ view that God never intended the law to be completely and strictly obeyed (12-44). Jubilees, Philo, the rabbis, and the Qumran covenanters all concur that each command required obedience (44). Then Das demonstrates that Jewish writings after the fall of the temple in A.D. 70 depart from Sanders’ covenantal nomism (8, 45-69). Indeed, either “absolute perfection or a majority of good works is necessary” (69) before God’s bar of judgment.

In Chapter 3 Das answers the question, “Would Paul the Apostle Affirm Covenantal Nomism’s ‘(Old) Covenant’?” (70-94). Whereas Sanders’ model views the Mosaic Covenant as salvific, in texts like Gal 3:15-17, 4:21-31, and 2 Cor 3:1-18 Paul obviously did not (8, 94). Would Paul agree with covenantal nomism’s emphasis on Israel’s election? That is the question in Chapter 4 (95-112). Again, according to Das, a careful study of Romans 9–11 reveals that the apostle’s view differs from that of covenantal nomism. With two key areas of covenantal nomism at odds with Pauline theology, how does covenantal nomism’s emphasis on atoning sacrifice fare (Chapter 5, 113-44)? Das’s conclusion is that “Paul nowhere granted that the atoning sacrifices of the Old Testament offer any help in mitigating the effects of sin” (9). Sin’s resolution is to be found only in Christ, not in the levitical
system of sacrifices (144).

NPP adherents have attempted to change the traditional understanding of Gal 3:10, that no one ever obeys all the commands of the Mosaic law. In Chapter 6 (145-70) Das affirms the traditional interpretation (9). By demonstrating the individual focus of Deuteronomy 27–30, he exposes the inaccuracy of N. T. Wright’s emphasis on the corporate dimension (153). After examining the usage and meaning of “works of the law,” he concludes that the phrase “always refers primarily to what the law requires in general and in its entirety” (158, emphasis in the original).

In Chapter 7 (171-91) the spotlight falls on Rom 1:18–2:29. Das concludes that the law in its entirety functions as “the legal standard of what God requires of humanity” (191). The law functioned as both a means of distinguishing “the Jewish people and to place a burden of obedience upon them” (9). The Jews failed the requirements of Mosaic law. Next, Das takes up the matter of justification in an analysis of Rom 3:27–4:8 (Chapter 8, 192-214). The OT itself demonstrates and Paul concurs that “God must justify the ungodly apart from the law” (213). In fact, “human achievement is what is left of the law when grace has been shown to be in Christ and not the law” (214).

Given the results of Das’s inquiry to this point, one might ask how Paul could consider his own relationship to the law as “blameless” in Phil 3:6? The author dedicates the first part of Chapter 9 (215-22) to that question. The second part of the chapter (222-32) deals with Romans 7. Careful examination of “blameless” in the OT as applied to OT saints who have obviously violated Mosaic law, forms Das’s distinction between what Paul is describing in the two passages (Philippians 3 and Romans 7). It is an aspect of the study of Paul’s relationship to the law that deserves more attention. Das’s treatment is a worthy starting point for such a study.

In his final chapter (234-67) the author employs Rom 9:30–10:8 to prove that “the law’s requirements fall into the realm of a merely human endeavor” (11). The “newer perspective” (273) recommended by Das transcends the NPP by recognizing that there is some validity to some claims of the NPP regarding divine grace and mercy in first-century Judaism, but by also admitting that the traditional view was not far from the mark since Paul clearly interpreted that same Judaism in a framework of works-righteousness. Das’s argument is that “New Testament scholarship has not yet fully explored the consequences of a Jewish apostle (Paul) abandoning ‘covenantal nomism’ in favor of a ‘christological nomism’” (11).

Though seeking to mark out a third way to approach the NPP issue, Das so thoroughly discredits major aspects of the NPP that it is difficult to understand why he would seek a mediating position. His biblical analyses clearly support the traditional interpretation of Paul and the Mosaic law without modifying that tradition. Whether one agrees with his third view or not, his volume deserves a wide reading for its clarity, its well-reasoned argumentation, and its exposure of the weaknesses in the NPP view of covenantal nomism.

A scholarly work emanating from Europe that defends a premillennial view of Israel and the church is an unexpected surprise. Yet that is what Ronald Diprose has written. Diprose is Academic Dean at the Evangelical Italian Bible Institute in Rome and is Editor of the theological journal *Lux Biblica*. An American who studied at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Diprose received his doctorate from the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium.

The subtitle of the work, “The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology” summarizes succinctly what Diprose has attempted to do. He has traced the rise of the view in the second century and has illustrated its effects in a number of theological areas. He is obviously critical of “Replacement Theology,” which he briefly defines as the idea that “all that formerly pertained to ethnic Israel now pertains to the Church” (169). While those sympathetic to this view may quibble about such an oversimplification of their theology, they will have to deal with Diprose’s thorough analysis and criticism, rather than carping about his definition. It will not do if some respond that their version of Israel and the church is not exactly what Diprose criticizes in all its details. It is true that he has painted with a broad brush, but (to continue the metaphor) he has thoroughly covered the wall with that brush.

According to Diprose, “In spite of the fact that Israel’s status as an elect people is confirmed by Paul in Romans 9–11, the view that the church had completely replaced Israel in God’s plan became the dominant opinion in post-Apostolic Christendom.” He illustrates how “some church fathers went further when they affirmed that the Church had always been the true Israel of which the physical Israelites were but the visible sign” (169). The logic of replacement theology required that much of the OT be allegorized. Only in this way could the church be made the subject of passages in which the nation of Israel is addressed. This, according to Diprose, led to the virtual abandoning of the Hebrew worldview and concept of God and the adoption of a framework of thought which had roots in Greek philosophy. All of this then led to an attitude of contempt toward ethnic Jews and led to the exclusion of Israel as a subject of theological reflection. The author provides an abundance of quotes from fathers, both ancient and medieval, to illustrate these attitudes in Chapter Three (69-98).

Diprose then discusses in two chapters the implications of this view for ecclesiology and eschatology (99-168). The increasing use of levitical terminology (e.g., priests officiating at a sacrifice) illustrate just one ecclesiological implication. The view of the church as the normative expression of the Messianic kingdom with the result of an unhealthy triumphalism in the Middle Ages illustrates an implication for eschatology.

Diprose emphasizes two principles that emerged from his study. First is the “failure to reflect seriously on Israel in light of all the relevant biblical data has serious consequences for the entire enterprise of Christian theology” (171). He works out one further theological implication in an extended appendix where he critically evaluates the “Two Covenant View” espoused by some Christian theologians and Jewish writers (175-89). He is one of the few writers to address this
view, which has a growing fascination, especially among those preferring “dialogue” between the communities, as opposed to traditional evangelism among Jewish people. Diprose encourages such advocates of the “two-covenant” view to look further back to the Abrahamic Covenant rather than the Sinaitic Covenant for greater clarity on this subject. In this regard, he would seem to have the backing of Paul, especially in Galatians 3 and 4.

The second principle emerging from his study is that “Christian theology must be based on sound hermeneutical principles which presuppose the Church’s essential relationship with Israel” (172). One of those hermeneutical guidelines is what he calls the “canonical principle” (191): “Inasmuch as the Jewish-Christian dialogue involves parties that recognize two partially different canons of Scripture, Christian partners in dialogue are obliged to bring to bear their understanding of the inter-relatedness of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament writings. Where the constraints of dialogue lead to the development of views involving the suppression of apostolic teaching, the best interests of both Israel and the Church are lost because no real progress can be made at the expense of truth” (191-92).

It is his commitment to ecclesiology and missions that distinguishes Diprose’s book from others who simply criticize covenant theology and amillennialism on the basis of their dispensational weaknesses. Dispensationalists will find little to criticize in this book. Although Diprose comes at the issue from a different angle, he arrives at conclusions that are essentially the same as others who have voiced concerns over replacement theology’s non-literal hermeneutic.

This book is highly recommended to students and pastors who face today’s onslaught by replacement theology in its various forms.


In what promises to be one of the most significant series of contemporary works on early Christianity and the early church, James D. G. Dunn has prepared a massive first installment of Christianity in the Making, ultimately planned as a three-volume work designed to chronicle, interpret, and evaluate the first 120 years of Christianity.

Dunn, the Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham in England, is the author of several significant works, including the commentary on Colossians and Philemon in the New International Greek Testament Commentary, the two-volume commentary on the Book of Romans in the Word Biblical Commentary, The Theology of the Apostle Paul and Christology in the Making: Jesus and the Spirit. In recent years Dunn along with E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright has also become a leading advocate and apologist of the New Perspective on Paul position. Dunn is without question a leading biblical scholar, exercising great influence within both evangelicalism and the larger sphere of non-evangelical biblical studies.

In evaluating a work such as this, one must understand the foundational
principles of the author. In addition to his New Perspective position (to be fully fleshed out in the next volume) particularly problematic for the evangelical is his view of Scripture. Through affirming a “high” position for Scripture, he is not an inerrantist. He stated his position clearly in another work in which, commenting on the historical reliability of the Synoptic Gospels, he stated,

We therefore can make the strong and confident affirmation that the Synoptic Gospels are a source of historical information about Jesus; the Evangelists were concerned with the historicity of what they remembered; in burden of proof terms we can start from the assumption that Synoptic tradition is a good witness to the historical Jesus unless proven otherwise (“The Historicity of the Synoptic Gospels,” in Crisis in Christology: Essays in Quest of Resolution, ed. William D. Farmer [Livonia, Mich.: Dove Booksellers, 1995], 216).

In the present work, Dunn, in discussing the “sources” for his studies, places high value on the Synoptics, but tends to follow a critical view that the Gospel of John was more “theological” in its construct at the expense of factual information. He states, “In what follows, therefore, we shall certainly want to call upon John’s Gospel as a source, but mostly as a secondary source to supplement or corroborate the testimony of the Synoptic tradition” (167). One wonders how the recent discovery of the Pool of Siloam (cf. John 9:7ff) and the affirmation of no less than James H. Charlesworth (whom Dunn cites frequently in this work) that, “Scholars have said that there wasn’t a Pool of Siloam and that John was using a religious conceit to illustrate a point. Now we have found the Pool of Siloam … exactly where John said it was. A gospel that was thought to be “pure theology” is now shown to be grounded in history” (http://www.latimes.com/news/science/la-sci-siloam08aug05,1,3097577.story?coll=la-news-science, accessed 8-9-2005). One of Dunn’s goals in this work is to make a more thorough examination into the “oral tradition” that underlay the Gospel accounts (the canonical Gospels, the non-canonical Gospels [e.g., The Gospel of Thomas], and the supposed Gospel accounts [e.g., The Q Document]). He states,

The most distinctive feature of the present study will be the attempt to freshly assess the importance of the oral tradition of Jesus; mission and the suggestion that the Synoptic Gospels bear testimony to a pattern and technique of oral transmission which has ensured a greater stability and continuity in the Jesus tradition that has thus far been generally appreciated (6).

In this regard, Dunn offers the thesis that the traditional “literary dependence” model of the Synoptics, “is far too limited to explain the complexities of the Jesus tradition” (336). He affirms that he cannot offer “proof positive” of his thesis that the Synoptics find their foundational source material, not in written texts, but in the oral transmission of the material. But he also insightfully asks, “in dealing with Synoptic traditions, who can realistically hope for proof positive of any thesis?” (336). He requests that “the same judgment of plausibility which convinces most scholars of the priority of Mark and the existence of Q be exercised in relation to Synoptic texts where literary dependence is less obvious and is at least arguably less plausible” (336).
Dunn falls into the category of a “maximalist,” that is, one holding the text of Scripture to be largely reliable in terms of historical accuracy. As such, Dunn lambastes the recent tendencies in postmodern criticism of the Bible, stating, “To conceive the hermeneutical process as an infinitely regressive intertextuality is a counsel of despair which quickly reduces all meaningful communication to impossibility and all communication to a game of ‘trivial pursuit’” (121). He also criticizes conservatives who, he claims, have a “lust for certainty which leads to fundamentalism’s absolutising of its own faith claims and dismissal of all others” (105). Still he affirms, “The meaning intended by means of and through the text is still a legitimate and viable goal for the NT exegete and interpreter” (122).

In this massive work Dunn has put together an impressive bibliography of over 50 pages, a Scripture (and other Ancient Writings) index (verses in which some exegesis or interpretation is offered are rendered in bold type), a subject, and an author index. The subject index is a little skimpy, only 7 pages, but with generally helpful access points. Evangelical and conservative scholars, though present in the bibliography, are a decided minority. Dunn has provided excellent footnotes and the breadth of research is impressive by any standard.

The first two parts of the book, comprising the first ten chapters, lay the foundation for Dunn’s work as he discusses the background of the Gospels and chronicles and critically interacts with research into the “Historical Jesus” in the last 100 years. Dunn carries a two-edged sword, affirming much of what German rationalism, liberal scholarship, historical critics, the Jesus Seminar, and the more recent movement toward sociological investigations of Jesus and the first-century world (which he correctly notes is becoming the leading discipline in current Jesus and Gospel studies). Yet he is also piercing in his critiques of the shortcomings, inadequacies and incongruities of these different methodologies. That he only critiques those on the non-evangelical end of the spectrum is a significant weakness. He never engages evangelical or inerrantist scholars, though he clearly departs from those positions at several junctures. In reading this work, one would never know that a significant body of literature on the Synoptics from an inerrantist position exists.

The first ten chapters (336 pages) could easily be a highly valued stand-alone volume of immense value for the student of the NT as an introduction to Gospel studies. The remaining three parts of the book examine the life of Christ. Space prevents a review all the aspects and lines of thought that Dunn presents. He deals with all the major events of Christ’s life, both historically and more thoroughly as they interrelate in a meaningful whole, or what Dunn refers to as “the Jesus tradition.” Some observations are possible on the major features, commonly viewed as the “flashpoints” in the discussions between inerrantist and errantist biblical scholars: (1) the Virgin Birth; (2) miracles, (3) the resurrection, and (4) the deity of Christ.

On the Virgin Birth, or “the virginal conception” as he puts it (345), Dunn spends relatively little time (339-48). He presents the material, but never specifically affirms or denies the Virgin Birth. He concludes that the Gospel accounts affirm the “core conviction that Jesus was born of God’s Spirit in a special way” (348). On the miracles of Jesus, while he ridicules some “explanations” of the miracle accounts by anti-supernaturalist theologians (31), in places he seems to report merely the miracle accounts as part of the text and “Jesus tradition” without offering a personal
affirmation. He does make a strong presentation that Jesus’ healing and exorcism ministry was widely attested, even outside of the NT (670-96). With regards to the resurrection, though he affirms it (879) and presents the textual data and proposed explanations for the resurrection accounts, he nonetheless states, “In short, ‘the resurrection of Jesus’ is not so much a criterion of faith as a paradigm for hope” (ibid). Finally, in regards to the deity of Christ, the volume has no specific affirmation.

In brief, it is not so much what Dunn affirms or denies in his presentation as what he fails to affirm (Is Jesus God, the Second Person of the Trinity? Was He born of a Virgin? Did He perform miracles? Did He rise on the third day and bodily ascend into Heaven?). These doctrines are foundational to biblical Christianity.

The work is must reading for any student of the NT, and contains many of the author’s insights, evaluations, and critical interaction expressed in a manner second to no similar works currently in print. That he affirms and desires to defend the reliability of the Synoptics and the biblical text in general is also laudable. However, though he decries a “lust for certainty,” he has in many places reduced the essential doctrines of biblical Christianity to mere “probabilities,” which is wholly unsatisfying to those who “would see Jesus.”


This work is Everett Ferguson’s second revision of his well-received textbook on NT backgrounds that was first published in 1987. Very little in the main content of the text has been changed from the second edition of the work which was published in 1993 (see the review in *TMSJ* 5/2 [Fall 1994]:216-17). The major changes in the third edition of *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* are in the areas of style and updating. The reading of this new edition is easier on the eyes thanks to sharper print, clearer pictures, and shaded charts. Also, the footnotes and bibliographies have been updated to include material that was not available in 1993.

The aim of Ferguson in this volume is to present a comprehensive, introductory guide to the world from which the NT and the early Christian church emerged. The introductory nature of presentation means generalizations must be made so that the beginning student can be given as broad a sweep as possible of vital material (xvi). The order of presentation of the material is the same as in the first two editions. In the Introduction (1-4), the author adds a disclaimer concerning *Backgrounds* in the title to the book. Though “backgrounds” has a connotation of distance and disengagement, Ferguson is stuck with the word, though he agrees that “environment,” “milieu,” or “context” might be better choice (1).

The first chapter of the text presents a concise political history of the Hellenistic-Roman era from broadly 330 B.C. to A.D. 330, from Alexander to Constantine (5-47). The only addition in this edition is a final section on “Political Connections of the New Testament” (46-47). The second chapter surveys the society and culture of the Hellenistic-Roman era (48-147). Ferguson has focused
discussions on social relationships (66-69) and clothing and appearance (96-97) that were not in the second edition. An introduction to Hellenistic-Roman religions is given in the third chapter (148-318). A sample of a civic cult, the worship of Artemis at Ephesus (198-99), and a discussion of the term “Gnosticism” (300-301) are new features in this third edition. The fourth chapter covering Hellenistic-Roman philosophies (319-95) includes added information on Arius Didymus (363) and Epicurus and his school (370-72).

The longest chapter of the book is the fifth on Judaism (396-582). A paragraph on the pseudopigraphic work “Joseph and Aseneth” (460) and a section on “Jewish Mysticism” (501-3) are the major additions to this chapter from previous editions. The final chapter presents Christianity in the ancient world (583-620). Ferguson adds three sentences concerning the supposedly ossuary of James, the brother of Jesus, concluding that certain identification with the family of Jesus is impossible (591). Indexes of subjects (621-42) and Scripture references (643-48) and a map of the Hellenistic-Roman era (650) conclude the volume.

This third edition continues to fulfill its purpose as an excellent introduction to NT backgrounds. All students of the NT should own and read the volume. However, if one owns one of the first two editions, the few additions in the third edition do not warrant the purchase of this new edition.


A former New Ager recounts his experiences in an altered consciousness during contemplation and other encounters. Then he tells of meeting the true Christ (not the false one he heard in New Age encounters), being born again, and serving in the church. After this, several chapters describe how he has seen in churches contemplative prayer that has essentially the same features, or very similar ones, which he thinks are akin to New Age practice.

Flynn’s title is about running blown by wind of false belief, then running against the wind of error as a Christian. Based in Minneapolis, he directs One Truth Ministries and anti-New Age seminars. His book warns the church about what he sees as subtleties in “contemplative [centering] prayer” with basic essentials of Eastern mystic meditation and monastic meditative prayer in a deceptive new dress. He sees the practice as separate and distinct from authentic meditation and prayer as revealed in Scripture.

Early chapters bring readers up to speed if they are not aware of New Age teaching and practice. Flynn not only details altered states but also meeting spirit guides from another world (he now considers them demons out to deceive), lies such as all paths lead to God, and friendly but deceptive people he met in New Age situations. Then Chapters 9-11 finish with his reasonings that some church people are endorsing ancient, non-Christian practices brought back to life, i.e., borrowing of elements of Eastern mystic meditation and monks’ traditions, not a vital experiencing of true biblical meditation and prayer. The latter is adequate for great
blessings joined to valid experiences, instead of the ones in so-called contemplative prayer—such as feeling relaxed, euphoric, and sometimes even hearing fresh revelations (which may be cunning things from demons, not genuine experiences from God).

Several of the book’s features stand out. The author defines many terms of the New Age and occult quests for experiences or revelations beyond this life. Among the many terms are astrology, psychics and mediums, the ouija board, channeling, auras, reincarnation, and yoga. Others include the human potential movement, creative visualization/guided imagery (imagining things as a help to making them occur), reiki or power by therapeutic touch, witchcraft/wicca, goddess worship, and crystal healing. Flynn shows how New Agers also claim they meet with Christ in an altered consciousness, but how this “Christ” is counterfeit. He argues that demons use deceptive ploys to divert people to a path away from the truth, for example in faking cases of speaking to the dead. He also mentions the rejection tactic, “that’s your truth,” and the false claim to find the “Christ” within.

Along the way, Flynn writes of Marianne Williamson and her book A Return to Love, Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles, based on Helen Schucman’s A Course in Miracles, which Schucman claimed she received as dictation from an inner voice, “Jesus.” She claimed the voice told her the Bible needed many corrections, and it took from 1965 to 1972 to compile all that this “Jesus” said. One can check Flynn (121-22) for a list of key things the false “Jesus” claimed in denial of biblical truths about God, salvation, and sin and details about Williamson (121-25). Flynn has much on Neale Donald Walsch and his books on Conversations with God (125-31).

Chapter 9 focuses on contemplative prayer. Monastics stilled their thoughts. They departed from a true biblical meditation that saturates prayer. In biblical meditation and prayer, believers always had thoughts guided, challenged, convicted, shaped by Scripture and the Holy Spirit. Flynn reasons that some modern church groups have fallen right in line with a monastic kind of prayer—or their versions as “spin offs” of it. Flynn indicates that monastics developed the system themselves, or somehow heard of Eastern meditation. In either case they repeated words or phrases to open the way into the state void of thought. Modern Roman Catholics such as their chief voice, Thomas Merton, defended the monastic method overall even while citing variations by different “desert fathers” (cf. Merton’s Contemplative Prayer [Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, Doubleday, 1971]).

Richard Foster, an evangelical, used his top-selling work, The Celebration of Discipline (1978), to write about a disciplined Christian experience that included contemplative prayer. He described the latter, approving repetitions and other formula to enter into this state (even listening to dreams as a help [16, 23]; meditating on nature for some weeks before meditating on Scripture [25-26]). Flynn adduces several quotes to show Foster’s leaning not solely on God’s Word but on other things, and Foster’s frequent citation of and endorsement of Merton, Eastern meditation, and secluded monks (142-53, 165-71, 185-86).

Another Flynn section details meditation/prayer ideas of Ruth Haley Barton (153-57), her reading her own ideas of silent meditating into Elijah in 1 Kings 19, and her using repeated words or phrases to pass into the silent state. After this are sections on other advocates of the contemplative prayer, e.g., Tilden Edwards (157-
59) and Brennan Manning (159-62).

The Bible has many repetitions of words or phrases (cf. one example in Ps 136:1, 2, 3, “O give thanks to the Lord,” and then a reason), but it has no proof-text for coaxing or inducing one to enter into prayer. It offers no case that silent prayer is a special secret that transforms. It has no text that endorses leaving one’s thoughts behind. In Psalm 62, prayer that follows is filled with thought that mediates on God’s acts in biblical history; then v. 26 ends the psalm with a return to a definite thought, the “give thanks” focus. God’s Word seems not to have an explicit reference to a special level of prayer distinct from normal prayer, such as contemplatives plead. It is not explicit about any venue higher, deeper, more precious, or helpful with light, love, sacrifice, or God’s face than the vital, wonderful bounties of prayer in thought, and most often vocal.

Flynn is very concerned that the church protect itself against elements that might dissipate prayer’s essence and fill it eventually with Eastern mysticism and monastic meditation. One wonders how a monastic strain of prayer that purportedly is without thought, concept, or reason is valid prayer at all. It would be quite different from the hundreds of examples of prayer God has led His servants to express in His Word. How could non-vocal prayer be a true “contemplation” or a true “prayer” in a biblical sense? Why not conclude that God has given sufficient guidelines for prayer in the vastness of Scripture, far more prayer than any mortal will in this life ever practice?

Flynn will stir the mind to evaluate “contemplative prayer” and prayer as it is commonly known in the Bible. His work is closely akin to Ray Yungen’s A Time of Departing. Whether these two books will convince the individual reader depends on how authentically biblical his own meditative prayer is (for there is a true contemplation and true prayer that contemplation impacts). Appraisal will also depend on factors such as alertness, a genuine grasp of God’s Word, and logical discernment of evidence. All in all, the book is a helpful survey of dangers in New Age thinking and practices and an urgent warning about books that deal with meditation/prayer. It is a pointed book with which shepherds dedicated to protect their flocks should be closely aware.


This volume is the American publication of the 2d edition of a book published in England and originally entitled Acts for Today. That original title captures the thrust of Michael Green’s passion and purpose in writing the book. Green is convinced that Acts is “...a book supremely relevant for our time” (5). He states, “I see no reason why, if we are willing to pay the price and follow their example, the gospel they [i.e., the first-century Christians] proclaimed and embodied should not again transform society” (6). To fulfill his purpose, Green has in this book traced themes of Christian life and service discovered in Acts and examined their relevance to today’s church (5). The author further states, “My prayer for the
The present book is that it may encourage us to believe that Acts 29 is possible: that the fresh wind of God’s Holy Spirit that launched the infant church is still available, still active, still ready to work in and through us if only we are willing” (9-10).

Before interacting with the main themes of Acts, Green presents two chapters that orient his readers to the book of Acts. He very creatively introduces the culture of the first-century world (11-24) and Luke and his friends (25-41). These chapters show an expositor how the introductory background material of Acts can be communicated effectively to a contemporary audience. The bulk of the book is a presentation of the major themes of Acts, with a particular emphasis on the ministry of the early church empowered by the Holy Spirit (42-267). Green deals with the topics of outreach, lifestyle, message, apologetics, methods, church planting, pastoral care, church life, leadership, hardships, and the Holy Spirit. The book concludes with a summary of the priorities of the early Christians as evidenced in the book of Acts (268-87).

In going through the book, the reader becomes aware that the primary target audience for Green is the laity of the Anglican Church. With great passion, he calls his readers to take the Scripture seriously. The author decries the fact that the central affirmations of the faith are ignored and that in many churches teaching is propounded that is in variance from the Bible. Fundamentalists and Pentecostals should not be despised and written off as uniformed (275). Though appreciating Green’s sincere concern, the readers of this book, especially the laity, need to exercise discernment. Though it has many positive points made about Christ, the gospel, evangelism, and church life, two major cautions are necessary. First, the writer calls his readers to an openness to accept whatever the Holy Spirit is doing in the church today (46). For instance, tongues is a gift that the Lord continues to give to some believers, including Green himself. However, all did not speak in tongues in Acts and it was not the invariable mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit; therefore, today, an openness by those gifted with tongues and those who have not to accept one another should prevail (259). Second, the author contends that the Lord is still doing the same miracles as recorded in Acts, including the raising of the dead (66-67).

Read with appropriate caution, Green’s book can spur the expositor to consider afresh the application of the book of Acts to the contemporary reader.


This is an interesting book. The author is director of academic projects and faculty development at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in Wilmington, Delaware. His previous ministries include director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College and academic dean and professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. His basic thesis as he develops it in his introduction is that Billy Graham and his friends, including the founders of the National Association of Evangelicals, co-opted the term “evangelicalism” in the 1940s from its historic usage. Consequently, “evangelicalism needs to be
relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist” (16). Forty percent of Americans consider themselves evangelical, according to some pollsters. But what this translates into is a shallow, theologically minimalist religious identity that “is at best vague and at worst hollow.”

So how was the term used before the 1940s? Hart’s answer is that the term goes back to the Reformation and basically meant Protestant. “For Protestants at the turn of the twentieth century, to be part of mainline Protestantism was to be evangelical” (21). Hart shows that the delegates who formed the liberal Federal Council of Churches in 1908 considered themselves “evangelical.” When Shailer Mathews, the dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School wrote his The Faith of Modernism in 1924, he asserted that Modernists “as a class are evangelical Christians. That is, they accept Jesus Christ as the revelation of a Savior God” (23). But in the 1940s, “the word began to be used exclusively by Protestants on the non-liberal side of the 1920s debates” (23). These new evangelicals were a part of the fundamentalist movement, says Hart, but they did not want to “carry the baggage of fundamentalism” (23). “Almost by sheer tenacity neo-evangelicals had created a new religious identity, and evangelical was its designation” (24).

The rest of the book is divided into two parts: first, it shows the “scholarly construction of evangelicalism during the last twenty-five years,” and second, it “explores the way evangelicalism as a post-World War II religious movement has fragmented” (29). In Hart’s analysis, the reason that the new evangelicalism has fragmented is because it replaced the church with the parachurch that “lacked the discipline and rigor of the church” (30). Theologically, the mid-twentieth century evangelicals narrowing down their theological position to a few core beliefs “was similar to (if not the same as) the liberal attempt to separate the kernel from the husk of the bible” (30). Hart also quotes Carl Henry’s analysis that Billy Graham had the chance “to rally and garner an umbrella alliance” but chose instead to seek as broad a coalition for his crusades as possible, one that extended beyond evangelicalism’s real boundaries”(190).

Some of the individual chapters are helpful. Chapter one is an interesting historiography of how twentieth-century historians have understood the term, “evangelical.” Hart believes that unfortunately, “the history of evangelicalism has thrived while denominational history has atrophied” (60). Other chapters in the first part of the book examine the sociology of evangelicalism.

In the second part of the book, chapter four describes the impact of parachurch organizations on evangelicalism. Consequently, “historically, the evangelical creed has been minimalist, the liturgy has tended toward Top 40 musical forms, and requirements for ministry have been so broad that every believer can have some kind of ministry” (125). In Hart’s analysis, the parachurch “has been evangelicalism’s genius as well as its Achilles’ heel. It has spread the evangelical label, leaving born-again Protestants with a sense of belonging to something big. But that feeling comes with an anonymity resembling that faced by frustrated shoppers at Home Depot: “The wealth of goods is truly remarkable, but it is so hard to find assistance” (126).

Hart also examines the role of contemporary music in the recent evangelical movement, especially noting its inroads into the Billy Graham crusades. But in Hart’s understanding, “the chief figure in the application of musical pop to
evangelical worship was Chuck Smith" (163). In fact, “one of the primary engines driving the charismatic movement of the second half of the twentieth century was music” (163). So, “access to the ‘Holy of Holies’” for many evangelical Protestants now depends on the praise band, overhead projectors (or their high-tech equivalent), and worship modelers stationed behind microphones at the front of the church” (164). For another example, Hart says that “once Saddleback turned down the contemporary music lane, people followed by the SUV-loads. Warren admits that the church has lost ‘hundreds’ because of this decision. ‘On the other hand, we have attracted thousands more because of our music’” (169).

Hart’s solution to the shallowness and minimalistic theology that he finds in contemporary evangelicalism is to reassert the role of the churches. “Would it be so bad to refer to Protestants in the United States by their church membership, from Baptists and Methodist to Lutheran and even the Willow Creek Association?” (188).

In some ways, this book is not in the same class as Hart’s previous studies on Machen or That Old-time Religion in Modern America. He also defines “evangelical” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries too broadly. “Evangelical” was narrower than “Protestant” with at least moderate to conservative theology, personal salvation, and revivalism to some degree. Clearly there was also a disdain for Unitarian/universalism and a respect for the Bible. Nevertheless, interspersed throughout Hart’s daring analysis of contemporary evangelicalism are some excellent historical and theological insights, worthy of serious consideration.


*Mikra* (a Hebrew term referring to “Scripture”) is a republication of Volume One in Section Two of *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1988). The *Compendia*’s purpose is to present a comprehensive study of the world of ancient Judaism and early Christianity. The editor of *Mikra*, Martin Jan Mulder, died in 1994. The volume’s twenty chapters cover topics like paleography, scribes, the canon of the Hebrew Bible, transmission and translation, reading in the ancient synagogue, as well as the use and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Major textual contributions include Mulder’s discussion of the Masora (87-135), Emanuel Tov’s chapter on the Septuagint (161-88), Abraham Tal’s chapter on the Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch (189-216), Philip S. Alexander’s treatment of Jewish Aramaic translations (217-53), Peter B. Dirkse’s presentation regarding the Syriac Peshitta (255-97), and Benjamin Kedar’s study of the Latin translations (299-338).

Analyses of the various systems of biblical interpretation and exegesis include Michael Fishbane on Qumran (339-77), Devorah Dimant on the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (379-419), Yehoshua Amir on Philo (421-53), Louis H. Feldman on Josephus (455-518), Pieter W. van der Horst on the minor Hellenistic
Jewish authors (519-46), Rimon Kasher on the rabbinic literature (547-94), Ruairidh Bóid (M. N. Saraf) on the Samaritan tradition (595-633), Birger A. Pearson on Gnostic literature (635-52), E. Earle Ellis on both the early church and the NT church (653-90, 691-725), and William Horbury on the church fathers (727-87).

With the exception of Dimant’s chapter, each chapter concludes with a selected bibliography that is often classified and/or annotated. Overall these are quite helpful, although the quality and extent of the bibliographies is very uneven. However, the abundance of footnoted references helps to provide at least some of what is lacking in some of the individual bibliographies. All of the individual bibliographies are accumulated into one bibliography at the end of the volume (797-852). An excellent “Index of Sources” rounds out the volume (853-929).

Scholars and academics will find the volume chock-full of information. Evangelical readers will need to apply a filter to much of the textual data, since, for the most part, the approach of the contributors betrays a bias against the historicity, authenticity, inspiration, and inerrancy of the Hebrew Bible. For example, Aaron Demsky places the origin of biblical Hebrew sometime following 1000 B.C. (6). Obviously, that removes Moses from the authorship of the Hebrew Pentateuch no matter which date of the exodus one might hold. The nearest to an evangelical approach is found in the two chapters by E. Earle Ellis. Due to the dense and detailed nature of the volume and the way it is written, pastors will not find it helpful as a resource through which to access the topics it discusses. For those outside academia, the introductory essays in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Zondervan, 1978-1992) are far more accessible and helpful.

Seminary libraries should include this volume in their collections because of its breadth in presenting the history of the Hebrew Bible. The contributors are well-known and respected scholars. Where the historical information is allowed to stand, the content is valuable and references to resources provide an efficient springboard for further research.


As in all the NIV Application Commentary series, the base text is the NIV and the treatment of each section of the text follows the general categories of “Original Meaning,” “Bridging Contexts,” and “Contemporary Significance.” The format is practical and user friendly. Provan is currently Marshall Sheppard Professor of Biblical Studies at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. He is also an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland.

The commentator rejects the traditional view of Solomonic authorship for both Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Provan assumes (with little demonstration or discussion) that the Hebrew of both books is post-exilic (26, 236). He ignores Daniel C. Fredericks’ Qoheleth’s Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date (Edwin Mellen Press, 1988) that demonstrates a pre-exilic date for the Hebrew of Ecclesiastes.
Qoheleth’s words in the Book of Ecclesiastes are supposedly passed on by his epilogist (50, 226, 229). This editorial epilogist is the author or writer, while Qoheleth is the speaker (26). Qoheleth “explores reality ‘as if’ he were Solomon” (27). His imagination is vivid enough to place himself into a variety of times and situations in order to communicate his message (28). Therefore, the author conspires literally with the speaker to project “the fiction of the opening chapters—that Qohelet (whoever or whatever this is) was ‘son of David, king in Jerusalem’” (28-29, 67).

Provan correctly disassociates himself from NIV’s translation of hebel as “meaningless” (51-53). Instead, he interprets hebel contextually in each occurrence, “stressing the ephemerality of existence or its elusiveness and resistance to intellectual and physical control” (57). Textual and exegetical decisions throughout the commentary on Ecclesiastes are normally sound and documented by at least one or two sources to permit additional research.

In the Ecclesiastes section of the commentary, readers will find the author’s keen insight informative and his interaction with current culture stimulating. Citations from literature and film alike illuminate his applications. His writing style is instructional and pleasant, challenging and entertaining. Pastors and teachers alike will find the wealth of both exegetical and illustrative material extremely helpful in arriving at an understanding of the text of Ecclesiastes that can be communicated to either the congregation or the classroom.

In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Provan takes the love triangle viewpoint (246). Accordingly, he makes Solomon the villain who has forced his attentions upon the maiden whose love is for another (246-47). He also concludes that the maiden had been victimized by “the anger of the men in her family” (267). Indeed, Provan treats the Song of Songs as an anti-chauvinistic drama that sometimes sounds like he has adopted radical feminist exegesis (e.g., “as feminist theologians have pointed out, when God is male, the male tends to be god,” 277). Support he garners from the writings of Phyllis Trible confirms this tendency (247 n. 15, 273 n. 15).

Through tortured exegesis and prejudicial treatment of the text, he accuses the OT legal tradition of fostering oppression and abuse of women (272, 278). His interpretation of 3:6-11 turns the royal wedding process into a metaphorical satire depicting Solomon’s bed riding “roughshod over the daughters of Jerusalem, on the road paved with sexual acts” (303). A sacrificial female victim rises from Solomon’s bed “in the way that smoke rises up into the sky when sacrifices are burnt” (303). As if that were not enough, Provan concludes that this love triangle involves the maiden’s public marriage to Solomon (under coercion) and, at the same time, her carrying on a physical relationship with her lover (321-22). Provan approves of that second relationship as “in all but legal reality a marriage” (324).

Thus, this volume is representative of two distinctly different commentaries. Careful exegesis characterizes the treatment of Ecclesiastes while an uncontrolled exegesis characterizes the commentary on the Song of Songs. The former is commended to the readers of this review, with but a caution concerning Provan’s view of its authorship and date. The latter commentary is not without some value (e.g., Provan’s frank and open discussion of a Christian view of sexuality that permeates every section), but its exegesis as well as its application is more often
flawed than not.


Recent years have witnessed a veritable plethora of books on Paul, his life and his theology. These books have sprung from every corner of the theological spectrum. Jewish writers have also attempted to probe the depth of the apostle’s motives and psyche. While Paul has continued to fascinate for his own sake, many of these authors have also attempted to respond to the “Copernican revolution” in Pauline studies initiated by E. P. Sanders’ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Sanders’ work launched what James Dunn coined as the “New Pauline Perspective.” Writers over the last decade have sought to line up on one side of the other of this perspective. N. T. Wright’s contributions in this area, while distancing himself from Sanders and Dunn on many points, have raised the discussion over Paul and justification to a fever pitch in some corners of the theological and ecclesiastical world. Therefore, when another book on Paul appears, the first question that arises in many minds is: “Where does he stand on the NPP?”

In this regard, Van Bruggen’s book may not satisfy some readers. While mentioning Sanders’ ideas about “covenantal nomism” (217, 218) and Dunn’s ideas on the “works of the law,” (218), the author opposes their ideas but wrestles little with the issues that these authors raise. More disturbing is the fact that Wright is mentioned only slightly in two endnotes (332, 362), neither of which relate to his view on Paul and justification. This edition is a translation of the Dutch version of the book, published in 2001. That may account for his neglect of Wright, but certainly Wright’s work *What Saint Paul Really Said*, published in 1997, at least deserves some mention.

Van Bruggen also never references the seminal Pauline labors of Richard Hays (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*) or the major commentaries on Romans by Ernst Kasemann and Karl Barth. If one argues that Van Bruggen is just not interested in non-evangelical authors, how does he explain the absence of any reference to C. E. B. Cranfield’s classic Romans commentary or the relegating of his own evangelical countryman, H. W. Ridderbos, to a single endnote (349)?

Perhaps, one also might argue that Van Bruggen is not interested in interacting with other views on Paul, but rather seeks to expound the apostle’s life and thought in a positive manner. That approach is fine, but not when the author himself states in the preface, “I continuously (have) interacted with modern theories about the person and meaning of this sometimes rather mysterious apostle” (xv). Such interaction, however, is very limited, and is often deeply buried in an endnote.

Is there value in this work? Yes, in its limited scope, it offers much. The author first discusses in eighteen chapters what he calls “Paul the Pioneer.” These chapters discuss in detail the events in Paul’s life as reconstructed from Acts and the epistles. Van Bruggen has a high regard for the integrity of the biblical text, as was evidenced in his earlier works on Jesus. The issue of Jesus’ Messiahship, as the
subtitle indicates, is the controlling idea that best explains Paul's driving force in evangelism. He then expounds in four chapters the theme of "Paul the Apostle." It is here that one would expect theological themes to dominate. Surprisingly, Van Bruggen counters with the following statement: "In fact, it is very much open to question whether it is methodologically possible to speak of something like Paul's theology at all" (170). No wonder Radderbos is not given much of a voice! Israel and the law are the themes Van Bruggen examines mostly in these chapters. Those who look, however, for an explanation of a future salvation for Israel consistent with a premillennial eschatology will be disappointed (272-74).

Van Bruggen's treatment of Paul will disappoint the reader who is looking for an up-to-date treatment of Pauline issues with some substantive interaction with current alternative views. On the other hand, the reader who desires a positive exposition of the apostle's life and ministry will find much help. However, in this reviewer's opinion, the reader who desires more than a factual biography of Paul will be served better by the classic work of F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*.


Scholarly treatments of the Didache continue to appear. During the last decade alone, at least six major scholarly treatments of this little book have been published (see "The Didache's Use of the Old and New Testaments," *TMSJ* 16/1 [Spring 2005]). Now another major work treats the relationship between the Didache and the Gospel of Matthew. The essays in this book originated in an international conference organized by the Tilburg Faculty of Theology in April 2003. The organizer of the conference and the editor of this volume, Huub van de Sandt, had co-authored with David Flusser a volume on the Jewish background of the Didache which appeared under the same publishers in 2002 (see review in *TMSJ* 14/1 [Spring 2003]). This volume is a follow-up to that one.

After one hundred and twenty years of articles and books on the Didache, according to the editor (1), a scholarly consensus has arisen on a few of the basic issues raised by the book. The first consensus is that the date of the Didache is, at the latest, toward the end of the first century AD. A few voices, some heard in this volume, call for an even earlier date, even before the fall of Jerusalem. The second consensus is that the book has a Jewish-Christian provenance, probably in Greek speaking Syria and possibly in Antioch. The third cannot really be called a new consensus. It is that definite affinities exist between the Didache and the Gospel of Matthew. Those affinities have been recognized since the publication of the Didache text in 1884. The earliest commentators argued that the work cites the Gospel of Matthew almost exclusively among the canonical Gospels. Some writers still affirm this point, this reviewer among them. The volume, however, is dominated by writers who believe that neither Matthew nor Didache are dependent on each other, but that
they both independently derive from the same source—either written or oral. Thus, it was a Jewish-Christian community in Greek-speaking Syria during the last quarter of the first century that produced both the Didache and the Gospel of Matthew independent of each other.

The twelve authors in this volume explore how the relationship between the two documents is demonstrated in the life of that community. It is obvious that the authors do not espouse Matthean authorship of the first Gospel, but attribute the work to an unnamed author (or authors) in that community. They apply the same methodology and conclusions to the composite authorship of the Didache.

In this reviewer’s opinion, one of the problems that has hampered research on the Didache has been the unquestioning application of source and redaction criticism techniques to the study of the document. When one is through reading most treatments of the book, he is left with a layered, multi-authored work patched together over decades with layers that must be separated and with little hope that an “original” can ever be found. The vast disagreement among these scholars over the number of sources and redactors effectively destroys the unity of the document. One gets a familiar feeling that all this has been done before—on the canonical books—and what we are seeing is a destruction of all confidence in a document from antiquity that has any integrity in the form in which it exists today. The biases, theological views, and attitudes to truth all affect these writers in such a way that agreement will never be reached. Hence, this volume has writers who agree on one point and then diverge on just about everything else about the Didache.

As long as the study of the Didache is held captive to source and redaction critics, its value as a window into the early church will be greatly diminished. Such treatments, with all of their scholarly efforts, tell far more about the critics than about the book they are examining.

Whatever be the answer to the exact origins of the Didache, only an approach that espouses its basic unity will pave the road for what can be learned from it about early Christian history. The source critics simply talk to each other. Others simply desire to hear what the Didache is telling the ancient and also the modern church. Amidst the cacophony of critics, however, its little voice has been smothered.

This reviewer proposes a book that will simply expound the Didache as a single document, exploring what, if anything, it can tell about how the authors desire their readers to “do church.” That is why the little book was written. Who will simply tell us what it says? Maybe this reviewer will try.


This major scholarly contribution is vast in research and clear in writing. The author is Chair and Professor of Religion and Philosophy in the Haggard School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University in Southern California. In format the work gives introductions of a page up to several pages on interpreters Yarchin selects from
the first century to the present. After these are extracts from their writings to expose their kinds of interpretation, literal, allegorical, a mixture, or a denial of biblical reliability. After the various sections of church history, a timeline chart of centuries shows when writers labored. Yarchin also provides indexes for authors and Scriptures. Some of the main features helpful to teachers, pastors, students, and solidly informed laypeople are as follows.

1) Excellent examples appear on scholars interpreting in a literal way, or allegorically, or both. An allegorizing case is Gregory the Great’s observation on Job’s having seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2). In addition to the literal sense are other meanings. The seven are the seven graces of the Spirit on the twelve apostles (4 x 3 = 12). The three denote faith, hope, and love in other believers. Even further levels of meaning emerge. Three points to those who do not have the apostles’ perfection (seven), but do know the Trinity (three). Also, three refers to three classes, pastors who are married, celibate pastors, and laity. These three also are seen in Ezek 14:14-20 in the three men not to be destroyed, namely Noah, Daniel, and Job. Added to that, another sense, the tropological, has seven being seven virtues of the Spirit in believers (Isa 11:2, 3). With the seven, lay people cannot achieve perfection of ten (seven virtues, plus the trio, hope, faith, love). In contrast to such fanciful reading, Calvin in another time frame has strong words against allegorizing (pp. 189-90).

Philo allegorized profusely to find supposedly more fertile, spiritually edifying ideas where he felt a literal sense was too bland. Yarchin’s examples are clear. In other cases of torturing texts to make them immediately pertinent, the Dead Sea Scrolls saw biblical prophecy fulfilled or about to be realized in the writers’ day. Rabbis were often literal, yet frequently fudged ideas into texts. They accepted the Bible plus traditions in their voluminous writings, such sources as the Palestinian Talmud (ca. 550 C.E.), Babylonian Talmud (ca. 650 C.E.), and the Mishnah (ca. 220 C.E.).

2) Introductions before the excerpts are quite informative, drawing much together to show the training, situation, writings, and basic tendencies of each writer.

3) Yarchin’s examples often get right to the point as to interpretive slant.

4) Helpful footnotes sometimes shed light on details, such as defining terms writers employ without explanation. Also beneficial are lists of specialized sources after introductions showing where a reader can find expanded scholarly thought.

5) A particularly good section has key orientations to rabbinic interpretations.

6) The chart on timelines near the end helps users to see where scholars included in the book fit amid the centuries.

Substantial weaknesses are few. Further footnotes would help clarify where certain fuzzy statements occur, for some users will not be abreast of all the details in such a vast field. A second benefit would be in the “Late Modern” era, 1970 to the present, in Chapters 26-34. The book skips scholars many readers will view as among the foremost evangelical pacesetters.

By contrast, Gerald Bray’s Biblical Interpretation, Past & Present (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996) comments on many evangelicals (544-55). Bray lists James Orr, James Denney, John Davis of Princeton, Robert D. Wilson, J. G. Machen, Geerhardus Vos, O. T. Allis, and Herman Sasse among men up to ca. 1940. Then he lists more recent or current evangelicals, among these E. J. Young,
George Ladd, F. F. Bruce, Donald Guthrie, Otto Michel, R. K. Harrison, Everett Harrison, J. W. Wenham, Derek Kidner, Leon Morris, Gleason Archer, Ralph Martin, Richard Longenecker, Bruce Waltke, Robert Gundry, Walter Kaiser, I. Howard Marshall, and Gordon Fee. Then Bray includes still others: Peter Craigie, Edwin Yamauchi, R. T. France, Moisés Silva, D. A. Carson, Craig Blomberg, and others. Bray also, at each stage of church history, comments on many more interpreters than Yarchin does (cf. this writer’s review of Bray, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 9/2 [Fall 1998]:220-22). Whether Bray or Yarchin, many very worthy scholars will be left out because of space limitations.

In Yarchin, no famous premillennial dispensationalist finds a place, though many were mighty in the Scriptures. No mention is made of Darrell Bock, Lewis S. Chafer, Charles Feinberg, Alva J. McClain, Charles C. Ryrie, Robert L. Thomas, and John F. Walvoord. All made interpretive contributions to many. And still others from various points of view might have had a part. As distinct from evangelical labors, Yarchin allows much space to interpreters whose work persuaded many away from belief in the integrity of the Scriptures, e.g., David Strauss, Hermann Gunkel, and Rudolf Bultmann.

In the era of 1500 to 1970, John Calvin and William F. Albright are cited. These made comments helpful for evangelicals. Calvin insists on literal interpretation and not allegorizing (for the most part), and Albright shows more charity than many to ways that archaeological findings uphold a reliable Scripture. Some will wish that the selector had given an example of Calvin in a prophetic passage, where issues of amillennialism and premillennialism are at stake.

Though many key evangelicals are missing, scholars are included who have had many readers, but are not well known or known at all to many evangelicals. In this list are David Steinmetz, Jon Levenson, Walter Wink, Phyllis Trible, Edgar McKnight, Elizabeth Fiorenza, Dale Patrick, and Fernando Segovia.

To this reviewer, all the sections offer an informative review, but Yarchin does more that evangelicals will find profitable in the following parts. One is prerabbinic Jewish interpretation (DS scrolls, Philo, etc.); another is patristic labors (Justin Martyr, Origen, Augustine, Theodore of Mopsuestia, etc.), and rabbinic work.

No book on Scripture interpretation is perfect. Overall Yarchin should be commended for breadth in awareness and considerable usefulness in a fluent manner. The work will probably have its greatest impact among seminary and Bible college teachers and more developed students, plus pastors who delve into vigorous readings.


Yungen’s title highlights his theme. He argues that features mingling Eastern meditation and Roman Catholic desert, monastic prayer traditions is infiltrating churches, even evangelical ones, at a rapid spread. This is by “contem-
plative prayer” which often is called “centering” since it uses various devices to leave vocal prayer behind and “center” on God in a changed consciousness. A person supposedly focuses on God’s face, pure Presence, on waves of love, and light. There, the claims are, one relaxes from fret, finds euphoria, or hears new revelation from God.

The author is steeped in research sources, and gives details via end notes for each chapter. At the outset thirty-two leaders commend the book, among these widely-known scholars such as Wayne House, Berit Kjos, and Donald Whitney.

One feature argues that yoga has gained great inroads, from the Far East to the West. Yungen reasons that some leading features of such meditation appear, in similar ways, in churches’ contemplative prayer. Another focus is in detailed discussions about proponents in churches using a kind of contemplation that has aspects similar to meditation from the East and also desert monks and later Catholics (e.g., Thomas Merton, C. Basil Pennington). Some other writers, known to the masses as Christians, are not really Christian to Yungen, in light of their own comments about their beliefs, which Yungen cites. An example is M. Scott Peck, author of The Road Less Traveled (57-60). Others writing as Christians are, to Yungen, betrayers of this in some statements or endorsements, e.g., Brennan Manning who wrote The Ragamuffin Gospel as well as The Signature of Jesus (78-80). Yungen also quotes what he feels are strange statements showing compromise about contemplation in Richard Foster’s best-selling book The Celebration of Discipline and another work, Prayer, Finding the Heart’s True Home (70-78).

The contemplative prayer that Yungen thinks is a peril to the church has advocates who write that in an altered consciousness one finds the best light, love, and sacrifice. But when one looks at Scripture, believers already have these blessings in prayer as part of living in Christ—light as in John 8:12, seen chiefly in the Word (Ps 119:105), not reserved for some extra echelon of silent prayer or prayer without thought. Distinguished from normal meditative prayer, one cannot find such a special level of meditation/prayer with unequivocal certainty in any biblical text. Passages on living in God’s love (John 3:16; Rom 8:28; 2 Cor 5:15ff.), meditation (Ps 1:1-3), and Christ-like sacrifice (Luke 9:23) never mention a so-called higher, deeper, purer, more enhancing level of contemplation or prayer. No passage distinctly says such a contemplation is the secret of godliness or enriching fulfillment.

What of prayer? The finest examples in the entire span of Scripture do not refer to prayer now on some other level, whether done in silence or in a venue in which one goes beyond thought. These include cases of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, the psalmists, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Nehemiah, Jesus, believers in Acts, Paul, Peter, the book of Hebrews, James, Jude, and John.

Readers will variously assess Yungen’s claims. Evangelicals will be wise to be seriously alert lest techniques that are crowd-pleasing but unbiblical sift into churches to their hurt. Meditation and prayer true to the Bible can be subtly even if gradually replaced, or really changed into something pleasing to a modern taste but not of a kind that God would honor. Wrong teachings have often attracted great numbers, whether in cults or new fads among evangelicals.

The author goes on (Chapter 6) to reason that contemplative prayer of the sort he opposes will be the one-world unifying factor in the future Tribulation period.
That is one of many views for the forming of a “Mystery Babylon” and a key to the Antichrist’s success to sway many to follow along. Christians need to exercise keen caution to test theories where the Scripture does not distinctly or necessarily support a given slant on how things will fit in future events.

A three-page glossary concisely defines terms in the book, e.g., Aquarian Age, Centering Prayer, New Age Christ-Consciousness, Contemplative Silence.

To this reviewer, much in the book is helpful in warning about features for Bible-teaching people to be discerning about. The book also cites how some writers such as Peck, Manning, and Foster make unwise statements and point with approval to writers responsible for ideas that many evangelicals call error. To this reviewer, to teach human prayer that is in an altered consciousness without thought is error. And Scripture never shows that those who pray need techniques such as a certain posture, or repeating inducement words, or reaching a state without thought. This book and Brian Flynn’s Running Against the Wind have warnings that demand a hearing from evangelicals as watchful shepherds who are true to the Bible.