

## THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL: ITS BASIC TENETS, HISTORY, AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

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*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 Perspective<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>The term “New Perspective on Paul” was coined by a major proponent, James Dunn (James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Ryland's Library* 65 [1983] 95-122).

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.<sup>2</sup>

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*)."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians," *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. Ross Mackenzie, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960) 8:69-70 (emphases in the original).

<sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>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).

<sup>5</sup>J. I. Packer, "Justification in Protestant Theology," in *Here We Stand*, eds. J. I. Packer et al. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986) 86.

### **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 fide 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,”<sup>6</sup> 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,<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.”<sup>9</sup> Though the Reformers

<sup>6</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 15.

<sup>7</sup>The inaccuracy of labeling the Reformation as the “Lutheran” perspective is that the majority of Reformers, such as Melancthon and Calvin, also supported the essentials of the Reformation perspective.

<sup>8</sup>Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 3.

<sup>9</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) III.xi.1 (1:726).

had differences, they were united on a sinner's justification before God as the prime focus of biblical doctrine, especially in terms of soteriology.<sup>10</sup> 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."<sup>11</sup> 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. . . . [S]ince 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."<sup>12</sup> 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 Decalog and ceremonial laws. Now if the work of the Decalog does not justify, much less will circumcision, which is a work of the Ceremonial Law."<sup>13</sup> 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."<sup>14</sup>

Though the Reformers were united on the principle of *sole 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. . . .

<sup>10</sup>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).

<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, "Treatise on Christian Liberty," 31:348, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957).

<sup>12</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.7.3 (p. 352).

<sup>13</sup>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.

<sup>14</sup>John Calvin, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians," *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 11:38.

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.<sup>15</sup>

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."<sup>16</sup>

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,"<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup>

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."<sup>19</sup> 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."<sup>20</sup> 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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<sup>15</sup>Luther's Works 35:164-66.

<sup>16</sup>Luther's Works 35:168.

<sup>17</sup>Luther's Works 35:173.

<sup>18</sup>Luther's Works 35:173; cf. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, ed. Victor I. Gruhn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 81-218; Gerhard Ebeling, "On the Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis* in the Theology of the Reformation," in *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963) 62-78.

<sup>19</sup>Institutes 2.7.7-12 (351-61).

<sup>20</sup>Institutes 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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

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. . . .<sup>24</sup>

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

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<sup>21</sup>*Institutes* 2:7.12 (360).

<sup>22</sup>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," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983):463-85.

<sup>23</sup>Luther, "Galatians" (1535), *Luther's Works* 26:105.

<sup>24</sup>Luther, "Galatians" (1535), *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. . . .<sup>25</sup>

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. . . .<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup>

### **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 Melancthon 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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<sup>25</sup>Calvin, "Romans," *Calvin's Commentaries* 8:221.

<sup>26</sup>Calvin "Romans," *Calvin's Commentaries* 8:221-22.

<sup>27</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 3:14.1-17 (768-84); 3.15.1-7 (788-96); Luther, "Galatians" (1535), *Luther's Works* 26:33, 124-76; 266, 396. For a defense of the Reformation position regarding Judaism's legalism in Paul's day, see R. H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Biblica* 66 (1985):1-38; Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).



rationalism.<sup>28</sup>

### **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.<sup>29</sup>

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,<sup>30</sup> 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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<sup>28</sup>Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Interpretation* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 682.

<sup>29</sup>Norman L. Geisler, "Inductivism, Materialism, and Rationalism: Bacon, Hobbes, and Spinoza," in *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 11. This excellent work presents a variety of articles that trace the underpinnings of historical-critical methodologies to baneful philosophical methodologies.

<sup>30</sup>Hans 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).

undermine these basic underpinnings of the Reformation application of grammatico-historical exegesis to Pauline theology.<sup>31</sup> *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.<sup>32</sup> 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."<sup>33</sup> He insisted that in biblical exegesis interpreters must search for "hidden presuppositions."<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>For background on the damage of historical-critical ideologies to the text of Scripture, especially the Gospels, see F. David Farnell, "The Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism," *The Jesus Crisis*, eds. Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 85-131; Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible, Methodology or Ideology?* trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990).

<sup>32</sup>For more about philosophical systems that undermined the inspiration and authority of the text, consult Geisler (ed.), *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots* 11-258.

<sup>33</sup>Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 1.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 4, 6.

<sup>35</sup>Frank Thielman, "Preface," *Paul and the Law, A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994) 9-10.

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;<sup>36</sup> that Paul's thinking about the law was frequently inconsistent or "aberrant" (e.g., Rom 2:12-16);<sup>37</sup> 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."<sup>38</sup> Raisänen, deeply influenced by Sanders' thinking,<sup>39</sup> 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."<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

Reid views the NPP as "A revolution in New Testament studies" that "will lead to a fresh understanding of Paul."<sup>42</sup> *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:

<sup>36</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977) 510.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>38</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Paul, The Law and the Jewish People* [hereafter *PLJ*] (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 123.

<sup>39</sup>Räisänen credits Sanders with a great influence on his thought: "the publication of Sanders' illuminating work [i.e. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*] was like a gift from heaven for my own quest." See Heikki Räisänen, "Preface," *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) v.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>41</sup>See Daniel G. Reid, "Did Paul Have a Theology?," *Christianity Today* (April 24, 1995):18-22.

<sup>42</sup>Daniel G. Reid, "The Misunderstood Apostle," *Christianity Today* (July 16, 1990):25.

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.<sup>43</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup>

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."<sup>45</sup> Earley remarks,

[E]fforts 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.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Robert Jewett, "The Law and the Coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Romans," *Interpretation* 39 (October 1985):341; cp. Calvin L. Porter, "A New Paradigm for Reading Romans: Dialogue Between Christians and Jews," *Encounter* 39 (Summer 1978):257-72.

<sup>44</sup>Porter, "A New Paradigm" 341.

<sup>45</sup>Glenn David Earley, "The Radical Hermeneutical Shift in Post-Holocaust Christian Thought," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18 (Winter 1981):16.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 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,<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2 Auflage (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1965); English edition, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975); and idem, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 1976).

<sup>48</sup>For example, Ernst Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*, 2 Auflage (Bad Cannstatt: R. Müllerschön, 1958); Gerhard Ebeling, *Einführung in Theologische Sprachlehre* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971); English edition, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

<sup>49</sup>For further information, consult James M. Robinson, "Part I. The Issue: Hermeneutic," in *New Frontiers in Theology*, vol. 2: *The New Hermeneutic*, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York; Evanston, Ill.; and London: Harper & Row, 1964):1-77.

<sup>50</sup>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 Reformational-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.<sup>51</sup>

Moo comments similarly:

Scholarship on Paul and the the law in the last ten years has witnessed a "paridigm 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.<sup>52</sup>

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,

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2002); Glasgow Ministerial Fraternal, May 2002, Glasgow, Scotland; Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi (September 2003) 3.

<sup>51</sup>Duncan, "The Attractions of the New Perspectives on Paul" 3; Robert Smith, "Justification in 'The New Perspective on Paul,'" *Reformed Theological Review* 58 (April 1999):16-30.

<sup>52</sup>Douglas Moo, "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1986):287; Moo wrote his article in 1986, so the NPP has had dominance for over 20 years.

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.<sup>53</sup>

*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.<sup>54</sup> 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

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<sup>53</sup>Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 178.

<sup>54</sup>For 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,*"<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup>

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).<sup>57</sup> 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."<sup>58</sup>

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."<sup>59</sup> 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."<sup>60</sup> Sanders strongly differentiates between the Jesus of history

<sup>55</sup>Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New* xiii.

<sup>56</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism, A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [hereafter *PPJ*] (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>57</sup>Sanders' position is substantially that of Moore, but Sanders was more successful in popularizing the views than Moore.

<sup>58</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Paul, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991) 95-96.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>60</sup>E. 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,”<sup>61</sup> 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 we have his own words, we would still have to fear that he was quoted out of context.”<sup>62</sup> 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.”<sup>63</sup>

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.”<sup>64</sup>

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.”<sup>65</sup> 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.”<sup>66</sup>

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. . . .”<sup>67</sup>

### **Sanders’ Approach to the NPP.** Strongly influenced by George Foot

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 163-64.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 244.

Moore, Sanders cited Moore's 1921 article, "Christian Writers on Judaism,"<sup>68</sup> and stressed that it "should be required reading for any Christian scholar who writes about Judaism."<sup>69</sup> 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."<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> Where Moore only partially succeeded in his contentions, Sanders followed through with such thinking in greater detail.

Reflecting Baur's historical-critical concept of *Hauptbriefe*,<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

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

<sup>68</sup>George Foot Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* XIV (July 1921):197-254. See also George Foot Moore, *Judaism, In the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 3 vols., reprint of the 1927 President and Fellows of Harvard College Edition (reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendricksen, 1997).

<sup>69</sup>Sanders, *PPJ* 33.

<sup>70</sup>Moore, *Judaism* 93.

<sup>71</sup>Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism" 197-221.

<sup>72</sup>Although 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 Kümmel, *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.

<sup>73</sup>A 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.

<sup>74</sup>Sanders, *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.”<sup>75</sup> Although he denies a polemical bias in dealing with anti-Semitism,<sup>76</sup> he less than subtly reveals his bent on improving Judaism and Christian relations coupled with holocaustic hermeneutical preunderstanding so prevalent in NPP and refuting notions that Judaism in Paul’s day was a religion of “legalistic works-righteousness.”<sup>77</sup>

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.”<sup>78</sup>

Apparently, 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 saviour. If he did so, it follows that such a saviour *must* have been needed, and then only consequently 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.<sup>79</sup>

Paul’s thinking stems from his dogmatically held conviction that “[i]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.<sup>80</sup> Sanders deprecates Paul’s reasoning by concluding, “In short, *this is*

<sup>75</sup>Sanders, *PPJ* xii.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 123; cf. Jewett, “The Law and the Coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Romans” 347.

<sup>79</sup>Sanders, *PPJ* 443 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 497 (see 442-97 also).

*what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.*"<sup>81</sup>

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."<sup>82</sup> 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."<sup>83</sup> 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*"<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup>

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.<sup>86</sup>

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";<sup>87</sup> "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";<sup>88</sup> 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

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 552 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 75 (see also 236).

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 180 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 420 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 420.

<sup>87</sup>Sanders, *Paul, A Very Short Introduction* 53.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 57.

misunderstand him if we see him through Luther's eyes.<sup>89</sup>

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."<sup>90</sup> 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."<sup>91</sup> 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,<sup>92</sup> he did, however, want Gentiles to keep what Sanders terms "his [Paul's] own reduction"<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup>

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. . . . [H]e offered no rationale for his de facto limitations, but insisted that those in the Spirit keep what the law requires (Rom. 8:4)."<sup>95</sup>

**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,

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 119, 120.

<sup>92</sup>Sanders, *PLJ* 100-102.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 103.

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."<sup>96</sup> 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.'"<sup>97</sup>

**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]hrough 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."<sup>98</sup> 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

<sup>96</sup>Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul" 97; see also James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) 338-39.

<sup>97</sup>Dunn, *Theology of Paul* 5.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 13.

speak with some confidence of the theology of that document.”<sup>99</sup> 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.”<sup>100</sup>

An examination of his theology of Paul reveals that, like Sanders, Dunn also has been influenced by Baur’s concept of *Hauptbriefe*. He attributes Pauline authorship to eight epistles: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1–2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.<sup>101</sup> 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).”<sup>102</sup> 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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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 292.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 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."<sup>103</sup>

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, regrettably, has played its part in feeding an evil strain of Christian anti-Semitism."<sup>104</sup>

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.<sup>105</sup> 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."<sup>106</sup> 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."<sup>107</sup> 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

<sup>103</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988) lxxv.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>D. 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* lxxv.

<sup>106</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) 10–11.

<sup>107</sup>Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* LVI (July 1963):200.



Jesus Christ . . . has not changed this fact.”<sup>108</sup> 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,

He [Sanders] quickly—too quickly in my view—concluded that Paul’s religion could be understood only as a basically different system from that of his fellow Jews. . . . The Lutheran Paul has been replaced by an idiosyncratic Paul who in arbitrary and irrational manner turns his face against the glory and greatness of Judaism’s covenant theology and abandons Judaism simply because it was not Christianity. . . .<sup>109</sup>

Though Dunn endorses Sanders’ definition of Judaism as “covenantal nomism,”<sup>110</sup> 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.”<sup>111</sup> 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.”<sup>112</sup> 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.”<sup>113</sup> 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.”<sup>114</sup> For Jews, these social functions became the “test cases

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>109</sup>Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* 186-87; Dunn, *Romans 1-8* lxvi.

<sup>110</sup>Dunn, *Romans 1-8* lxx. See also D. Garlington, “Obedience of Faith,” *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2/38 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991).

<sup>111</sup>Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 11.

<sup>112</sup>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.

<sup>113</sup>Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* 11-12.

<sup>114</sup>Dunn, *Romans 1-8* lxvi.

of covenant loyalty,” marking them out as the people of God.<sup>115</sup>

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 conventional nomism” and “covenantal nomism is the issue underlying Paul’s argument in Galatians.”<sup>116</sup> 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.<sup>117</sup> 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.”<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> Galatians 2:16 (cf. also Gal 3:10-14;<sup>120</sup> 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” (εἰδότες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεῦσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων 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

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., lxxi.

<sup>116</sup>Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* 242 (also 251-57).

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>118</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways* (London and Philadelphia: SCM and Trinity, 1991) 135-36.

<sup>119</sup>Interestingly, 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 Decalog.” See Luther, “Commentary on Galatians,” *Luther’s Works* 26:138; I 3.17.2 (804-5).

<sup>120</sup>For 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.<sup>121</sup>

Dunn takes the expression ἐὰν μὴ (*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.<sup>122</sup>

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.”<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup> 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.”<sup>125</sup> 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.”<sup>126</sup> 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

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<sup>121</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14),” *New Testament Studies* 31 (October 1985) 528.

<sup>122</sup>Dunn, “New Perspective on Paul” 112.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>125</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “The Justice of God,” *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 43 (April 1992):11.

<sup>126</sup>Dunn, “The Justice of God” 12; cp. also Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 153-55, 158-59, 183-94.

encroachment.”<sup>127</sup>

Dunn has come under severe criticism for his position in his groundbreaking “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 ἔὰν μή 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.<sup>128</sup> 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.<sup>129</sup> 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.”<sup>130</sup>

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.”<sup>131</sup> 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.”<sup>132</sup> He also remains adamant that “Paul’s gospel of justification by faith is clearly aimed at Jewish assumption of privileged status before God.”<sup>133</sup>

**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,

<sup>127</sup>Dunn, “The Justice of God” 12; cp. also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, vol. 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988) 595-96.

<sup>128</sup>F. F. Bruce, “Paul and the Law in Recent Research,” in *Law and Religion*, ed. Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988) 125.

<sup>129</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “‘Works of the Law’ in Paul,” *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991):227.

<sup>130</sup>Moisés Silva, “The Law and Christianity: Dunn’s New Synthesis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991):347-48.

<sup>131</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, “‘The Works of the Law’ in the Epistle to the Romans,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 43 (1991):92; cp. Dunn, “Works of the Law and Curse of the Law” 536-39.

<sup>132</sup>James D. G. Dunn, “Yet Once More—‘The Works of the Law,’” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 46 (1992):102.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 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.<sup>134</sup>

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."<sup>135</sup> 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."<sup>136</sup> He proceeds to speak of his growing respect for liberals such as Rudolf Bultmann and Joachim Jeremias.<sup>137</sup> He now finds his greatest difficulties in relating to conservative Christians, not

<sup>134</sup>Dunn, "The Justice of God" 2.

<sup>135</sup>Tim Stafford, "The New Theologians," *Christianity Today* (February 8, 1999):46.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*

liberals.<sup>138</sup>

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 *Hauptbriefe*, Wright confines evidence for his work, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, to selected epistles of Paul: "Most of what I say in this book [*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."<sup>139</sup> 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."<sup>140</sup> He also questions Paul's authorship of the Pastorals because of no mention of resurrection in them.<sup>141</sup>

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."<sup>142</sup> 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.<sup>143</sup>

The discussions have included three quests for the "historical" Jesus. The First Quest covered the period from Reimarus (1694-1768) to Schweitzer (1906–*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

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>139</sup>N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 8.

<sup>140</sup>N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 267.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 271.

<sup>142</sup>N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 78.

<sup>143</sup>See Thomas and Farnell (eds.), *The Jesus Crisis*; Eta Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism on Trial*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001).

of NT discussion.<sup>144</sup> 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.<sup>145</sup> 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.<sup>146</sup> 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 Rabbinit 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’ *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948), Duabe’s *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (1956), and Gerhardsson’s *Memory and Manuscript* (1961).<sup>147</sup>

Alexander identifies some of the weaknesses in evidence in many NT scholars’ handling of Rabbinic literature.<sup>148</sup> 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

<sup>144</sup>For further discussion on these Quests, consult N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* 3-124; N. T. Wright, *The Contemporary Quest for Jesus* (Minneapolis:Fortress, 2002).

<sup>145</sup>Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* 78-82.

<sup>146</sup>See John Reumann, “Jesus and Christology,” in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), with Wright’s response (*Jesus and the Victory of God* 83-84).

<sup>147</sup>Philip S. Alexander, “Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74 (1983):237.

<sup>148</sup>*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 unsustainable anachronism in their use of Rabbinic sources. Time and again we find them quoting *texts from the 3rd, 4th or 5th centuries AD, or even later, to illustrate Jewish teaching in the 1st century.*"<sup>149</sup> 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 Hoshaiiah in the 3rd.<sup>150</sup> 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) Parallelomania—"New Testament scholars are still afflicted by the scourge of parallelomania."<sup>151</sup> 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.<sup>152</sup> 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."<sup>153</sup>

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.<sup>154</sup> (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."<sup>155</sup> (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."<sup>156</sup> For Wright, "Jesus and his contemporaries" did not take apocalyptic language "literally, as referring to the

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 244 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 243, cf. also 238-46; and Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962):1-13.

<sup>153</sup>Philip S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Judaism," in *Jews and Christians, the Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*; ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 2-3.

<sup>154</sup>Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* 86.

<sup>155</sup>Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* 424.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 426 (emphasis in the original).



actual end of the time-space universe.”<sup>157</sup> (4) He claims that “‘Jesus-stories’ were invented or possibly adapted for the needs of the community.”<sup>158</sup> (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.”<sup>159</sup>

**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.”<sup>160</sup> He contends, “Sanders’ main thesis . . . is that the picture of Judaism assumed in most Protestant readings of Paul is historically inaccurate and theologically misleading.”<sup>161</sup> He “strongly disagrees with Sanders on some points, and wants to go a good deal further than him on some others.”<sup>162</sup> Wright also criticizes Sanders for “a somewhat unsystematic treatment of different Pauline themes. Nor has he [Sanders] offered very much verse-by-verse exegesis.”<sup>163</sup> 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.”<sup>164</sup> 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.”<sup>165</sup>

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.”<sup>166</sup> For Wright, “the traditional” picture of Judaism as self-righteous legalism promoted by Luther and the Reformation (“though by no means exclu-

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 425.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 426, cf. 424-26 also.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 372 n. 4.

<sup>160</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 20.

<sup>161</sup>Wright, “A Fresh Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 83 (Spring 2001):21.

<sup>162</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 18.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>164</sup>Wright, “A Fresh Perspective on Paul” 22.

<sup>165</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 20.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 19; cf. N. T. Wright, “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978):79-80.

sively”) is “false”: “My case here is simply stated: the tradition of Pauline interpretation has manufactured a false Judaism for him to oppose.”<sup>167</sup> 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.<sup>168</sup> 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.”<sup>169</sup>

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.<sup>170</sup>

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.”<sup>171</sup>

Wright also adds his own emphases to NPP. One of these is Rom 2:17-29, calling it “a somewhat neglected passage.”<sup>172</sup> He says that Paul was not criticizing Jews for legalism, but presents “a detailed and sensitive critique of Judaism *as it advocates present it*”<sup>173</sup> (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

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>169</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 32.

<sup>170</sup>Wright, “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith” 65 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 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.<sup>174</sup>

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.<sup>175</sup>

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.'" <sup>176</sup> 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. . . ." <sup>177</sup> 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?" <sup>178</sup>

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." <sup>179</sup> 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

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>175</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 45-46.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>177</sup>N. T. Wright, "The Shape of Justification," *Bible Review* 17 (April 2001):50.

<sup>178</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 120.

<sup>179</sup>Wright, "The Shape of Justification" 8.

avail at the final judgment if Israel has not kept Torah.”<sup>180</sup>

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.<sup>181</sup>

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:

[I]f 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.<sup>182</sup>

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” (ἔξ ἔργων νόμου, *ex ergōn 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.”<sup>183</sup> 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.”<sup>184</sup> He, therefore, reflects Dunn's interpretation rather than

<sup>180</sup>N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” *NIB* 440.

<sup>181</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 119.

<sup>182</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>183</sup>N. 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.

<sup>184</sup>Wright, “Justification” 8, 50.

substantially differing with him.<sup>185</sup> 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.”<sup>186</sup>

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.”<sup>187</sup> For Wright, the Protestant view describes more of a “legal fiction” of imputation.<sup>188</sup> 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.’<sup>189</sup>

He also rejects the traditional concept of imputation of the righteousness of God. Overturning Augustinian and Reformation understanding of imputation,<sup>190</sup> 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.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>Cf. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* 216-19; idem, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993) 134-41.

<sup>186</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* 122.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 100, 102.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>191</sup>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.<sup>192</sup> 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

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<sup>192</sup>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.<sup>193</sup> 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.<sup>194</sup> 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.”<sup>195</sup> 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 *Aboth* 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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<sup>193</sup>For an excellent study of this Jewish reclamation of Jesus, consult Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>194</sup>Harry A. Wolfson, “How the Jews will Reclaim Jesus,” *The Menorah Journal* (1962):25-31; reprinted in *Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. B. Agus (New York: Arno, 1973). For an excellent review of how Jewish theologians have approached Paul in modern Jewish thought, consult Donald A. Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought,” in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to Professor F. F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday*, eds. Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 143-65.

<sup>195</sup>Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 143.

*Halakah*.”<sup>196</sup> Klausner considers *b. Shabbath* 30b a reference to Paul when it speaks of a pupil of Gamaliel as having exhibited “impudence in matters of learning.”<sup>197</sup>

Two main reasons may account for this: First, Jews ignored Paul’s theology as patently wrong and dangerous. Since Christian missionary endeavors found great success with Paul’s thoughts, Jews ignored Paul so as not to support his ideas unintentionally, ideas that threatened Jewish interests. Second, Jewish and Christian hostilities contributed to silence. Hagner notes,

Explaining the silence was the precarious situation of the Jews under a Christian tyranny that existed from the fourth century to the nineteenth-century Emancipation—the ultimate, but slowly realized, fruit of the Enlightenment. As long as this oppression continued, Jews were unable to speak publicly and objectively about Jesus, Paul or Christianity. Thus the history of the Jewish study of Paul is closely parallel to the history of the Jewish study of Jesus. With the new climate of freedom produced by the gradual acceptance of Jews into European society came the first scholarly assessments of Jesus and Paul from Jewish writers.<sup>198</sup>

The Enlightenment, “a prejudice against prejudice” movement that used philosophy to destroy the authority of the OT and NT, gave impetus and freedom to Jewish assaults on the Gospels as well as the Pauline Epistles.<sup>199</sup> Gay summarizes the essence of Enlightenment leaders: “Theirs [the Enlightenment proponents’] was a paganism directed against their Christian inheritance and dependent upon the paganism of classical antiquity, but it was also a *modern* paganism, emancipated from classical thought as much as from Christian dogma.”<sup>200</sup>

Ironically, Jewish opposition to the Jesus of the Gospels and to Paul’s portrayal of Judaism found an ally in the meteoric rise of historical-criticism in Gentile circles that stemmed from philosophy’s invasion of theology. The impact of individual approaches along with their sum-total effect upon the trustworthiness of the NT confirmed centuries-old Jewish criticism of Paul. As noted below, from so-called “Christians” of “massive scholarly erudition” came theories that affirmed what the Jews had felt long ago, i.e., that Paul’s epistles and the Gospels had

<sup>196</sup>Kittel traces the possibility that Paul is alluded to by Rabbi Eleazar in the Mishna (*Abot* 3.12). See Gerhard Kittel, “Paulus im Talmud,” in *Rabbinica* (Leipzig: Heinrich’s, 1920), 1-16; Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah*, translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes (London: Oxford University, 1933) 451.

<sup>197</sup>Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, trans. William F. Stinespring (New York: Macmillan, 1943) 308-11.

<sup>198</sup>Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 144.

<sup>199</sup>See Farnell, “Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism,” in *The Jesus Crisis*, 96-97.

<sup>200</sup>Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966) xi.



imported elements foreign to Judaism.<sup>201</sup>

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.”<sup>202</sup> 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.<sup>203</sup>

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 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* to formulating his view of “covenantal nomism” by reviewing the emphasis of Jewish scholars such as Claude Goldsmid Montefiore<sup>204</sup> 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.”<sup>205</sup> 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.”<sup>206</sup> Montefiore asserted, “[T]here is much in Paul which, while dealing *with* Judaism, is inexplicable *by* Judaism.”<sup>207</sup> 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

<sup>201</sup>Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 146.

<sup>202</sup>Hagner, “Paul in Modern Jewish Thought” 146.

<sup>203</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Paul the Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 462.

<sup>204</sup>Claude Goldsmid Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul, Two Essays* (London: Max Goschen, 1914); see also “Rabbinic Judaism and the Epistles of St. Paul,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 13 (January 1901): 161-217.

<sup>205</sup>Sanders, *PPJ* 35.

<sup>206</sup>C. G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul, Two Essays* (London: Max Goschen, 1914) 65.

<sup>207</sup>C. G. Montefiore, “Rabbinic Judaism and the Epistles of St. Paul,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 13 (January 1901) 167 (emphasis in the original); reprinted in *Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. B. Agus (1973).

Jew of the year 500.”<sup>208</sup> 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.”<sup>209</sup>

### **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).<sup>210</sup> The treatise caused widespread dismay, not only among Jews contemporary with Luther, but also in Protestant circles. Melancthon and Osiander were unhappy with its severity, and Bullinger related Luther's words to the Spanish Inquisition.<sup>211</sup> Luther's proposals were quite severe, especially in the fourth section of his work.<sup>212</sup> 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.<sup>213</sup> 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

<sup>208</sup>Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul* 17.

<sup>209</sup>Sanders, *PPJ* xii.

<sup>210</sup>For the complete text see Martin Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *The Christian in Society*, vol. 47 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Franklin Sherman, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 137-306.

<sup>211</sup>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.

<sup>212</sup>See Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies” 267-92.

<sup>213</sup>“Introduction to ‘On the Jews and Their Lies’” 123.

the Jewish people which this treatise contains.”<sup>214</sup>

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 spade, 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. . . .<sup>215</sup>

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.”<sup>216</sup> 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.”<sup>217</sup>

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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<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 268-72.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., 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.<sup>218</sup>

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.”<sup>219</sup>

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”

<sup>218</sup>Martin Luther, “That Jesus was Born a Jew,” in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt, trans. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962) 200.

<sup>219</sup>Marvin Lowenthal, *The Jews of Germany, A Story of Sixteen Centuries* (New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936) 158-59.

of German radical biblical criticism and a tutor of Strauss.<sup>220</sup> 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.”<sup>221</sup> 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.”<sup>222</sup>

In 1831, Baur published an essay entitled, “*Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen 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.<sup>223</sup> 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

<sup>220</sup>For further information, see Peter C. Hodgson, “General Introduction,” in Ferdinand Christian Baur, *On the Writing of Church History*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (New York: Oxford University, 1968) 1-40; Neill and Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* 20-30.

<sup>221</sup>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.

<sup>222</sup>Winfried Corduan, “Transcendentalism: Hegel,” in *Biblical Errancy* 94.

<sup>223</sup>Ferdinand Christian Baur, “Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831):61-206.

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.<sup>224</sup>

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.<sup>225</sup>

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 Pastorals 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).<sup>226</sup>

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

<sup>224</sup>Ferdinand Christian Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 3d ed., trans. and ed. Allan Menzies (London: Williams and Norgate, 1878) 1:49-50.

<sup>225</sup>Hagner, "Paul in Modern Jewish Thought" 146; Baur's major works, especially *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.

<sup>226</sup>For further information, consult Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* 127-133.

debate in the twentieth century over the relationship between the life and teaching of the historical Jesus and the theology of Paul.<sup>227</sup>

Baur's *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.<sup>228</sup> 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.

**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.<sup>229</sup> 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, *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, Mandaeen, 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.<sup>230</sup>

Another leader in this movement was Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920) who in his *Kyrios Christos* (1913) alleged that in Hellenistic Christianity the "Kyrios Christos" concept replaced the eschatological Son of Man in earlier Christianity and

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<sup>227</sup>S. J. Hafemann, "Paul and His Interpreters," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993) 668.

<sup>228</sup>Though Wrede and Bultmann were essentially still Lutheran in approach, their ideas stimulated discussion that would lead to the NPP.

<sup>229</sup>For overviews of the development of the *Religionsgeschichte Schule* or History-of-Religions school, see Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* 206-25, 245-80; Neill and Wright, *The Interpretation of the NT 1861-1986* 168-79.

<sup>230</sup>Richard Reitzenstein, *Der Hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen, Ihre Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Leipzig und Berlin: Bruck und Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1910); see also English translation *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions, Their Basic Ideas and Significance*, trans. John E. Steely (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978).

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.<sup>231</sup>

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.<sup>232</sup> 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.”<sup>233</sup>

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.”<sup>234</sup>

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

<sup>231</sup>See Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970).

<sup>232</sup>For further information, see Ernst Troeltsch, “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology” (1898) (11-32); “Christianity and the History of Religion” (1897) (77-86); “The Dogmatics of the History-of-Religions School” (87-108), in *Religion in History*, essays translated by James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense with an Introduction by James Luther Adams (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

<sup>233</sup>See Troeltsch, “The Dogmatics of the History-of-Religions School,” in *Religion in History* 87.

<sup>234</sup>See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, complete in one volume, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951, 1955) 164-87 (especially 181, 187).



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."<sup>235</sup>

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.<sup>236</sup> 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."<sup>237</sup> 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."<sup>238</sup>

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*,<sup>239</sup> 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."<sup>240</sup> 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."<sup>241</sup>

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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<sup>235</sup>Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 7.

<sup>236</sup>Wilhelm Wrede, *The Origin of the New Testament*, trans. James S. Hill (London and New York: Harper & Brothers, 1909) 3.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid.

<sup>239</sup>Wilhelm Wrede. *Paul*, trans. Edward Lumm is (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1908).

<sup>240</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 179, 180.

The Reformation has accustomed us to look upon this as the central point of Pauline doctrine: 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.<sup>242</sup>

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.*"<sup>243</sup>

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.<sup>244</sup>

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.<sup>245</sup>

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

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid., 127-28 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>245</sup>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.”<sup>246</sup> Paul never attempts “to unfold a system of doctrine.”<sup>247</sup> 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.”<sup>248</sup>

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.<sup>249</sup>

In his studies, Schweitzer came under the philosophical influence of Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche.<sup>250</sup> He has been called an irrational rationalist, but the term that best describes him is “mystic.”<sup>251</sup> 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),<sup>252</sup> he developed ideological approaches as a matrix he would use on later studies of Jesus<sup>253</sup> and

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>249</sup>For an excellent summary, see William Baird, *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 2:229-37.

<sup>250</sup>Schweitzer completed his D.Phil. dissertation on Kant (*Die Religionsphilosophie Kants*) in July 1899.

<sup>251</sup>Baird, *A History of New Testament Research* 2:230.

<sup>252</sup>For further information see John Reumann, “‘The Problem of the Lord’s Supper’” as Matrix for Albert Schweitzer’s ‘Quest of the Historical Jesus,’” *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981):476.

<sup>253</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, ed. John Bowden, trans. W. Montgomery, J. R. Coates, Susan Cupitt, and John Bowden from the German *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, published by J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen [1906, 1913, 1950] (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). Bowden’s edition has been produced in response to some perceived translational errors in Montgomery’s famous English translation. Bowden remarks, “[W]hen I started comparing it [Montgomery’s translation] to what Schweitzer had written, I was horrified. Montgomery had a kind of bombastic, end-of-the-nineteenth-century style which contrasts strikingly with Schweitzer’s clear, matter-of-fact and often witty prose.” See “Editor’s Note,” *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First

Paul:<sup>254</sup> (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.<sup>255</sup> *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 *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!"<sup>256</sup> Echoing the thinking of Wrede's Messianic Secret,<sup>257</sup> Schweitzer maintained that Jesus recognized himself as the Messiah at his baptism, but kept his messiahship secret, arguing,

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.<sup>258</sup>

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."<sup>259</sup> 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 'Weltan-

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<sup>254</sup>A. Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1930), English translation, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Henry Holt, 1931). See also A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1912), English translation, *Paul and His Interpreters: A Critical History*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1951).

<sup>255</sup>For information, see Reumann, "The Problem of the 'Lord's Supper' as Matrix for Albert Schweitzer's 'Quest of the Historical Jesus'" 475-87.

<sup>256</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, translated and introduced by Walter Lowrie (London: A. & C. Black, 1925) 87.

<sup>257</sup>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-Markan tradition. See Schweitzer, *The Quest* 302, 303-14.

<sup>258</sup>Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* 180-81.

<sup>259</sup>*Ibid.*, 251.

shauung' as it quickened and transfigured Jewish eschatology."<sup>260</sup>

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.<sup>261</sup> 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."<sup>262</sup> For Schweitzer, all scholarship between Reimarus and Johannes Weiss "appears retrograde" because of a failure to appreciate apocalyptic thought.<sup>263</sup> Schweitzer's heroes in this work were four: Reimarus, Strauss, J. Weiss, and Schweitzer himself.<sup>264</sup> 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.<sup>265</sup>

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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<sup>260</sup>Ibid.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid.

<sup>262</sup>Schweitzer, *The Quest* 90.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>264</sup>For the agenda behind Schweitzer's *Quest*, see S. J. Gathercole, "The Critical and Dogmatic Agenda of Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*," *Tyndale Bulletin* 51 (2000):261-83.

<sup>265</sup>Oddly, this quote does not appear in the latest edition of Schweitzer's *Quest*, i.e., Bowden's edition (2001). See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Introduction by James M. Robinson, trans. W. Montgomery from the first German edition, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* [1906] (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 370-71.

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.<sup>266</sup>

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."<sup>267</sup> Schweitzer labels Paul's "being in-Christ" as "the prime enigma of Pauline teaching."<sup>268</sup>

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."<sup>269</sup> 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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<sup>266</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1951) 37.

<sup>267</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul* (German title *Die Mystik des Apostles Paulus*), trans. William Montgomery with a prefatory note by F. C. Burkitt (New York: Henry Holt, 1931) 3.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid.

<sup>269</sup>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.<sup>270</sup>

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/ors, 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."<sup>271</sup>

### 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.

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<sup>270</sup>Ibid., 224-25 (emphasis added).

<sup>271</sup>Baird, *History of New Testament Research* 2:237.