

THE TARGET OF PAUL'S POLEMIC:
A DIALOGUE WITH THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

by

Daniel W. Waldschmidt

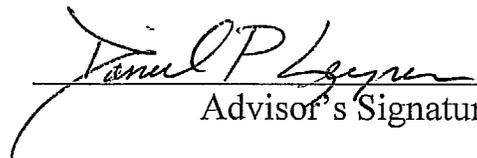
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Professor Daniel P. Leyrer, Advisor

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ABSTRACT

What attitude was Paul opposing when he said that “a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:28)? The traditional view has been that Paul was opposing works-righteousness, the idea that says, “I can earn God’s favor by keeping the law.” There is, however, a group of scholars promoting a New Perspective: E.P. Sanders, James D.G. Dunn, and N.T. Wright. They deny that it was works-righteousness which Paul was opposing in his letters. Instead, Paul was opposing ethnic exclusivism. This thesis attempts to demonstrate that Paul was indeed opposing works-righteousness by bringing forward evidence from the Pauline passages at the center of the debate. Interaction is also made with the exegesis of these passages put forward by the advocates of the New Perspective. This paper will argue for a Pauline polemic against works-righteousness from Paul’s usage of Psalm 143:2 in Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:20, from Paul’s consistent contrast between “doing” and “believing” (Romans 9:32; Galatians 3:11-12), and from Paul’s warning to the Christians in Philippi against “putting confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

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Introduction

Justification by faith is a polemical doctrine. That is to say Paul employed this doctrine in disputes with false teachers. What is the target at which justification by faith is aimed? The traditional view has been that it is aimed at works-righteousness. Paul's opponents taught some form of works-righteousness and Paul countered with justification by faith.

There are a group of scholars, however, promoting what has been called the New Perspective on Paul. A central conviction of the New Perspective is that Paul could not have been opposing works-righteousness because first century Jews were not work-righteous. Many Christians suppose that Paul is opposing works-righteousness, New Perspective authors say, because they have been influenced by the polemical battles of Martin Luther and Saint Augustine and are unconsciously reading those debates back into Paul's polemical language. One New Perspective author states:

One of the great gains of the last quarter of a century in Pauline scholarship has been to recognize that Paul's contemporaries- and Paul himself prior to his conversion- were not 'legalists,' if by that we mean that they were attempting to earn favor with God, to earn grace as it were, by the performance of law-prescribed works. Paul's fellow Jews were not proto-Pelagians, attempting to pull themselves up by their own moral shoelaces.¹

The main articulators of the New Perspective are E.P. Sanders, James Dunn and N.T. Wright. In many ways, these three men are deserving of high honor. They all have an obvious love for the apostle Paul. In a lecture given at Villanova University, E.P. Sanders said of Paul that "there are few greater thrills than reading his letters."² James Dunn, at the beginning of his Romans commentary, calls Paul "the one whom I personally regard as the greatest theologian of all time."³ All students of Paul would do well to follow the example of N.T. Wright when he says, "I have lived with St Paul as more or less a companion for more than twenty years."⁴ Expressing a similar sentiment to that of E.P. Sanders above, Wright wrote, "I have to say that

¹ N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume X: Acts-1 Corinthians*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 460-461.

² "Is Paul's Legacy Relevant Today?" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZNijc_-4Lk (accessed February 17, 2012).

³ *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco: Word, 1988), xiii.

⁴ *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 7.

for me there has been no more stimulating exercise, for the mind, the heart, the imagination and the spirit, than trying to think Paul's thoughts after him and constantly to be stirred up to fresh glimpses of God's ways with the world and with us strange human creatures."⁵ New Perspective authors are to be commended for these sentiments.

The writings of Sanders, Dunn, and Wright have made considerable contributions to the field of Pauline Studies. Even if the reader finds himself in disagreement on certain points, the reader always comes away having learned much about Paul, his world and his letters. This paper, however, will take up one of the points of disagreement. The purpose of this paper will be to demonstrate that, contrary to the New Perspective, Paul is indeed opposing works-righteousness. By examining key passages this paper aims to show that Lutherans are not reading a polemic against works-righteousness into Paul; exegetes from the New Perspective are reading it out.

Why devote an entire thesis to providing evidence that Paul was opposing works-righteousness? Works-righteousness is a serious danger for every Christian. It is imperative for the Christian to recognize and avoid works-righteousness, lest he "be severed from Christ and fall away from grace" (Galatians 5:4).⁶ The danger of the New Perspective is that the definition of works-righteousness has been softened almost to the extent that if grace is involved in a religion at all, that religion cannot be labeled work-righteous. In this paper it will be suggested that Paul's definition of works-righteousness was much stricter. If any works, circumcision or otherwise, are allowed into the doctrine of the justification of the sinner before God, this can fairly be labeled as works-righteousness. According to Paul, if salvation is "by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6). As some have well said, "salvation is by grace alone or it is not by grace at all."

⁵ *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2009), x.

⁶ Scripture quotations throughout the paper are from the NIV 1984 unless otherwise indicated.

Literature Review

E.P. Sanders

The New Perspective on Paul began with a new perspective on Judaism. In the view of E.P. Sanders, first century Judaism had been unfairly portrayed as a religion which was coldly work-righteous.⁷

Sanders saw two reasons for this misrepresentation of Judaism. First, Christian scholars needed a foil religion (Judaism) over against which to set their true religion (Christianity).⁸ The result is that Judaism is made to represent everything that is bad about religion (dead ritual, merit theology, self-righteousness, etc.) and Christianity is made to represent everything that is good about religion (inner spirituality, salvation by grace, true humility, etc.).

The second reason Sanders saw for this misrepresentation of Judaism is that most Christian scholars leaned exclusively upon two sources for their knowledge of first century Judaism: Ferdinand Weber's *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrash und Talmud* and Strack – Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*.⁹ These two works stated that in Judaism a person's salvation depended upon whether his good deeds numerically outnumbered his transgressions.¹⁰ "As Billerbeck put it, Judaism is a religion of *Selbsterlösung*, self-salvation."¹¹ These two sources, according to Sanders, are, despite their wide use, faulty representations of Judaism.

Sanders conducted an extensive study of the soteriology of first century Judaism.¹² Sanders wanted to learn what Judaism taught about how a person "gets in" and "stays in" the community of the saved; in other words, "*how getting in and staying in are understood: the way in which a religion [in this case Judaism] is understood to admit and retain members.*"¹³ As

⁷ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 33-59.

⁸ *Ibid*, 57.

⁹ *Ibid*, 33-42.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 220. The quotation is from St. – B. IV, p. 6.

¹² *Ibid*, 17.

¹³ *Ibid*, Emphasis original.

Sanders looked at first century Judaism, he saw a very different picture emerge than the one presented in Weber and Strack-Billerbeck. Instead of a soteriology that depended on doing more good deeds than bad, Sanders saw a soteriology which he called “covenantal nomism.”¹⁴ Sanders defines “covenantal nomism” in this way: “Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one’s place in God’s plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.”¹⁵

The first half of “covenantal nomism” is that a person “gets in” to the community of the saved by God’s electing grace. God in his grace had taken the initiative and made a *covenant* with Israel (this is the “covenantal” part of the equation). No Israelite had to *earn* his way into the covenant. He was already “in” by virtue of being a member of Israel, the covenant people.

Along with the covenant come certain laws (this is the “nomism” part of the equation). A member of the covenant keeps these laws in order to maintain his covenant status (i.e. to “stay in” the community of the saved). Sanders wrote that “election and salvation as such are not by works of law, although obedience is the condition of remaining righteous.”¹⁶ When the covenant was transgressed, the covenant itself provided means of atonement for the transgressions (i.e. repentance and the sacrificial system).

Sanders insisted that the requirement to do works in order to maintain one’s covenant status did not mean that the Jew had to *earn* his place in the covenant. “[O]bedience maintains one’s position in the covenant, but it does not earn God’s grace as such. It simply keeps an individual in the group which is the recipient of God’s grace.”¹⁷

To sum up, in Judaism according to Sanders, one “gets in” by grace and one “stays in” by obedience to the commandments. The Jews “*believed that God has provided for the salvation of all faithful members of Israel* – all those who maintain their place in the covenant by obedience

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 423.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 420. Emphasis original.

and by employing the means of atonement provided by the covenant, especially repentance, for transgression.”¹⁸

Now that covenantal nomism has been summarized, the question needs to be asked whether it is a religion of grace. Sanders says “yes” because God had taken the initiative in making a covenant with Israel. No individual Israelite had to earn their way into the covenant. He or she was “in” by virtue of being an Israelite, one of God’s chosen people. It is the conclusion of this paper, however, that though there are elements of grace in covenantal nomism, it cannot ultimately be called a religion of grace because covenant status, though given by grace, needs to be maintained by obedience. In covenantal nomism, God does his part in salvation, but the individual Israelite also has to do his part in salvation (obey the commandments).

Sanders presented his theory that Judaism was based on covenantal nomism in an enormously influential book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, published in 1977. Sanders reviewed a wide variety of Jewish literature from roughly 200 BC – 200 AD. Tannaitic Literature (Rabbinic material from 70 – 200 AD), The Dead Sea Scrolls, and selected Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Ben Sirach, I Enoch, Jubilees, Psalms of Solomon, and IV Ezra) all receive separate treatment in the book. Sanders saw covenantal nomism as a pervasive pattern in all of these writings except for one (IV Ezra)¹⁹.

In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Sanders presents Judaism as a religion of grace. In the following pages the evidence that Sanders brings forward in support of his argument that Judaism was a religion of grace will be summarized and evaluated.

From the Rabbis, Sanders quotes Sanhedrin 10.1. “All Israelites have a share in the world to come.”²⁰ The Rabbis did not say that Israelites *who do more good deeds than bad* have a share in the world to come. Nor did they say that Israelites *who earn God’s favor by fulfilling enough*

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 236. Emphasis original.

¹⁹ Sanders admits that in IV Ezra covenantal nomism has broken down and salvation really does depend on doing more righteous deeds than bad. “One has here the closest approach to legalistic works-righteousness which can be found in the Jewish literature of the period; for only here are the traditional characteristics of God – he freely forgives and restores sinners and maintains the covenant promises despite transgression – denied,” *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 418.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 147.

commandments have a share in the world to come, but rather that *all* Israelites have a share in the world to come.

Sanders' claim that Judaism is a religion of grace is largely based on the election of Israel as the people of God and the corresponding covenant made with Israel on Mount Sinai.

However, when the Rabbis discuss the question *why* God chose Israel, grace does not come shining through in their answers. Sanders writes,

Thus one finds that the Rabbis could not rest content with simply saying that God chose Israel, but inquired *why* he did so. They wished to explain that it was not 'odd of God to choose the Jews'. There are basically three kinds of answers given by the Rabbis to the question of why God chose Israel. One answer is that God offered the covenant (and the commandments attached to it) to all, but only Israel accepted it. The second answer is that God chose Israel because of some merit found either in the patriarchs or in the exodus generation or on the condition of future obedience. The third answer is really not an answer at all; that is, it does not in fact give a reason beyond God's own will: it is that God chose Israel for his name's sake.²¹

Grace is found only in the third answer. The first two attribute the cause of the election to Israel and not God's grace. In the first answer (God offered the covenant to all, but only Israel accepted it), one could even say that it was *Israel* who chose *God*, not God who chose Israel.

Sanders expands on the first answer by saying, "That God offered the covenant to all is sometimes said in such a way as to point out Israel's moral superiority to other nations."²² The reason for the election is then Israel's moral superiority.

The answer that God chose Israel because of the merit of the exodus generation or on the condition of future obedience is in direct conflict with Romans 9:11-12 in which Paul says that future obedience had nothing to do with God's choice of Jacob. "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told 'the older will serve the younger.'" See also Romans 9:16, "it does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy," and 11:5, "So too at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." It is apparent, then, that the part of Rabbinic Judaism which Sanders calls grace (namely their consciousness that God had chosen

²¹ *Ibid*, 87-88.

²² *Ibid*, 88.

Israel), would not have been called grace by the apostle Paul; because for the apostle Paul grace completely excludes works when it comes to election.

Sanders admits that according to the Rabbis the exodus was earned, but seems to brush this fact off by saying that this did not trouble the Rabbis.

The Rabbis did not have the Pauline/Lutheran problem of ‘works-righteousness’, and so felt no embarrassment at saying that the exodus was earned...One might have expected the Rabbis to develop a clear doctrine of prevenient grace, but grace and merit did not seem to them to be in contradiction to each other; and doubtless they had good biblical support here. They could assert the grace of God in bringing Israel out of Egypt, yet at the same time ask by whose *zekut* [merit] he did so.²³

Even though the Rabbis saw no contradiction between grace and merit, Paul did. Paul pushed grace and merit into antithetical opposites when speaking of election in Romans 11:5-6 which was quoted above.

Sanders then moves on to the Dead Sea Scrolls. According to Sanders, Israel in general had an awareness of the electing grace of God which chose Israel from among the nations to be his special people, but the Qumran community had a special appreciation for the electing grace of God. This appreciation came from their belief that God had chosen them out from the rest of the Israelites to know the previously hidden secrets of the covenant. “The sectarian view of their covenant as one containing special revelations required them to emphasize the initiating grace of God in deciding who will receive insight and who not, so that the grace of God and his determination of the fate of each individual are emphasized in the Scrolls as nowhere else in Palestinian Judaism.”²⁴ Again Sanders says, “More important, the Qumran covenanters doubtless did have a heightened sense of God’s grace, which is to be explained by their view that they were especially elect from among Israel.”²⁵

Sanders cites several passages to support this claim. To demonstrate the emphasis on predestination at Qumran he quotes IQS 3.18, “[God] has appointed for [man] two spirits in which to walk until the time of his visitation: the spirits of truth and falsehood.” To demonstrate God’s grace in electing he quotes IQH 14.25, “And Thou hast favored me, Thy servant, with the Spirit of Knowledge.” He adds the comment, “Frequently in IQH knowledge seems to be more

²³ *Ibid*, 100.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 268-269.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 297.

or less equated with election.”²⁶ He also quotes portions of IQH 6.5 – 10, “Thou hast brought me into the Council... Thou wilt raise up survivors among Thy people and a remnant within Thine inheritance.”

These verses certainly speak of predestination and divine favor, but one wonders whether they live up to claims Sanders makes of them. They certainly do not rise to the heights of Ephesians 1:3-6:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

Nevertheless, the point is well taken that grace is not absent from Qumran. Sanders cites IQH 11.10, “For the sake of Thy glory Thou hast purified man of sin,” and IQH 4.37, “for Thou wilt pardon iniquity and through Thy righteousness [Thou wilt purify man] of his sin.” IQS 11.12 is a lovely statement of God’s grace. “As for me, if I stumble, the mercies of God shall be my eternal salvation. If I stagger because of the sin of flesh, my justification shall be by the righteousness of God which endures forever.”

This consciousness of divine grace, however, stood side by side with extreme legalism. Sanders notes that within the Qumran community there was “suspicion and intolerance; for one had to stay separate from all sin, and consequently members were at least partially excluded from the fellowship for any transgression.”²⁷

In his chapter on Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Sanders’ discussion of Jubilees is most important for our thesis. Jubilees dates to about 100 B.C. It is mostly a retelling of the biblical story of Moses’ forty days on Mount Sinai.²⁸ In the view of the author of Jubilees, every Israelite will be saved except those who sin in such a way as to indicate that they have denied the covenant. Sanders writes,

²⁶ *Ibid*, 260.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 314.

²⁸ For a helpful introduction and overview of Jubilees see that of O.S. Wintermute in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 35-50.

Thus we see that all Israel will be saved. Excluded from Israel are those who transgress a commandment which is, in the author's view, tantamount to denying the covenant (not circumcising, not keeping the Sabbath, intermarrying or permitting intermarriage with Gentiles, not keeping the Passover, devising evil against fellow Israelites) or those who blatantly commit a heinous transgression which is, by inference, a denial of the God who gave the commandment (eating blood, having intercourse with one's father's wife and perhaps with one's mother-in-law or daughter-in-law).²⁹

This list of transgressions that exclude an Israelite from salvation is too extensive for the theology of Jubilees to be considered a theology of grace. It is biblical to say that unrepentant sin is an outward indication of unbelief, but the alarming thing is that for the author of Jubilees, the sins listed above are in themselves sins for which there is no atonement. "One who gives his daughter or sister in marriage to a Gentile shall be stoned and the woman buried, 'and she shall be rooted out of Israel' (30.7). 'And to this law there is no limit of days, and no remission nor any atonement...' (30.10)."³⁰ According to Jubilees, even if a person repented there would still be no forgiveness for these transgressions. Sanders writes, "It is doubtful, however, if the author would agree that forgiveness could be given to a repentant contemporary transgressor of one of the commandments for which there is no atonement."³¹

"In the case of one who has intercourse with his father's wife, 'there is no atonement forever,'" (33.13).³² This forms a stark contrast to the apostle Paul, who was confronted with a situation in which a man slept with his father's wife. To be sure, Paul told the Corinthians to put the man out of their fellowship while he was unrepentant (1 Corinthians 5:2). "Hand this man over to Satan," Paul said (5:5). But Paul's ultimate purpose in this was for the man to be "saved on the day of the Lord" (5:5). In addition, Paul may have this man in mind in 2 Corinthians where he says, "The punishment inflicted by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2:6-7). According to the author of Jubilees, however, there would be no atonement or forgiveness for such a sin.

²⁹ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 369-370.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 369.

³¹ *Ibid*, 377.

³² *Ibid*, 369.

Nevertheless, Sanders still sees the soteriology of Jubilees as one of grace. “Salvation is given graciously by God in his establishing the covenant with the fathers, a covenant which he will not forsake (1.18); individuals may, however, be excluded from Israel if they sin in such a way as to spurn the covenant itself.”³³ “Obedience, as is generally the case in Judaism, is the *condition* of salvation (when it is coupled with repentance for transgression), but not its cause.”³⁴ Since the theology of Jubilees requires obedience as a condition for salvation; and especially since there are certain sins for which there is no atonement or forgiveness, it should not be considered a religion of grace.

As one reads through *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, one hears Sanders talk a good deal about grace in Palestinian Judaism, but one does not hear the sources which Sanders quotes talk very much about grace. Despite this and the other weaknesses pointed out above, Sanders’ presentation of Judaism as a religion of grace won wide-spread acceptance. N.T. Wright, whom we will discuss much more below, endorsed Sanders’ view of Judaism already in 1978, less than a year after *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* appeared. In a lecture that appeared in the Tyndale Bulletin in 1978, Wright wrote, “In fact, we are told [by Sanders], Judaism, so far from being a religion of works, is based on a clear understanding of grace, the grace that chose Israel in the first place to be a special people.”³⁵ Scholars like Wright took Sander’s view of Judaism and ran with it, exploring fully its implications for the interpretation of Paul. We now turn to the scholar who has done this with perhaps the most zeal: James D.G. Dunn.

James D.G. Dunn

Dunn fully endorsed Sanders’ presentation of Judaism. Making reference to Sanders he wrote:

Judaism is first and foremost a religion of grace, with human obedience always understood as response to that grace...The wheel of scholarly perception of first century Judaism has turned through a °180 arc, to the point precisely opposite from where it began. The Judaism of what Sanders christened as ‘covenantal nomism’ can now be seen to preach good protestant doctrine: that grace is always prior; that human effort is ever the response to divine initiative; that good works are the fruit and not the root of salvation. But if that is so, where does that leave Paul? And where does it leave

³³ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 370-371.

³⁴ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 371.

³⁵ “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 79-80.

justification by faith? In formulating his own teaching on the theme, what was it that Paul was protesting against?³⁶

Sanders' main contribution to the New Perspective's reconstruction of Judaism was his emphasis that God had made a gracious covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai and that individual salvation depended upon membership in that covenant. James Dunn's contribution to that same reconstruction was his emphasis that circumcision, food laws and the Sabbath functioned as badges indicating membership in that saving covenant. Much like a member of the YMCA is issued a membership card which indicates that he is indeed a member of the YMCA, circumcision (among other things) served as a membership card which identified a person as a member of the saving covenant community.

Dunn rightly emphasizes the significance of circumcision for the first-century Jew. Circumcision was absolutely essential to a Jew's identity as a Jew. In many places³⁷ Dunn refers to the Maccabean era as the time when circumcision became extremely important as a marker of national identity and even pride. This is certainly understandable given the fact that many Jews were forced to fight for their national identity in the face of the ever encroaching hellenization enforced by the Seleucids. Circumcision was absolutely vital to Jewish national identity.

This understanding drives Dunn's interpretation of Paul's phrase *ἔργα νόμου*, "the works of the law" (Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16 (x3), 3:2, 5, 10). According to Dunn "works of the law" are not good works in general, nor are they works done to earn God's favor. In a lecture delivered in 1982 entitled "The New Perspective on Paul" from which this movement got its name, Dunn says that "works of the law" are "identity markers...They functioned as badges of covenant membership."³⁸ The "works" or badges that identified Jews as Jews were circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath.

According to Dunn, Paul was not opposing the Jews because they were work-righteous, but rather because they insisted that in order for a person to be saved he had to have the

³⁶ "The Justice of God," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 199.

³⁷ For example see *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco: Word, 1988), 119, 125.

³⁸ "The New Perspective on Paul," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 109.

membership card; he had to wear the badge of covenant membership. Dunn notes that some Jews were extremely zealous to enforce the boundaries of the people of God. They insisted that Israel maintain its “set-apartness” by continuing to practice circumcision, observe food laws, and keep the Sabbath.

The prime example of this is the Maccabean revolt. Many Israelites had tried to fit in with Greek culture by becoming uncircumcised (1 Maccabees 1:15), sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath (1:43). Antiochus Epiphanes had put to death women who had their children circumcised (1:60-61), and others who refused to eat unclean meat (1:62-63). Out of zeal for the law and to maintain Israel’s set-apartness, Mattathias and his sons led a brave and successful revolt against the Greeks.

Some went so far in their zeal to maintain Israel’s distinct identity that they persecuted those who put that identity in jeopardy. Dunn cites Saul of Tarsus as a prime example (Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6). But in his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul was faced with a shocking reality: Jesus, who had been hung on a tree and was thus under the curse of the law just like the Gentiles, had now been vindicated by God! Dunn suggests that Paul’s train of thought ran like this:

Christ in his death had put himself under the curse and outside the covenant blessing (cf. Deut 11.26; 30.19-20) – that is, put himself in the place of the Gentile! Yet God vindicated him! Therefore, God is *for* the Gentiles; and consequently the law could no longer serve as a boundary dividing Jew from Gentile. In short, Christ in his death had effectively abolished this disqualification, by himself being disqualified...[Christ’s death] demonstrated that the grace of God was now to be experienced apart from the law.³⁹

For Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus meant that a new era had dawned in which God was fulfilling his promise to Abraham that his covenant family would include all nations. Now that the covenant had been extended to include the Gentiles, Jewish “works of the law” could no longer serve as the badge of covenant membership. For the Gentiles to be included, the badge of membership had to be faith, and faith alone. Dunn writes,

The decisive corollary which Paul saw and which he did not hesitate to draw, was that the covenant is no longer to be identified or characterized by such distinctively Jewish observances as circumcision, food laws and sabbath...To continue to insist on such works of the law was to ignore the central fact for Christians, that with Christ’s coming

³⁹ “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14),” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 138-139.

God's covenant purpose had reached its intended final stage in which the more fundamental identity marker (Abraham's faith) reasserts its primacy over against the too narrowly nationalistic identity markers of circumcision, food laws and sabbath.⁴⁰

"Too narrow," however, was also the phrase used by Dunn's critics to describe his interpretation of "works of the law." The features of the law which separated Jews from Gentiles were limited largely to circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. C.E.B. Cranfield wrote an article against Dunn in which he insisted that the phrase "works of the law" most naturally means obedience to the law generally, and cannot be restricted to only certain parts of the law.⁴¹

Dunn responded with, "Yet Once More – 'The Works of the Law' A Response."⁴² Cranfield in his article had made frequent reference to "Dunn's special restricted sense" for ἔργα νόμου. In response Dunn claimed, "I do not, however, advocate 'a special restricted sense' for the phrase."⁴³ This in spite of the fact that Dunn had previously written,

The phrase "works of the law" in Gal. 2.16 is, in fact, a fairly restricted one: it refers precisely to these same identity markers described above, *covenant* works – those regulations prescribed by the law which any good Jew would simply take for granted to describe what a good Jew did. To be a good Jew, was to be a member of the covenant, was to observe circumcision, food laws and Sabbath.⁴⁴

At any rate, Dunn modified/clarified his position to be that "works of the law" referred to obedience to the law generally, but because the law was a badge which identified covenant membership, certain laws naturally rose to the surface as laws which identified their practitioners as members of the covenant. Circumcision and food laws were "crucial test cases"⁴⁵ to see whether a person could be identified as a member of the saving covenant or not.

⁴⁰ "The New Perspective on Paul" in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 114.

⁴¹ "'The Works of the Law' in the Epistle to the Romans," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 43 (1991): 89-101.

⁴² Found in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 213-226.

⁴³ "Yet Once More – 'The Works of the Law' A Response," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 214.

⁴⁴ "The New Perspective on Paul," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 111.

⁴⁵ "Yet Once More – 'The Works of the Law' A Response," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 214.

Whether or not we can accept Dunn's claim that he does not advocate "a special restricted sense;" several things are clear. For Dunn, Jews did not attempt to earn God's favor by doing "works of the law." They were not work-righteous. Dunn writes that, "'works of the law' do not denote any attempt to earn favour with God."⁴⁶

Rather, "works of the law" were identity badges which showed that this person was a member of the community of the saved; that is, a member of the covenant. When Paul said that "a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2.16), he was saying that the identity badge which indicates membership in the covenant was not "works of the law," but rather faith in Jesus Christ. This new identity badge would work for Gentiles as well as Jews.

When exegetes see Paul as fighting against Jewish works-righteousness, they are, according to Dunn, reading Paul "through Reformation spectacles."⁴⁷ When Lutherans read Paul's epistles, they see Paul playing the part of Luther and the Jews playing the part of work-righteous Medieval Catholics (though it always strikes me that according to the New Perspective definition of works-righteousness, Medieval Catholics should not be considered work-righteous either). All that Lutherans can see when they read Paul is Luther's battle against the Roman Catholics and they miss what Paul was really fighting against (Jewish exclusion of the Gentiles). According to Dunn, their "reformation spectacles" blind them to what Paul is really addressing.

In his essay, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith" Dunn outlines four common misunderstandings which demonstrate "the more negative influence of Luther's conversion and rediscovery of justification by faith...all of them effects of the reflection backwards of Luther's experience on to Paul."⁴⁸ The first misunderstanding which is the fault of "Reformation spectacles" is the thought that "Paul's conversion was understood as

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 221.

⁴⁷ "The New Perspective on Paul," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 118.

⁴⁸ "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 194.

*the climax to a long, inward, spiritual struggle, during which Paul had wrestled with the pangs of a troubled conscience – just like Luther.”*⁴⁹

The second was “the understanding of justification by faith in *distinctly individualistic terms*. Justification was all about the individual finding peace with God, just like Luther – and Paul.”⁵⁰ According to Dunn, the true emphasis of justification by faith was the availability of the covenant to a *group* of people: the Gentiles. In response it can be said that Paul certainly emphasized the availability of justification to *all*, both Jews and Gentiles, but justification is received by the *individual* by faith.

The third misunderstanding was that Paul’s conversion had been “a conversion *from Judaism*,”⁵¹ the implication being that “Judaism was the antithesis of Christianity, what Paul had been saved from.”⁵² In response it can be said that Paul the Christian was in complete agreement with Moses and the prophets. He was also in complete agreement with faithful Jews such as Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-6), Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38), and James (Galatians 2:9). Jesus’ frequent confrontations with the Pharisees makes clear, however, that there were some in Judaism, (indeed, even the leaders) who had perverted the religion of the Old Testament, and Paul was one of them before his conversion.

The fourth “misunderstanding” which Dunn outlines is the most important for our purposes because with it Dunn flatly denies our thesis that Paul was fighting against works-righteousness. The “misunderstanding” is the assumption that since Luther fought against works-righteousness, Paul also must have been fighting against works-righteousness.

Luther had striven to please God by his acts of penitence and good works. The Church of his day taught that salvation could be gained by merit, the merit of the saints, that the time spent in purgatory could be diminished by the purchase of indulgences. That was what the discovery of justification by faith had freed him from. It was all too easy to read Paul’s experience through the same grid...As the medieval church taught salvation by merit and good works, so must the Judaism of Paul’s day.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 195. His italics.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 196. His italics.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 197. His italics.

⁵² *Ibid*.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 198.

Dunn believes this line of thinking to be disproved by Sanders' demonstration that Judaism was a religion of grace. In the body of this thesis, I hope to bring forward some exegetical points toward proving that Paul was indeed attacking works-righteousness with his polemical doctrine of justification by faith.

N.T. Wright

James Dunn is often thought of as the one who first put Paul into the context of Sanders' Judaism and that Dunn is thus the originator of the New Perspective. This distinction, however, rightfully belongs to N.T. Wright. In 1978, four years before Dunn's seminal lecture entitled "The New Perspective on Paul," N.T. Wright delivered a lecture entitled, "The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith."⁵⁴ In that lecture Wright said, "I want to contribute...by offering a new way of looking at Paul...a new perspective [!] on...Pauline problems."⁵⁵ Wright continued,

If we ask how it is that Israel has missed her vocation [to be a light to the world], Paul's answer is that she is guilty not of 'legalism' or 'works-righteousness' but of what I call 'national righteousness'...Within this 'national righteousness', the law functions not as a legalist's ladder, but as a charter of national privilege...[C]ircumcision 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 mission work, the true children of Abraham, the world-wide community of faith. Faith, unlike the Torah, is available to all.⁵⁶

Here we see that many of Dunn's later thoughts had already been expressed in this early work of Wright. The above quotation demonstrates the truth of Simon Gathercole's statement: "It is a tribute to Wright's foresight and genius at such an early stage of his career that so many scholars are still catching up to him."⁵⁷

For Wright, like Dunn, the opinion that Paul was fighting against Jewish works-righteousness is anachronistic. Not only are the heirs of Luther guilty of reading Luther's situation back into Paul's, but Luther himself is guilty of the same anachronism. Luther's

⁵⁴ *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978), 61-88.

⁵⁵ "The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith," 64.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 65.

⁵⁷ *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 220.

commentary on Galatians is “wonderful and deeply flawed”⁵⁸ because in it Luther is “imagining that Paul is attacking exactly the same enemies as he is himself.”⁵⁹

In Luther’s defense it can be said that there were legitimate similarities between Paul’s opponents and his own. Both the “papists” and the Judaizers preached a “Jesus-plus” gospel. The papists preached that a person needed Jesus to be saved, but that faith in Jesus alone was not enough. Works of satisfaction, the third step in the doctrine of penance,⁶⁰ needed to be done by the believer here in this life. The temporal punishment which had not been removed in this life by means of works would be taken care of by an appropriate number of years in purgatory. The gospel of the papists was “Jesus-plus-works of penance.” The Judaizers, too, preached a “Jesus-plus” gospel. They apparently told the Galatians that Jesus was indeed the Savior, otherwise Paul would not have attached to it the name “gospel” (Galatians 1:6-7). However, the Judaizers, too, taught that faith in Jesus was not enough. They tried to convince the Galatians that in order for them to be saved they needed to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law. This is apparent from Acts 15:1, “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’” This is also apparent from Galatians 5:2, “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.” Thus whereas the papists preached a gospel of “Jesus-plus-works of penance,” the Judaizers preached a gospel of “Jesus-plus-the Mosaic Law.” Though outwardly the Judaizers and the papists differed in many details, essentially they were quite similar. Both of their religions were “Jesus-plus” and “grace-plus.” Paul engaged in fierce polemic against this type of religion, contending both that “Jesus-plus” destroys the work of Jesus (“...if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all,” Galatians 5:2) and that “grace-plus” destroys grace (“And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace,” Romans 11:6). Therefore it was no “flaw” of Luther to write in his Galatians commentary on 2:4-5:

⁵⁸ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 112.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ The three steps in the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance are 1) *contritio cordis*, 2) *confessio oris*, 3) *satisfactio operis*. 1) contrition of the heart 2) confession of the mouth 3) satisfaction of works.

Now the truth of the gospel is, that our righteousness cometh by faith alone, without the works of the law. The corruption, or falsehood of the gospel is, that we are justified by faith, but not without the works of the law. With the like condition the false apostles preached the gospel. Even so do our papists today. For they say, that we must believe in Christ, and that faith is the foundation of our salvation, but it justifieth not, except it be furnished with charity. This is not the truth of the gospel, but falsehood and dissimulation. But the true gospel is, that the works of charity are not the ornament or perfection of faith: but that faith itself is God's gift, and God's work in our hearts, which therefore justifieth us, because it apprehendeth Christ our Redeemer.⁶¹

New Perspective authors point to elements of grace in Judaism to prove that Paul's Jewish opponents were not work-righteous, but there were also gracious elements in Medieval Catholicism, and Medieval Catholicism cannot escape the charge of works-righteousness thereby. Nevertheless, N.T. Wright and others insist Paul and Luther were simply not wrestling with the same questions or fighting the same enemies. Paul was not, like Luther, debating John Eck on the subject of indulgences. Nor was Paul, like Philip Melanchthon, writing an *Apology* against the *Roman Confutation of Augsburg Confession*. According to Wright, Paul did not live in the sixteenth century and thus is not responding to sixteenth century questions about merit and good works. Paul lived in the first century and his opponents were Jews who, according to the New Perspective, understood grace and kept grace and works in their proper place.

What, then, according to Bishop Wright, is Paul reacting against when he insists, "not by works of the law"? If it is not works-righteousness against which he is fighting, then what? For Wright, the answer is all about the covenant: the covenant God made with Abraham.⁶² God promised Abraham, "all people on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 18:18). But Abraham's offspring, the Israelites, did not live up to their calling to be a blessing to the whole world. In fact, instead of being a blessing to the world, they were part of the problem. They too were sinful.

Would God then abandon his promise to bless the whole world through Israel? No! God would stay faithful to his promise; faithful to the covenant. Wright takes the phrase "righteousness of God" in Romans to mean God's faithfulness to the covenant he made with Abraham. Israel *would* be a blessing to the whole world; but they would be so through their

⁶¹ *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Erasmus Middleton, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 47).

⁶² It's interesting to notice that when E.P. Sanders talks about the covenant, he seems to have in mind primarily the covenant God made with Israel on Mount Sinai. When N.T. Wright talks about the covenant, he seems to have in mind mostly God's covenant with Abraham.

representative Messiah, the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. In Jesus Messiah God had fulfilled his promise to bless the whole world through Israel.

Now, however, Israel according to the flesh tries to get in the way of God's plan and Paul's vision. Instead of letting the blessing of Jesus Messiah go out to the whole world, which God had always intended, Israel tried to keep the covenant blessing for themselves. They tried to keep it to themselves by insisting that in order to enjoy the covenant blessing the Gentiles needed to become Jewish. They needed to wear the badge of the covenant. They needed to do "works of the law." "As well as 'ordinary' sin – the *breaking* of God's law... Israel is now shown to be guilty of a kind of meta-sin, the attempt to confine grace to one race."⁶³

Wright's view on "works of the law" is exactly the same as Dunn's: works of law are boundary markers which separate Jews from Gentiles, *not* works which Jews did to try to gain justification before God. In his book, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, Wright quotes Ephesians 2:14, "He [the Messiah] is our peace; he has made the two into one, and has destroyed the dividing wall that partitioned us off in mutual hostility."⁶⁴ Wright goes on to comment,

Here is the point – large as life, in the pages of the New Testament – that was one of James Dunn's major breakthrough moments in the development of the new perspective. The 'works of the law' against which Paul warned were not, he suggested, the moral good deeds done to earn justification (or salvation), but the particular commandments and ordinances which kept Jew and Gentile separate from one another.⁶⁵

The observation that the Mosaic Law served as a boundary marker between Jews and Gentiles is an excellent observation (and a biblical one, as Wright has demonstrated with Ephesians 2:14). In this paper which is mostly critical of the New Perspective it should be admitted that this insight is often missed or downplayed by the "Lutheran" perspective. The law of Moses was a high wall between Jews and Gentiles, like the former wall between West and East Germany. Christ brought down this wall with his death, making the two into one people of God as Ephesians 2:14-16 says. This does not mean, however, that no Jews were work-righteous or that Paul was not fighting against works-righteousness. Paul fights against (Gentile) works-righteousness in the same chapter of Ephesians when he says, "For it is by grace you have been

⁶³ *The Climax of the Covenant*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 240.

⁶⁴ Wright's translation.

⁶⁵ *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 172.

saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV84). It should not be construed as an “either/or” choice between a Pauline polemic against ethnic exclusivism or a Pauline polemic against works-righteousness. Both are true.

In conclusion, Wright’s narrative of God’s plan to bless the whole world is edifying for Christian faith. That the Jews tried to confine covenant membership to only include Jews is a perceptive insight. This is part of the false teaching against which Paul was fighting. What should not be accepted is Wright’s exclusion of works-righteousness from the target of Paul’s polemic.

Wright insists that first century Jews were not “proto-Pelagians, attempting to pull themselves up by their own moral shoelaces.”⁶⁶ The problem with this and other charges of Lutheran anachronism is that works-righteousness does not need to look exactly like Pelagianism or sixteenth century Roman Catholicism. Works-righteousness does not need to involve indulgences or purgatory or even a strict counting of deeds. Works-righteousness can take many forms. It is the contention of this paper that the attempt of first century Jews to be justified in God’s sight by works of the law is one form of works-righteousness.

The New Perspective’s View of Luther Himself

In the above section, N.T. Wright was quoted as saying that Luther’s commentary on Galatians was ““wonderful and deeply flawed”⁶⁷ because in it Luther is “imagining that Paul is attacking exactly the same enemies as he is himself.”⁶⁸ It seems appropriate, therefore, to discuss the New Perspective’s assessment of Luther himself. It must first be said that the New Perspective does *not* say that Luther was wrong in his attack on Medieval Catholicism, nor that Paul would have approved of works-righteousness. The New Perspective is simply saying that the Jews of Paul’s time were not work-righteous, and Paul could not have been opposing something which he did not see in his contemporaries.

⁶⁶ *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume X: Acts-1 Corinthians*, 461.

⁶⁷ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, 112.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

It should also be remembered that most New Perspective authors are New Testament exegetes, not church historians. For the most part they do not display a wide and vast knowledge of Luther's writings. This is not a fault on their part. The learning they display in their field of study is immense and they cannot be faulted for the fact that Reformation history is not their area of expertise. J.D.G. Dunn has been criticized for speaking against Luther without firsthand knowledge of Luther's writings. Dunn freely admits that he has not read widely in Luther. However, Dunn also contends that his critique is not of Luther himself, but of Lutheran exegetes who read Luther's situation back into Paul's. Dunn writes,

At the heart of the criticism is that I attack Martin Luther but show no first-hand knowledge of his writings. Now, I freely admit that I am no expert on Luther and that my direct familiarity with his writings is limited – particularly his commentaries on *Romans* and *Galatians*, and John Dillinger's *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*...So had I been intent on critiquing Luther directly (or engaging in a study of Reformation theology) I would certainly be open to criticism; whereas my primary concern is with the way Luther has been perceived and used in the modern period.⁶⁹

For a long time now some scholars have lodged the complaint that Protestants read Paul in view of Luther's life struggles. Krister Stendahl, in a famous article entitled, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,"⁷⁰ argued that the pre-Christian Paul did not struggle with a burdened conscience as Luther did during his days as a monk. Stendahl pointed to Philippians 3:6 in which the Apostle says that in his former life he had been "blameless." Far from being bothered by his sins, Stendahl concluded that the pre-Christian Paul must have had a "robust conscience." On this basis Heikki Räisänen made the famous statement that "Paul was no Luther before Luther."⁷¹ According to Stendahl, anyone who assumes that the pre-Christian Paul struggled with a guilty conscience is reading Luther's life situation back into Paul. Sanders, Dunn, and Wright claim that the same thing happens when Protestant exegetes say that Paul engaged in a polemic against works-righteousness.

⁶⁹ "The New Perspective: Whence, What and Wither?" in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 18.

⁷⁰ *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1962): 199-215.

⁷¹ *Paul and the Law*, 2nd Edition, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 231.

Whereas Dunn directs his criticism more against the exegesis done by Luther's followers than against the exegesis of Luther himself, Sanders more directly criticizes the exegesis of Luther himself:

Luther saw the world and the Christian life quite differently [from Paul]. He was impressed by the fact that, though a Christian, he nevertheless felt himself to be a "sinner": he suffered from guilt. Paul, however, did not have a guilty conscience. Before his conversion to being an apostle of Christ, he had been, as we saw, "blameless" with regard to "righteousness under the law" (Phil 3:6). . . Luther, plagued by guilt, read Paul's passages on "righteousness by faith" as meaning that God reckoned a Christian to be righteous even though he or she was a sinner. . . . Luther understood "righteousness" to be judicial, a declaration of innocence, . . . since God was merciful. Luther's phrase for the Christian condition was not Paul's "blameless" or "without blemish". . . , but rather *simul justus et peccator*, "at the same time righteous and a sinner": "righteous" in God's sight, but a "sinner" in everyday experience. Put another way, Luther saw the Christian life as summed up in Romans 7:21, "I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand," whereas Paul thought that this was the plight from which people were freed through Christ.... "You", he wrote, "are not in the Flesh, you are in the Spirit;" and those in the Spirit, he thought, did not do the sinful deeds "of the Flesh" ... Luther's emphasis on fictitious, 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 ...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 misunderstand him if we see him through Luther's eyes.⁷²

This quotation, along with N.T. Wright's statement that Luther's Galatians commentary is "deeply flawed,"⁷³ demonstrates that although many New Perspective authors appreciate Luther's religious insight, many do not have high respect for him as an exegete or interpreter of Paul.

Stephen Westerholm, who has written extensively about the New Perspective, shows a much higher regard for Luther in the area of exegesis and interpretation, although Westerholm also admits that Luther has some flaws as an exegete. Westerholm writes the following:⁷⁴

⁷² *Paul*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), 48-49. This quotation is owed to Wilfried Härle in his article "Rethinking Paul and Luther," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006): 303-304.

⁷³ *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 112.

⁷⁴ Because of the length of the quote, 1.5 line spacing has been retained for readability.

Hence, integral to Paul’s Christian thinking – and, indeed, to his “doctrine of justification” – are his convictions that all human endeavors are salvifically unhelpful and that justification must be received (by faith) as a gift of God’s grace... That Luther, to this extent at least, gets Paul “right” is part of what I intended when I once suggested, somewhat epigrammatically, that Pauline scholars can learn from the Reformer. But there is more to be said. Admittedly, Luther is prone to seeing his own circumstances reflected in biblical texts (if this is a fault); and (herein lies a very great fault), when he writes polemically, his terms and tone are often monumentally lamentable. Still, one has only to read a few pages of his writings (most any will do) to realize that, in crucial respects, he inhabits the same world, and breathes the same air, as the apostle. Both are driven by a massive, unremitting sense of answerability to their Maker. For both, the message of God’s grace in Christ is a source of palpable liberty and joy... For both, the faith in God awakened by the message of the cross is a living, busy, active, mighty thing; for both, works without faith are dead. Neither makes the slightest gesture toward cloaking his horror and indignation at any perceived tampering with the divine kerygma or infringement of divine prerogatives. Such kindredness of spirit gives Luther an inestimable advantage over many readers of Paul in “capturing” the essence of the apostle’s writings. On numerous points of detail, Luther may be the last to illumine. For those, however, who would see forest as well as trees, I am still inclined to propose a trip to the dustbins of recent Pauline scholarship – to retrieve and try out, on a reading of the epistles, the discarded spectacles of the Reformer.⁷⁵

Westerholm’s assertion that “in crucial respects, [Luther] inhabits the same world, and breathes the same air, as the apostle,” forms a stark contrast to Sanders’ statement that “Luther saw the world and the Christian life quite differently [from Paul].”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “The ‘New Perspective’ at Twenty-Five,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 2 – The Paradoxes of Paul*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 38-39. Westerholm has a gift for summarizing the positions of Pauline scholars ancient and modern. The article just cited and his book, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), give detailed literature reviews.

⁷⁶ *Paul*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), 48

Westerholm is not alone, however, in recognizing that Luther still has great value for Pauline exegesis. Hans Dieter Betz, in his detailed commentary on Galatians in the Hermeneia series, uses language similar to Westerholm's in describing the kindred spirit of Paul and Luther:

There is at least one commentary which in this commentator's opinion expresses an extraordinary and profound understanding of what Paul intended to say: Luther's commentary of 1535. Written after earlier attempts and including the entire range of scholarship available at the time, Luther's commentary is more than a scholarly commentary *upon* Galatians. It is a recreation *of* Galatians in the sixteenth century. Luther speaks as Paul would have spoken had he lived at the time when Luther gave his lectures.⁷⁷

Throughout his commentary, Betz speaks approvingly of Luther's exegesis.⁷⁸ Betz's main emphasis in his commentary was upon the rhetorical structure of Galatians and he praises Luther for recognizing and reflecting that rhetorical structure. Betz writes, "[Luther] often speaks in the first person singular, imitating the apostle. Surprisingly, Luther seems to be aware of Paul's rhetorical skills, so that he often appropriates his style and makes creative use of it for his own purposes."⁷⁹

In conclusion, some scholars back away from Luther in their interpretation of Paul, insisting that Paul and Luther lived at different times and were faced with different questions. Many from the New Perspective would fall into this category. Other scholars,⁸⁰ while recognizing that Luther and Paul lived centuries apart, nevertheless tend to think that Luther had his finger on the pulse of exactly what Paul was talking about and that Luther should therefore by all means be consulted when interpreting Paul. In light of the New Perspective on Paul, a detailed study of Luther as a New Testament exegete (his exegetical method and principles) would be interesting and informative.

⁷⁷ *Galatians*, Hermeneia, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), xv. Italics original. I owe this quotation to a note in the front cover of Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 46 n. 37; 47 n. 38; 84 n.252; 131 n.34; 132 n.43; 137 n.5; 154 n.5; 191 n.82; 211 n.95; 220 n. 10; etc.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, xv.

⁸⁰ For example: Westerholm, Betz, Thomas Schreiner.

Conclusion for New Perspective Authors

The New Perspective insists that Paul could not be engaging in a polemic against works-righteousness because first century Jews were not work-righteous. First century Jews emphasized grace. For Paul to criticize them for teaching works-righteousness would be like someone criticizing a good Lutheran for teaching works-righteousness. The charge would be unfounded. Instead of charging Jews with works-righteousness, Paul charged them with ethnic exclusivism; to use Wright's terminology, the attempt to confine grace to race.

A key issue in the debate is the definition of works-righteousness. The New Perspective has a narrow definition of works-righteousness. This is apparent from what the New Perspective labels works-righteousness and from what it defends as not being works-righteousness. For E.P. Sanders an example of works-righteousness is the notion that a person needs to do more good deeds than bad in order to be saved. Sanders does not find this in Judaism.⁸¹ Another example of works-righteousness for Sanders would be a treasury of merit stored up by the fathers (in the case of the Jews, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), from which individual Jews can benefit. Sanders does not find this in Judaism.⁸² For N.T. Wright, an example of works-righteousness would be the doctrine of Pelagius. Wright does not find this in Judaism.

More telling, however, is what the New Perspective does not consider works-righteousness. It is not works-righteousness, according to the New Perspective, for a Jew to believe that he needs to maintain his right standing with God, his place in the covenant, by his works. This they do not consider works-righteousness because the Jew was admitted into the covenant people by sheer grace. The works done by the Jew in conformity with the law are the means by which the Jew keeps his status as a member of the saved people of God. This "pattern of religion" is called "covenantal nomism." The fact that Jews saw themselves as "getting in" by grace is enough to convince Sanders, Wright and Dunn that they were not work-righteous, even though the Jew needed to maintain his status ("stay in") by his works.

By contrast, works-righteousness in this paper is more broadly defined as any attempt to contribute one's own works to his justification before God. Whether those works are seen as earning or maintaining justification makes little difference: it is still works-righteousness. Under

⁸¹ "'Weighing' is not Rabbinic soteriology. Further, good deeds are not considered to offset or compensate for bad deeds at the judgment..." *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 147.

⁸² *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 183-184.

this definition covenantal nomism is one form of works-righteousness because in that pattern of religion the individual Jew has to contribute his works in order to maintain his covenant status before God.

This definition is derived from several passages in Paul. For Paul, any intrusion of works into justification destroys grace. “And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:6). “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all” (Galatians 5:2). “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ, you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4). James Dunn questions this broad definition of works-righteousness:

And on the crucial point of dispute, what is the difference? If the finding that Judaism’s soteriology was synergistic means that salvation was in at least some measure dependent on obeying the law, then we note that Paul expected believers to obey the law, and warned them that if they did not fulfill the law, in that they continued to live according to the flesh, they would die (Rom. 8.4, 13).⁸³

Dunn reasons that since Paul exhorts believers to good works and since Paul warns believers against continuing to live in the flesh lest they not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10), therefore the maintenance of one’s covenant status by works cannot be considered works-righteousness. The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Dogmatics notes handle these passages from Paul by saying, “Good works do not preserve faith, although bad works may destroy it.”⁸⁴ This statement keeps the balance which Paul maintains. On the one hand, if it were said that good works preserve faith the rebuke which Paul gave to the Galatians would apply: “after beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Galatians 3:3). On the other hand, he warns that living in unrepentant sin can indeed destroy faith. “If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die” (Romans 8:4). “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1Corinthians 6:9-10).

⁸³ “The New Perspective: Whence, What, and Whither?” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 87.

⁸⁴ Dog Notes SR IIc, 434. Available online at <http://www.wls.wels.net/resources/dogmatics-notes> (Accessed 2/28/2012).

Sanders set out to prove that Jewish soteriology did not depend on doing more good works than bad, nor was there in Judaism anything comparable to the Roman Catholic treasury of merit. Can works-righteousness, however, exist in another form? Can it exist in the form of obeying the law in order to maintain your covenant status? Is working to pay off time in purgatory really all that different from working to maintain covenant status? The New Perspective points out that Judaism valued covenant grace. However, Medieval Roman Catholicism also talked a good deal about grace, but it does not for this reason escape the charge of works-righteousness.

“Lutheran” Responses to the New Perspective

The New Perspective triggered a host of responses from those trained in the traditional Reformation interpretation of Paul. Only a few of these responses will be considered below. The title “‘Lutheran’ Responses” is perhaps a bit misleading. The word “Lutheran” is in quotation marks because in scholarly discussions about the New Perspective, the word “Lutheran” has come to denote not so much the denomination, but rather the Reformation way of understanding Paul. Advocates of the “Lutheran” view are by no means all Lutheran. Many are Reformed. Stephen Westerholm writes, “Here ‘Lutheran’ designates, not the denominational affiliation of the interpreters, but their reading of the apostle as one for whom the doctrine of justification by faith is central and deliberately excludes any role for human ‘works.’”⁸⁵ Below are presented in summary form the views of four Pauline interpreters who have responded to the New Perspective from a traditional viewpoint. The first scholar discussed, Professor A. Andrew Das, seems to hold a middle position between the New Perspective and the “Lutheran” perspective. The next three, Thomas Schreiner, Robert Gundry, and Douglas Moo, hold more strictly to the traditional viewpoint.

A. Andrew Das

Professor A. Andrew Das promotes a “Newer Perspective on Paul.”⁸⁶ This is a synthesis between the New Perspective and the “Lutheran” perspective. On the one hand, Das accepts the

⁸⁵ *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), xvii.

⁸⁶ *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 268-273.

argument of the New Perspective that the Judaism of Paul's time was religion of grace. On the other hand, Das sides with the "Lutheran" perspective in affirming that Paul saw the law as requiring perfect obedience (something which Sanders denies), and that "works of the law" cannot be limited to the boundary marking features of the law.

In his book, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, A. Andrew Das makes an interesting observation. In Jewish history, whenever a national calamity took place, Israelites began to doubt the gracious covenant and began to become work-righteous. For example, when we discussed E.P. Sanders above we mentioned that the only exception he found to covenantal nomism was IV Ezra.

IV Ezra was written "in the wake of Jerusalem's fall in 70 C.E."⁸⁷ The calamity caused people to doubt the compassion and mercy of God. The book features Ezra, the great teacher in the Old Testament, in dialogue with an angel. Ezra appeals to the covenant and to God's compassion and mercy for the salvation of Israel, but the angel stubbornly maintains that only those who keep the law laboriously and perfectly will be saved and will inherit the world to come (7:88-90; 8:33). Most people will not have sufficient deeds to inherit the world to come. Instead they will be punished for their evil deeds after death. This will be the fate of most of humanity.

The point of citing IV Ezra is to demonstrate that when the *covenantal* part of covenantal nomism is taken away, all that remains is nomism (laws). Judaism no longer has any grace at all and it becomes work-righteous in the crass sense. Sanders admits, "In IV Ezra, in short, we see an instance in which covenantal nomism has collapsed. All that is left is legalistic perfectionism."⁸⁸

Das writes, "when God's election and sacrifice play little or no role or are radically challenged in the wake of disturbing events, Jewish thought drifts toward legalism."⁸⁹ Das then took this phenomenon and applied it to Paul. The principle is: when gracious elements fall away, all that remains is works. When the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, grace went away in the mind of many Jews and all that was left was works. Das contends that the same phenomenon

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 45.

⁸⁸ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 409.

⁸⁹ *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 45.

happened in the mind of Paul. When Paul realized that salvation was only found in Christ, he simultaneously realized that the gracious elements of Judaism no longer had any value. If the gracious elements of Judaism no longer have any value, then all that Judaism has left is works.

As Paul saw things, all the gracious elements of Judaism were worthless apart from Christ. The sacrifices of atonement, the election of physical Israel as God's covenant people, even repentance⁹⁰: None of these had any saving value apart from their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. From Paul's point of view, the gracious components of covenantal nomism had fallen off and all that was left was law; and for Paul, the law definitely does not save or justify because it demands perfect obedience.

In other words, there was for a Paul a "shift" as to "where grace was located."⁹¹ In the new era brought in by Christ, grace was found exclusively in Christ. Grace could no longer be found in the sacrifices or the Mosaic covenant. According to Das, the non-Christian Jews thought that they were standing in grace. The Jews thought that they received grace from the covenant and from the sacrifices, and that their works flowed from this particular system of grace. In Paul's mind, however, there is no grace in the Jewish system. In Paul's mind there were only "works" in the Jewish system because for Paul all the gracious elements of Judaism had fallen off. The Jews, however, according to Das were not work-righteous because they were thinking that there was still grace in the Old Covenant, but in Paul's mind all grace had shifted from the Old Covenant to Christ. Professor Das explains:

Traditional scholarship was not entirely off the mark in its analysis of Paul and the law. The law does indeed require accomplishment and serves as a mirror of human failure. Yet the path to this conclusion was often fraught with a critical error: first-century Judaism was never the culprit. The error was to foist on first-century Judaism what was an essential step in *Paul's own* reasoning corresponding to his transition from a law-observant Jew to the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul's newfound faith in Christ forced him to place the law's requirements into a new framework of understanding. This created an artificial problem with the law, a problem that a Jew (or Jewish Christian!) subscribing to a system of covenantal nomism would not have recognized. But for the apostle, it was a problem that should have been clear to anyone in Christ.⁹²

⁹⁰ In *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, Das spends a chapter on each of these, demonstrating that for Paul, none of them had gracious or saving value after Christ had come.

⁹¹ *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 270.

⁹² *Ibid*, 273. Emphasis original.

It seems that Das is saying that works-righteousness was not an actual problem for the Jew because the Jew relied on the grace of the covenant. In Paul's view, however, the grace which the Jew was relying on had moved and could now be found only in Christ.⁹³ This left the Jew who relied on the old covenant and the sacrifices with nothing but works.

In some respects Professor Das supports the thesis presented in this paper. In other respects he denies it. As an example of a way in which he supports the thesis presented here, Das is very adamant that "works of the law" cannot be limited to the boundary marking features of the law. He also says in regard to Romans 9:32 that the Jews "had pursued the law as if righteousness were based on human effort rather than faith."⁹⁴ Further he says that, "the Jews failed because they sought a righteousness of their own, their own achievement, rather than God's righteousness."⁹⁵ "Since God justifies through faith, human efforts are excluded, including the doing of the Mosaic Law."⁹⁶

Concerning the letter to the Ephesians, Das wrote,

Critics claim that advocates of the more traditional approach have viewed Paul through the lenses of Augustine and Luther. This is a facile critique. Long before Augustine and Luther, the author of Ephesians⁹⁷ already interpreted the Pauline phrases 'works of the law' and 'works' in terms of general human accomplishment. The author of Ephesians understood an aspect of Paul's thinking that "new perspective" readers have missed. Paul's critique of Jewish pride in the possession of the law was never exclusive of his critique of the need, and difficulty, to accomplish that law.⁹⁸

On the other hand, however, Das sometimes flatly denies the thesis presented in this paper. "Nothing suggests that Paul is combating Jewish legalism or some sort of works

⁹³ For further proof that Das reasons in this way, see *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 268-273.

⁹⁴ *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 246.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 248.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 192.

⁹⁷ Das seems to leave open the question of whether Paul wrote Ephesians or not. Das says, "...either Paul or one of his early disciples, the author of Ephesians..." *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 271. Perhaps Das himself believes that Paul wrote Ephesians, but he leaves open the question so as to be able to engage higher critics who would doubt Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 273.

righteousness.”⁹⁹ “A survey of Galatians 3:1-14 will help show why the concept of legalism is completely absent from Paul’s reasoning.”¹⁰⁰

The following quotation seems to articulate most fully Das’ position in regard to the thesis presented in this paper:

Sanders was right to emphasize that the Jews’ overall approach to the law was not legalistic, but Paul’s understanding empties the law of any saving value. To seek salvation in the law’s works, from Paul’s vantage point, would be to engage in a sort of works-righteousness since the law’s works are simply an activity. God’s salvation is in Christ. Paul’s conclusions with regard to the law’s works would also apply to other attempts at currying God’s favor through human achievement. From a theological perspective, Paul’s antithesis between God’s plan in Christ and human effort still eliminates the path of “works-righteousness.” Nevertheless, this elimination of human works is the result of Paul’s christological reasoning and is not itself an empirical claim that Jews approached the law in a legalistic fashion.¹⁰¹

Professor Das here seems to imply that if the covenant had saving value, the Jews would not be guilty of works-righteousness in their effort to maintain their covenant status with law-observance. In *Paul and the Jews*, Das explicitly denies that efforts at maintaining covenant status through law observance constitutes works-righteousness. Commenting on the collection of essays entitled, *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Das wrote,

Also, some of the essayists deem efforts to “stay in” the Jewish community, such as Law observance, instances of works righteousness. If so, should Christian acts of piety and avoidance of sin, all of which help maintain status within their community of faith, be analogously labeled as works righteousness? Greater sophistication in the analysis of these matters would have been helpful.¹⁰²

There certainly is a need for sophistication and nuance, but finally it is vital for a Christian to recognize works-righteousness when he sees it, and in the view presented in this paper any effort to secure or maintain favor with God on the basis of one’s own works is works-righteousness.

⁹⁹ “Paul and Works of Obedience in Second Temple Judaism: Romans 4:4-5 as a ‘New Perspective’ Case Study,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71 (2009), 812 n.75.

¹⁰⁰ *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 162.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 266-267.

¹⁰² *Paul and the Jews*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 12n.22.

Thomas Schreiner

Professor Das makes the astonishing statement that Thomas Schreiner is the only scholar who still believes that Jews tried to earn their way to heaven by their good deeds. Das writes, “With the exception of Thomas Schreiner, most of those [who object to the New Perspective] do not see Paul combating a legalism by which Jews tried to earn their way into heaven.”¹⁰³ It seems that Douglas Moo, Stephen Westerholm, Simon Gathercole, Peter T. O’Brien, and Seyoon Kim take the same position Schreiner does. The quote from Das serves to show, however, that Thomas Schreiner is perhaps the most ardent supporter of the thesis put forth in this paper that the target of Paul’s polemic is works-righteousness.

In his lecture entitled, “An Old Perspective on the New Perspective,”¹⁰⁴ Schreiner takes up many of the same issues addressed by this paper. He says, “Today I would like to look briefly at three issues. 1) Is Sanders correct in saying that Judaism was not legalistic? 2) Is there polemic against legalism in the Pauline letters? 3) Does Paul’s emphasis on the necessity of obedience in his letters introduce works-righteousness into his theology by the back door? Is Paul really that different from Judaism after all?”¹⁰⁵ The questions asked in Schreiner’s lecture are exactly the questions being explored in this paper.

In regard to the first question (“Is Sanders correct in saying that Judaism was not legalistic?”) Schreiner first says that “Sanders rightly corrected an extreme position which overemphasized legalism in Judaism.”¹⁰⁶ Here Schreiner strikes a healthy balance.

In agreement with the evaluation of Sanders’ work given above, Schreiner also concluded that “Sanders overemphasized the theme of grace in Second Temple Judaism and underemphasized the importance of works.”¹⁰⁷ Whereas Sanders’ view of Judaism is skewed, putting an over-emphasis on grace, and whereas the New Perspective is built on Sanders’ insight that Judaism was a religion of grace, therefore the New Perspective is doubtful since it is built on a doubtful foundation. Schreiner writes, “The new perspective depends on the foundation that

¹⁰³ *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Concordia Journal* 35 (2009): 140-155.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 141.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 143.

Sanders erected, but the foundation is not secure, and there is no consensus that it is correct.”¹⁰⁸
Below we will quote Douglas Moo making the exact same point.

In regard to the second question (“Is there polemic against legalism in the Pauline letters?”) Schreiner writes, “Indeed, when we examine the Pauline writings, there are indications that he engaged in a polemic against legalism.”¹⁰⁹ Legalism is defined by Schreiner as, “the view that one’s works are the *basis* of a right relation with God, so that one can boast in what one has accomplished.”¹¹⁰

To support his conclusion Schreiner points to the fact that Paul often contrasts “believing” and “doing.” “Righteousness before God is obtained by *believing* rather than *doing*.”¹¹¹ “Doing and believing are contrasted as well in Galatians 3:10-12.”¹¹² When speaking of Paul’s autobiographical description in Philippians 3, which will be given detailed attention below in the exegetical section, Schreiner says, “It is clear that [Paul’s pre-Christian righteousness] was a righteousness based on doing instead of believing.”¹¹³ The fact that Paul contrasts “doing” and “believing” as two different and opposing ways to justification before God is one of the main arguments presented in the exegetical section below as evidence for a Pauline polemic against works-righteousness.

Schreiner gives evidence from Romans 4 for a Pauline polemic against legalism. Since the treatment of Romans 4 in the exegetical section below is unfortunately sparse, Schreiner’s main points on Romans 4 will be presented here. Abraham, of course, is the main person under discussion in Romans 4.

First Schreiner shows that interpreting “works” as boundary markers does not work at several points in the chapter. In verse 2, Paul asks indirectly whether “Abraham was justified by works” (εἰ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη). “Dunn thinks that the works in view here focus on boundary markers, but this is mistaken since Paul refers to Abraham’s *works*, not *works of the*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 144. Emphasis original.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 145. Emphasis original.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 146.

law.”¹¹⁴ Seeing Abraham’s works as works in general and not boundary markers, fits well with verses 4 and 5: “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” “If employees do what is required, their payment is not considered to be a gift, but something they deserve.”¹¹⁵ Verses 4 and 5 clearly have nothing to do with boundary markers.

Boundary markers between Jew and Gentile have no place in verses 6 -8 either. Schreiner rightly says:

David also witnesses to righteousness by faith. David’s righteousness is “apart from works” (Rom. 4:6). Hence, those whose sins are forgiven, covered, and not reckoned receive a blessing from God. These verses clarify that the works David failed to do constitute moral failures. The new perspective does not account well for what Paul says here, for David was circumcised and certainly observed purity laws and the Sabbath. Nor is he indicted for excluding Gentiles from the promise. He needed forgiveness because of his moral infractions: his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. The example of David supports the interpretation offered relative to Abraham. Both were ungodly, in that they both failed to observe what God commanded. Their only hope of a right relation with God, then, was on the basis of forgiveness given.¹¹⁶

According to Schreiner, a polemic against exclusivistic boundary markers does not account for Romans 4:1-8. Schreiner also contends that only a polemic against works-righteousness accounts for Romans 4:1-8. If no one believed that Abraham and David were justified by their works, then why did Paul construct an argument to prove that they were not justified by works? It is true that not every text needs to be polemical, but the way Paul constructs his sentences shows that he is arguing against an opposing position. “*If Abraham were justified by works...*” strongly suggests that some people claimed that Abraham was justified by his works. Paul did not fight against an imaginary opponent. Schreiner writes,

Against the new perspective, Paul’s polemic against works as the basis of salvation must be directed against some who believed that works qualified them to receive the inheritance. Otherwise, Paul’s remarks are merely theoretical and address a problem that he did not face in his ministry. Paul does not waste time in his letters to critique problems that did not exist. Apparently, some believed that their works were the basis of their right relation with God, and Paul counters that claim...Again, Paul’s polemic only makes

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 145. Emphasis original.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 144.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 145.

sense if there were some Jews attempting to be righteous before God on the basis of their works. Otherwise, his comments are superfluous.¹¹⁷

Schreiner is balanced enough, however, to acknowledge the validity of the New Perspective's insistence that Paul was deeply concerned about the inclusion of the Gentiles in the blessings promised to Abraham. Schreiner writes, "We do learn from Romans 4:9-12 that the inclusion of the Gentiles was important to Paul. The new perspective rightly reminds us that this theme is important, but they wrongly conclude that there is no polemic against works-righteousness."¹¹⁸ Again he says,

The new perspective on Paul rightly sees that Paul is concerned about the exclusion of the Gentiles from the promise (Rom. 4:9-12). Salvation is open to all without distinction, both Jews and Gentiles by faith in Christ Jesus (Rom. 1:16; 2:6-11; 3:9; 22-23, 29-30; 4:9-12, 16; Gal 3:7-9, 14; Eph. 2:11-22). But Paul also engages in a polemic against works as the basis of salvation, for those who trust in their own works trust themselves and their own goodness rather than the grace of God.¹¹⁹

Schreiner points out the subtle form that works-righteousness can take.

E. Sanders rightly demolishes a caricature of Judaism as wholly consumed with works righteousness and petty legalism. But he fails to see that legalism can operate at a more subtle level. People can confess God's grace, deeply believe in it, and yet believe that human works play a vital role in obtaining salvation. Paul vigorously opposed such a synergism, contending that entrance into the covenant was by faith alone.¹²⁰

Schreiner makes the astute observation that even if Judaism saw itself as a religion of grace, Paul may have seen it differently. Permit a lengthy quotation.¹²¹

To describe something as legalistic is a matter of perspective. Here the debate between Luther and Catholicism provides a helpful illustration. Luther charged the Catholic Church...with a deficient understanding of grace, saying that they had fallen prey to works righteousness. Yet Luther's opponents with legitimate reason could counter that in their theology no good work was done apart from grace. Grace was the foundation for any good work. The *via moderna* against which Luther reacted, although different from

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 145-146.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 145.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 147.

¹²⁰ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 204.

¹²¹ Because the quote is quite long, I left the line spacing at 1.5 for readability.

Palestinian Judaism in numerous ways, was similar in that it appealed to covenantal relations between people and God as a foundation for its soteriology. One could research the Roman Catholic side in the debate thoroughly (as Sanders has examined Palestinian Judaism) and conclude that any idea of legalism or earning merit was foreign to Roman Catholicism. But such a study would exclude Luther's interpretation of the situation. What was described as grace by the *via moderna* was legalistic according to Luther. This conflict between Luther and Roman Catholicism is at least illustrative of the possible perspectival differences between Paul and other Jewish Christians. To Jewish Christians the theology they articulated was based on grace, and not legalistic. And yet it is possible that Paul saw that same theology from another perspective. Thus, Sanders may be correct in explaining the Jewish perspective in terms of their own self-understanding, while Paul had a different perspective on the movement.¹²²

New Perspective scholars insist that Judaism must be allowed to speak for itself. True though this is, Schreiner reminds us that we should also let Paul's critique speak for itself and not allow it to be colored either by what Judaism says about itself or by the claims the New Perspective makes about Judaism.

Schreiner does not shy away from using words like "earn" or "merit" in describing Jewish soteriology. These terms are very offensive to New Perspective interpreters. They emphatically deny that Jews thought in terms of "earning" salvation. Paul does, however, in his interpretation of the Abraham story, make a point of spelling out the difference between a gift and wages which are earned. "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5; τῷ δὲ ἐργαζομένῳ ὁ μισθὸς οὐ λογίζεται κατὰ χάριν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ὀφείλημα, τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην·).

Much of what is said in this thesis could be misunderstood as anti-Semitism. Schreiner makes it clear that works-righteousness is not an exclusively Jewish temptation but "a

¹²² "Works of the Law' in Paul," *Novum Testamentum* XXXIII, 3 (1991): 241-242.

fundamentally human problem.”¹²³ Because of the sin which lives in our flesh (Romans 7:14-24), we all, Jew and Gentile alike, are prone to boast in our works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Finally it should simply be noted again that Schreiner shares the thesis presented in this paper. “When Paul says that no one can receive the Spirit or obtain righteousness by ‘works of the law,’ his argument is against those who thought such righteousness could be merited by performing the law...What he opposes is the delusion of those who think they can earn merit before God by their obedience to the law, even though they fail to obey it.”¹²⁴

Robert H. Gundry

In his article, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,”¹²⁵ Robert H. Gundry responds directly to E.P. Sander’s *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Gundry first acknowledges what is excellent about Sanders’ work. He joins many New Testament scholars in recognizing “the breadth and depth of his discussions in *PPJ*¹²⁶ concerning both primary Jewish materials and secondary literature (especially that stemming from modern Jewish scholarship) devoted to those materials.”¹²⁷ He commends Sanders for emphasizing that when reading first-century Jewish literature one should not “seize on certain statements that appeal to Christian prejudice and neglect others which, from the Christian standpoint, put Palestinian Judaism in a better light.”¹²⁸

After acknowledging what is useful about Sanders’ work, Gundry goes on to point out some significant flaws. First, if Palestinian Jewish Literature is directly compared to Pauline Literature, a glaring difference emerges. Paul talks constantly about grace. Palestinian Jewish Literature talks constantly about observing laws, whereas talk of grace is sparse.¹²⁹ Gundry writes,

¹²³ *Ibid*, 243.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 244.

¹²⁵ *Biblica*, 66 (1985): 1-38.

¹²⁶ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.

¹²⁷ R.H. Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” *Biblica*, 66 (1985): 1. Emphasis original.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

¹²⁹ This was observed above in our own analysis of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.

But if we treat the literatures (the Pauline and the Palestinian Jewish) *materially* – i.e., if we weigh their emphases – quite a different impression may be gained, an impression of Palestinian Judaism as centered on works-righteousness and of Paul’s theology as centered on grace... Weighing the materials of Palestinian Judaism shows a preponderance of emphasis on obedience to the law as the way of staying in. The covenant, based on God’s grace, may be presupposed; but it has no prominence (as Sanders admits).¹³⁰

Gundry further observes, “Though obedience is integral and important to Paul’s theology, alongside Palestinian Jewish absorption in legal questions his comments on obedience look proportionately slight.”¹³¹ Paul spends the majority of his time on grace and some time on exhortation. The Rabbis spend almost all of their time in instruction about laws. This difference should be noted. It could be said in response that for the Rabbis grace was a presupposition. When Paul writes to Christians, however, he could also presuppose that they understood grace, but yet grace never falls out of prominence in Paul’s letters.

A further criticism which Gundry makes of Sanders has to do with the concept of “staying in.” In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Sanders emphasized that in Palestinian Judaism, observing the law was the means of “staying in,” not “getting in,” and that therefore Judaism could be exonerated of the charge of works-righteousness. Gundry, however, says that at exactly this point there is a significant difference between Paul and Palestinian Judaism. For Paul, both “getting in” and “staying in” are by faith alone. Gundry says that, “whatever else the phrase ‘from faith to faith’ in [Romans] 1,17a may mean, it surely means that from beginning to end, faith alone (which Paul expressly contrasts with works – see esp. 4,4-5) forms the overarching principle of soteriology, staying in as well as getting in.”¹³²

Gundry points out that “staying in” rather than “getting in” is actually the issue in Galatians. He writes,

In fact, however, the question of staying in *is* the issue, at least the primary one, in Galatians. There, contrary to Sanders’ statement that ‘the subject of Galatians is... the condition on which Gentiles enter the people of God’, Paul does not deal with a question whether believing Gentiles had *gotten* in; rather he deals with the question whether believing Gentiles could *stay* in without submitting to circumcision and keeping other

¹³⁰ R.H. Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” 5-6.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 7.

¹³² *Ibid*, 9.

parts of the law. ‘Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?’ (3,3).¹³³

Sanders and other New Perspective writers often bring up the fact that Paul too instructs Christians to do good works. Gundry rightly says, however, that for Paul good works are evidence that a person is “in” rather than a *means* for “staying in.” He writes, “At the same time [Paul] demands good works, and Sanders appeals to this demand. But Paul’s un-Jewish extension of faith and grace to staying in makes good works evidential of having received grace through faith, not instrumental in keeping grace through works.”¹³⁴ The distinction is a fine one, but it is important. For Paul, faith alone, apart from works, is the means (a receiving means) to justification and salvation.

We conclude our discussion of Gundry with a quotation which sums up his position on Paul and his appraisal of Sanders’ work:

In view of Sanders’ discussion, it may be too much to say that in Palestinian Judaism good works were always thought to earn God’s favor according to a bookish weighing of merits. But in view of the many passages in Palestinian Jewish literature that Sanders cites concerning atonement by good works¹³⁵, it is not too much to say that in Paul’s presentation of Palestinian Judaism good works constitute a righteousness necessary at least to activate God’s grace for the forgiveness of sins. Paul will have none of this synergism. For him, salvation is *wholly* by grace through faith.¹³⁶

Douglas Moo

Douglas Moo also supports the thesis presented in this paper that Paul opposed a work-righteous attitude he saw in some of his fellow Jews. In his Romans commentary, Moo writes,

The second issue...has to do with the viewpoint that Paul is opposing with his statement [by works of the law shall no flesh be justified before him (Romans 3:20)]. Traditionally, it has been understood as a denial that a person can ‘earn’ salvation by doing anything: no ‘works,’ however ‘good’ – even those done in obedience to God’s holy law – can bring a person into relationship with God. It has, furthermore, usually been assumed that this thesis was directed against Jews in Paul’s day who believed that, indeed, they could get

¹³³ *Ibid*, 8-9. Emphasis original. The quotation from Sanders is from *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 17-20.

¹³⁴ “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” 11.

¹³⁵ In a footnote, Gundry directs the reader to “the pages cited under ‘Atonement’ in the subject-index of *PPJ*.”

¹³⁶ “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” 19-20. Emphasis is original.

into relationship with God by obedience to the law. Many modern interpreters (some of whom label this traditional view the “Lutheran orthodox” interpretation) question this explanation of the situation. i [Sic] think, however, that, properly nuanced, the traditional view remains the best explanation of Paul’s polemic.¹³⁷

One reason Moo thinks the traditional interpretation is to be preferred is that the New Perspective stands on a questionable foundation: Sanders’ presentation of Judaism. Moo writes, “I think that there is reason to conclude that Judaism was more ‘legalistic’ than Sanders thinks.”¹³⁸ Sanders had admitted that the gracious covenant is not mentioned a great deal in first-hand Jewish sources, but he insisted that it can be assumed throughout. Moo, among others, questions that assumption. “In passage after passage in his scrutiny of Jewish literature, he dismisses a ‘legalistic’ interpretation by arguing that the covenantal framework must be read into the text... Might not lack of reference in many Jewish works imply that it had been lost sight of it in a more general reliance on Jewish identity?”¹³⁹

Moo also makes this insightful comment: “If Christianity has been far from immune from legalism, is it likely to think that Judaism, at any stage of its development, was?”¹⁴⁰ Someone has remarked, “If the Jews were not work-righteous, then they were the only nation in the history of the world which wasn’t.” It is simply unlikely that the Jews as people were completely pure of works-righteousness. This does not prove that the target of Paul’s polemic was works-righteousness, but the possibility cannot be excluded on the grounds that Jews had no problem with works-righteousness.

Some have puzzled over the fact that Paul does seem to make an antithesis out of grace and works, whereas most first century Jews would have never posed such an antithesis. Moo makes an excellent comment in this regard:

Whereas “doing the law” in Judaism could well include faith, “doing the law” in Paul is definitely and emphatically separated from faith (cf. [Rom.] 3:27-28...4:2-5, 13-16; 10:5-8; and perhaps most clearly Gal. 3:12). True, Paul thereby drives a wedge between two human responses – faith and obedience to the law – that were intertwined in Judaism. But

¹³⁷ *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 216-217.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 216.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 216-217.

he does this knowingly and on the basis of conviction, for Paul views any mixing, any synergism, of faith and works as damaging to the grace of God (cf. especially 4:1-5).¹⁴¹

Body

The following portions of this paper will deal directly with selected Pauline passages. The passages to be considered were selected because they have become “battle ground” passages in the New Perspective debate. The Greek text¹⁴² of each passage is given, then a translation by the present author. The translations are not intended to be the type of smooth English which could be published in a translation. Rather, they tend toward a literal or formal equivalence. The purpose of presenting both the Greek text and a literal translation is so that the reader will have the text fresh in his mind as he reads the exegetical portions and will also have the ability to quickly reference the Greek text or the translation. After the translation, the text is considered at length. These sections are labeled “Discussion,” for two reasons: 1) they are not intended to be a full exegesis. While many exegetical points are made and some exegetical questions are discussed at length, others are regrettably skimmed over or skipped entirely. 2) The author tries to bring in many different view points from commentators so that by listening in on their “discussions” the reader might gather all the options for the questions under consideration. The commentators, however, are always used critically and decisions are always made by the author. In a few places the reader might disagree with the decision made, but the hope is that the reader comes away knowing all the options and the author’s recommendation.

Galatians

The exegetical portion of this paper starts with Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia for two reasons. First, of the three letters to be considered (Galatians, Romans and Philippians), Galatians seems to be the earliest. Second, Galatians features Paul’s fiercest polemic. Dunn states that, “Galatians is one of the most polemical books in the Bible.”¹⁴³ Paul musters all his

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 168.

¹⁴² The Greek text is taken from the Libronix version of *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition*, Edited by Kurt Aland, M. Black, C.M. Martini, B.M. Metzger, M. Robinson, A. Wikgren, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

¹⁴³ “Echoes of Intra-Jewish Polemic in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 227.

rhetorical, exegetical (3:6-14; 4:21-31), and pastoral (3:1; 4:8-20) skill in order to dissuade the Galatian Christians from following certain missionaries. Apparently, these missionaries were trying to persuade the Galatians that they needed to adopt the Mosaic Law in order to be justified before God (5:2-4) and to be accepted as full children of Abraham (3:7). This adoption of the Mosaic Law would begin with circumcision (6:12), but would probably also include other observances of the law (cf. 4:10).

Because these teachers were pressuring the Gentile believers to follow the *Jewish* law for justification, they are commonly referred to as Judaizers. N.T. Wright and James Dunn, however, insist that, actually, “Judaizers” properly refers to Gentiles who adopt Jewish practices, not to Jews who insist on them for Gentiles. Dunn writes, “‘To judaize’ was a quite familiar expression, in the sense of ‘to live like a Jew’, ‘to adopt a distinctively Jewish way of life’ – with reference to Gentiles taking up Jewish customs like observing the Sabbath.”¹⁴⁴

Proof for this meaning is found in Galatians 2:14, where the Greek verb Ἰουδαΐζειν means “to live Jewishly” or “to follow Jewish practices.” If the Greek were to be simply transcribed the translation would read, “how do you compel Gentiles to *judaize*?” (πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις Ἰουδαΐζειν;).

Instead of using the word “Judaizers” to designate the teachers Paul was combating, N.T. Wright prefers the term, “agitators.” The name is taken from Galatians 1:7 which reads in the New American Standard Bible, “some who are disturbing you” (τινές εἰσιν οἱ παράσποντες ὑμᾶς). παράσσω means to “to cause inward turmoil, *stir up, disturb, unsettle.*”¹⁴⁵ Thus the term “agitators” is suggested as a designation for the missionaries who had visited the Galatians. N.T. Wright says,

“[Paul] was, in short, under attack from people whom scholars have come to call by a variety of names, but perhaps most straightforwardly (and following what Paul himself says in Galatians 1:7), ‘agitators.’ They are not, we note, ‘Judaizers,’ despite often being called that; that word, properly, refers to Gentiles who are trying to become Jews – which is what the erstwhile pagan Galatians, having come to faith in Jesus the Messiah, were

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 230.

¹⁴⁵ Bauer, Walter, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 2000). Hereafter this lexicon will be referred to simply as BDAG.

now being urged to do. The agitators, in other words, were trying to get the Galatians to ‘Judaize.’”¹⁴⁶

Despite the suitability of the term “agitators,” this paper will retain the name “Judaizers” to refer to Paul’s opponents because it is still the commonly used designation.

Galatians 2:11 – 21

Greek Text

11 Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν Κηφᾶς εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν, κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην, ὅτι κατεγνωσμένος ἦν. **12** πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν· ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον, ὑπέστελλεν καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἑαυτὸν φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς. **13** καὶ συνυπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ [καὶ] οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὥστε καὶ Βαρναβᾶς συναπήχθη αὐτῶν τῇ ὑποκρίσει. **14** ἀλλ’ ὅτε εἶδον ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθοδοδοῦσιν πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, εἶπον τῷ Κηφᾷ ἔμπροσθεν πάντων, Εἰ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων ἐθνικῶς καὶ οὐχὶ Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῆς, πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις Ἰουδαΐζειν; **15** Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἀμαρτωλοί· **16** εἰδότες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ. **17** εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ εὐρέθημεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀμαρτωλοί, ἄρα Χριστὸς ἀμαρτίας διάκονος; μὴ γένοιτο. **18** εἰ γὰρ ἃ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ, παραβάτην ἑμαυτὸν συνιστάνω. **19** ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω. Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι· **20** ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ. **21** οὐκ ἀθετῶ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ· εἰ γὰρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη, ἄρα Χριστὸς δωρεὰν ἀπέθανεν.

Translation

¹¹Now when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he had been condemned.

¹²For before some people came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles. But when they came, he began to disappear and separate himself because he was afraid of those from the circumcision. ¹³And the rest of the Jews also joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But when I saw that they were not walking

¹⁴⁶ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, 112-113.

straight with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of everyone, “If you, even though you are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to judaize?”¹⁵ We are Jews by nature and not sinners from the Gentiles,¹⁶ but we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we also believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law all flesh will not be justified.¹⁷ But if because we are seeking to be justified in Christ, we are found to be sinners ourselves, is Christ consequently a servant of sin? May it never be!¹⁸ For if I build up again these very things which I tore down, I show myself a transgressor.¹⁹ For I, through the law, died to the law, so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ,²⁰ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me, and what I now live in the flesh, I live in faith in the Son of God, the one who loved me and gave himself up for my sake.²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God. For if righteousness is through the law, consequently Christ died for no purpose.

Discussion

Galatians 2:11-21 forms the central portion of Paul’s letter to the Galatians (especially verses 15-21). G.S. Duncan says of verse 16 that “This is the text on which all that follows in the epistle is commentary.”¹⁴⁷ Hans Dieter Betz, who is followed with some variation by Richard Longenecker and Ben Witherington, analyzed Galatians as a piece of “Greco-Roman Rhetoric and epistolography.”¹⁴⁸ Verses 15-21 Betz called the *propositio*: a short proposition or thesis which will be unfolded and proved in the *probatio* or argument (the doctrinal section of chapters 3 and 4).¹⁴⁹ In other words, 2:15-21 is the thesis statement of Galatians. Before looking closely at verses 15-21, we should give some attention to verses 11-14 which set the background for Paul’s thesis statement.

¹⁴⁷ *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary. (London: Hodder, 1934), 64-65. I owe this quotation to James Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 134.

¹⁴⁸ *Galatians*, (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress), 1979.

¹⁴⁹ See the discussion in Betz, 14-25; 113-114, and Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Dallas: Word, 1990), 82-83.

In Galatians 2:11-21, Paul recounts his confrontation of Peter, the infamous “Antioch Incident.” The church in Antioch had a high percentage of Gentiles, as is clear from Acts 11:19-21:

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to *Greeks also*,¹⁵⁰ telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Peter had come to visit the church and was in the habit of eating with the Gentiles there. Ben Witherington III points out that, “the verb *συνήσθιεν* is an imperfect and suggests that Peter was regularly eating with Gentiles before the ‘James gang’ came to town.”¹⁵¹ In eating with the Gentile believers, he presumably broke Mosaic food purity laws. Then some men from the Jerusalem church (literally, “from James,” *ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου*, verse 12) came and pressured Peter into eating separately from the “unclean” Gentiles. Peter gave in to the peer pressure and began not showing up for meals with Gentiles. In verse 12, *ὑπέστειλλον* means to “draw back or disappear from a position.”¹⁵² Witherington plausibly suggests that the imperfect tense could indicate a gradual withdrawal, but it could also indicate that he repeatedly did not show up for fellowship meals with Gentiles. Coupled with *ὑπέστειλλον* is the verb *ἀφώριζεν* “to separate.” The verb reminds many commentators of the word “Pharisee” which means “separated one” from the Hebrew verb *פָּרַץ* “to separate.” Dunn writes:

Cephas¹⁵³ ‘separated himself’. Is there here an echo of the nickname by which one of the main ‘sects’ within contemporary Judaism was commonly designated (Pharisees = ‘separated ones’)? Pharisees and Essenes were known within Jewish circles as those who separated themselves from others precisely in the matter of table fellowship, for reasons of purity – even from others who no doubt regarded themselves as Torah faithful, but who were not so regarded by Essenes and Pharisees. Cephas, like other factions within second Temple Judaism, had now made table-fellowship a test-case of covenant identity and faithfulness, and in concluding that Gentiles believers failed that test (or rather that

¹⁵⁰ Emphasis added.

¹⁵¹ *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 152.

¹⁵² BDAG.

¹⁵³ Peter is referred to in the Greek text as *Κηφᾶς*.

their company caused *him* to fail that test) has withdrawn from table fellowship with them. In a verbal exchange between Jews on the subject of table-fellowship such an echo would not have been difficult to hear. We might even paraphrase, ‘Cephas played the Pharisee.’¹⁵⁴

It should be noted that this was a *reluctant* withdrawal on Peter’s part, one that went against his own convictions. Paul describes Peter’s action as *ὑπόκρισις* (v. 13), “hypocrisy.” According to BDAG this word indicates creating “a public impression that is at odds with one’s real purposes or motivations, *play-acting*.” Peter and Paul agreed on the true doctrine of the Gospel. Peter simply let himself be pressured into acting against his beliefs.

Though Peter’s true *convictions* were in line with the truth of the Gospel, he was not *walking* (οὐκ ὀρθοποδοῦσιν), or acting, in line with the truth of the Gospel. His actions created a disastrous ripple effect. The influence which Peter carried as a “pillar” (Galatians 2:9) caused “the other Jews to join him in his hypocrisy” (2:13). Most shocking to Paul was the fact that even Barnabas, who had worked alongside Paul in spreading the Gospel among the Gentiles, now refrained from eating with Gentiles. The Greek reads, (ὥστε καὶ Βαρναβᾶς συναπήχθη αὐτῶν τῇ ὑποκρίσει) “so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.”¹⁵⁵ Witherington comments, “The ὥστε is followed here by an indicative verb in a consecutive clause, something which happens only one other time in the NT (Jn. 3.16). The force of this construction is that it makes the statement emphatic. The clause should read, ‘so that even Barnabas was carried away in their charade!’ Paul could hardly believe it.”¹⁵⁶

Paul addressed the situation publicly. Since Peter was the one whose influence everyone was following, Paul addressed his rebuke to him. Paul “opposed him to his face” (κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην). Yet Paul’s opposition was not without winsome appeal. In verse 15 and 16, Paul reminds Peter of their common belief in justification by faith alone without the works of the law.

¹⁵⁴ “Echoes of Intra-Jewish Polemic in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 228.

¹⁵⁵ My Translation.

¹⁵⁶ *Grace in Galatia*, 157.

The Greek syntax of verses 15-16a is rather difficult. The main interpretive question is whether an adversative contrast should be seen between verses 15 and 16. Schreiner, along with most from the old/"Lutheran" perspective, says that there is a contrast. Dunn and most from the New Perspective say that there is not. The question is important for the New Perspective debate because Dunn contends that since there is no contrast between verses 15 and 16 and the verses are rendered, "we Jews by nature...know that a man is not justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ..." therefore all first century Jews believed that justification was by faith. Since, according to Dunn, Jews believed that justification was by faith, Jews cannot be charged with works-righteousness. Since (again according to Dunn), Jews were not guilty of works-righteousness, Paul's polemic could not have been directed against works-righteousness. Establishing that there is no contrast between verses 15 and 16 is therefore important for New Perspective exegesis.

The Greek text has, 'Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί· εἰδότες [δὲ]¹⁵⁷ ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου. Schreiner renders the Greek this way: "*For even though* we are Jews by nature and not sinners from the Gentiles, *nevertheless*, we know that a man is not justified by works of law..."¹⁵⁸ The italicized words indicate that they are inserted into the Greek text and are thus part of the translator's interpretation. Schreiner writes, "The words, 'for even though' do not strictly translate the Greek but represent an interpretation of what Paul said to Peter."¹⁵⁹ In other words, according to Schreiner's interpretation there is a contrast between verses 15 and 16, "*even though* we are Jews...we know that a man is not justified by works of law."¹⁶⁰ The δὲ in verse 16 supports this interpretation. δὲ is adversative and indicates that the verse should be translated "we are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, *but* (δὲ) we know that a man is not justified by works of the law..."¹⁶¹ Schreiner's insertion of "for even though" at the

¹⁵⁷ The brackets in the United Bible Society (UBS) text indicate that δὲ is not found in some ancient manuscripts.

¹⁵⁸ Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁹ *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 154.

¹⁶⁰ Emphasis added.

¹⁶¹ Emphasis added.

beginning of verse 15 is thus justified because it most clearly brings out the contrast between the two clauses in English.

δέ, however, is textually disputed, as the brackets in the UBS text indicate. In a footnote, Schreiner lays out the textual evidence and states the reason for his decision that δέ is original: “Scribes probably deleted ‘but’ (δέ) since the participle connects more smoothly without it (so P⁴⁶, A, D², ψ, ff). Furthermore, diverse and early evidence supports its inclusion (⋈, B, C, D*, F, G, H, 81, 104, 1175, 1241^s, 2464, pc, lat).”¹⁶²

Professor Dunn disagrees:

It is unlikely that Paul wrote εἰδότες δέ. (1) δέ is omitted by P⁴⁶ as well as by other important manuscripts, and was probably introduced by a scribe who misread the flow of Paul’s thought and assumed that an adversative particle should be added. (2) Had Paul wished to give adversative force he would have more probably written Ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι... οἴδαμεν δέ... (contrast Rom. 6.9 and 2 Cor. 4.14 with Rom. 8:28). In fact, what he wrote is “We Jews by nature... knowing that...”¹⁶³

As is clear from the quote above, Dunn does not add, “For even though” to the beginning of verse 15. Dunn sees no contrast between verses 15 and 16, and he sees this as support that non-Christians Jews believed in justification by faith and therefore cannot be charged with works-righteousness. Perhaps it will be clearer to let Dunn speak for himself. The following quote is very lengthy, but is given here because it is foundational for the New Perspective and clearly shows the New Perspective’s main critique of Reformation exegesis.¹⁶⁴

The format of his words shows that he is appealing to an accepted view of Jewish Christians: ‘we who are Jews...know...’. Indeed, as already noted, Paul is probably at this point still recalling (if not actually repeating) what it was he said to Peter at Antioch. Not only so, but his wording shows that he is actually appealing to Jewish sensibilities, we may say even to Jewish prejudices – “we are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles”. This understanding of “being justified” is thus, evidently something Jewish, something which belongs to Jews “by nature”, something which distinguishes them from

¹⁶² *Galatians*, 154 n.11.

¹⁶³ “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 106.

¹⁶⁴ Because of the length of the quote, I have retained the 1.5 line spacing.

“Gentile sinners”...[A]t this point Paul is wholly at one with his fellow Jews in asserting that justification is *by faith*. That is to say, integral to the idea of the covenant itself, and of God’s continued action to maintain it, is the profound recognition of God’s initiative and grace in first establishing and then maintaining the covenant. Justification by faith is not a distinctively Christian teaching. Paul’s appeal here is not to *Christians* who happen also to be Jews, but to *Jews* whose Christian faith is but an extension of their Jewish faith in a graciously electing and sustaining God. We must return to this point shortly, but for the moment we may simply note that to ignore this fundamental feature of Israel’s understanding of its covenant status is to put in jeopardy a properly historical exegesis. Far worse, to start our exegesis here from the Reformation presupposition that Paul was attacking the idea of *earning* God’s acquittal, the idea of meritorious works, is to set the whole exegetical endeavor off on the wrong track. If Paul was not an idiosyncratic Jew,¹⁶⁵ neither was he a straightforward prototype of Luther.¹⁶⁶

Contrary to Dunn, Galatians 2:15-16 should not be used to show that Jews in general believed in justification by faith because Paul is not here establishing common ground with Jews in general, but with Jewish Christians and more specifically with Peter. There is too much in verse 16 with which the non-Christian Jew would not agree. A non-Christian Jew would certainly not agree that a man is justified “through faith in Jesus Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), nor would a non-Christian Jew agree with the statement that a man is not justified “by works of the law” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου). Witherington writes, “It must be considered unlikely that Paul considers it a common opinion among Jews in general that human beings are not δικαιούται by works of the Law, but rather he assumes it is the proper and normal view of Jewish

¹⁶⁵ With the words, “not an idiosyncratic Jew,” Dunn refers to his main criticism of E.P. Sanders’ view of Paul. Sanders said that Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus had caused him to abandon “covenantal nomism” for a completely different pattern of religion, which Sanders called “participationist eschatology” *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 549. Dunn said that the implications of this view was that Paul had broken all connection with his ancestral faith, started his own religion and was thus an “idiosyncratic Jew.” Much more likely Dunn thought, was the view that Paul’s religion could be seen as a continuation of Judaism redefined in light of the death of Jesus Messiah.

¹⁶⁶ “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 106-108. Italics original.

Christians, in light of what they know and believe about the work of Christ.”¹⁶⁷ It is dubious, therefore, that Paul is here appealing to a sentiment in Peter which Peter shared with non-Christians Jews. Schreiner rightly says, “Such a statement [εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου] clearly does not reflect the standard Jewish point of view (cf. 1:13-16!), for not all Jews agreed that people were justified by faith in Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁸

The participle εἰδότες does not come over naturally into English. English wants an indicative (“we know” instead of “knowing”). It is also difficult to determine the function of the participle in the Greek sentence. Longenecker says, “The perfect participle εἰδότες functions as an adverbial participle of attendant circumstance (‘circumstantial participle’) and so adds an associated fact or conception to what was stated in v 15. It is best translated as a coordinate verb with καὶ (‘and we know’).”¹⁶⁹ Longenecker views the δὲ as original but says that it carries no concessive force here,¹⁷⁰ though he does not accept Dunn’s conclusion that Paul is therefore appealing to Jewish sensibilities. According to Longenecker, verse 16 simply builds on verse 15 rather than contrasting with it: “We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, and we know...”

Though this is possible, the flow of the text seems to demand an adversative contrast: “We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, but we know...” Schreiner is therefore probably correct in saying that the participle εἰδότες “modifies v. 15, and v. 15 is concessive [“even though”] to the idea in the participle.”¹⁷¹

Paul makes clear through repetition that what is said in verse 16 is of the highest importance. The verse can be broken down into three parallel parts:

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 σὰρξ

¹⁶⁷ *Grace in Galatia*, 173.

¹⁶⁸ *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary, 154.

¹⁶⁹ *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 83.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 83.

¹⁷¹ *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary, 154 n.12.

Verse 16 is a treasure chest of key Pauline vocabulary (δικαιώω, ἔργα νόμου, πίστις, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός). Each deserves special attention. The first words to be considered are the forms of δικαιώω, The occurrences of the word in verse 16 are highlighted below.

οὐ **δικαιοῦται** ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα **δικαιωθῶμεν** ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου

ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ **δικαιωθήσεται** πᾶσα σὰρξ

δικαιώω means “to declare not guilty.” BDAG gives this definition: “to render a favorable verdict, *vindicate*.”¹⁷² Paul’s use of the word in context makes it clear that God is the judge who declares a man not guilty in his heavenly courtroom. If a person has been declared by God to be innocent then that means that his relationship with God is on good terms. The definition found in Louw-Nida brings out this relational aspect the verb: “**put right with**, justify, vindicate, declare righteous, *i.e.* cause someone to be in a right relation.”¹⁷³ Burton brings out the related thought that “to be justified” by God means to be accepted by him. “To be justified...is to be accounted by God as acceptable to him, approved of God, accepted as being such as God desires man to be.”¹⁷⁴ The verb occurs three times in this verse; each time with a different form (δικαιοῦται present passive indicative 3rd person singular; δικαιωθῶμεν aorist passive subjunctive 1st person plural; δικαιωθήσεται future passive indicative 3rd person singular).

The verb evokes courtroom imagery. In the scene which Paul sets, any given person (ἄνθρωπος) is the defendant and God is the judge. The question is this: how can man receive a favorable verdict from God the judge? There are two possible means to a favorable verdict. One of them Paul rejects as theoretically possible but practically impossible. The other Paul affirms

¹⁷² BDAG 2. Italics original.

¹⁷³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Nida, editors, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Volume 1, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988). Emphasis original.

¹⁷⁴ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1971), 119.

as the only way to a favorable verdict before God's judgment seat. We will start with the means which Paul rejects: ἐξ ἔργων νόμου.

“Not by works of the law...not by works of the law...not by works of the law.” Paul obviously wants to drive the point home. Three times Paul repeats the exact phrase, as is highlighted below.

οὐ δικαιούται 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 σὰρξ

Each word in the phrase will be considered separately and then the phrase will be taken as a unit. The first word in the phrase is the preposition ἐκ, which becomes ἐξ before vowels.¹⁷⁵ Daniel Wallace lists “means: *by, from*” as a possible use of ἐκ.¹⁷⁶ This meaning seems to fit best here. The major translations have “by” (NIV, NASB, ESV, NET, HCSB). ἐκ could also denote a cause or reason for something.¹⁷⁷ BDAG defines ἐκ further as “the reason which is a presupposition for something.”¹⁷⁸ BDAG lists Galatians 2:16 under this meaning so that we could translate, “no one is justified because of/on the basis of the works of the law.” This would yield good sense of the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου all by itself, but since it is later contrasted with the phrase ἐκ πίστεως, which is best rendered “by means of” it seems best to stay consistent and translate ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, “by the works of the law.”

Burton has a slightly different take on the preposition, but his interpretation ends up in much the same place as the one given here. He writes: “The preposition ἐξ properly denotes source, in this case the source of justification. Since, however, justification is an act of God, while ἔργα νόμου are the deeds of men, the preposition in effect marks its object as a conditioning clause, whose inadequacy for the justification of men the apostle says he and Peter

¹⁷⁵ BDAG

¹⁷⁶ *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 371.

¹⁷⁷ BDAG 3

¹⁷⁸ BDAG 3e

already knew.”¹⁷⁹ The point is the same: works of the law can in no way contribute to God’s “not guilty” verdict.

Next to be considered is the word ἔργα. An ἔργον very basically is something that a person does. It is a “deed, accomplishment.”¹⁸⁰ When the New Perspective defines ἔργα νόμου as boundary markers which distinguish Jews from Gentiles, it seems they are weakening the word ἔργα to mean “distinguishing characteristics.” When Paul uses the word ἔργα in the context of justification, he uses it to mean something a person does as opposed to something a person receives. Gundry writes, “‘Works’ shows that [Paul] has in mind performance.”¹⁸¹ Armin Panning describes the error of the Judaizers like this: “The fundamental error was in telling people to do something in order to secure salvation... Works are *man’s doing*. Faith is accepting what *God has done* in Christ.”¹⁸²

Finally, attention must be given to the word νόμος. Νόμος can mean different things in Paul. It could refer to the Pentateuch, as with the second occurrence of νόμος in Romans 3:21, and the second occurrence in Galatians 4:21. This usage would include both law and gospel as theological concepts since the Pentateuch contains both commands and Gospel promises (Genesis 3:15; 12:3 etc.). Νόμος could mean “principle” as in Romans 3:27 and 7:23. Νόμος could mean the general or moral law of God. This law is written on the hearts of Gentiles (Rom 2:15-16), and is followed by Christians (Rom 2:27), though they are not justified thereby. Νόμος could refer to the commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai (Gal 3:17; Rom 5:13). It is the view of this paper that νόμου in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου refers to the Mosaic Law. Some might say that νόμου in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου means “anything that has the character of law” and so refer mainly to the divine law generally/moral law. The fact that νόμου lacks the article might be pointed to for support. It is true that when a word lacks the article, the quality of the noun is usually being stressed. Ridderbos comments here that the nouns are “without the

¹⁷⁹ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 120.

¹⁸⁰ BDAG 1c

¹⁸¹ R.H. Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” 24.

¹⁸² *Galatians, Ephesians, People’s Bible*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2010), 51. Emphasis original.

articles; hence qualitative.”¹⁸³ This, however, does not make the noun indefinite so that it means “a law” or “any law.” In Greek, the lack of an article does necessarily not make a word indefinite (cf. θεός in John 1:1). This is not to say that only the Mosaic Law is unable to justify a person, as if some other law were able to justify. Actually, the opposite is true. If not even the Mosaic Law, given by God himself, is unable to justify, then certainly no law can justify.

Again, it is the view of this paper that νόμος here means the law given by Moses. One reason for this interpretation is that the Antioch controversy grew out of a dispute over a ceremonial aspect of the Mosaic Law and not out of a controversy over a moral aspect of God’s law. Therefore, νόμου must include the ceremonial aspect of the Mosaic Law. Νόμου is not, however, limited to the ceremonial aspect of the Mosaic Law, but includes the law in all its aspects (moral, ceremonial, and civil). Νόμου in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου means the Mosaic Law as a whole. More argumentation for the interpretation of νόμου here presented will be given in the discussion of Romans 3:19-20.

Now we will consider the phrase as a unit. The phrase, “works of the law” (ἔργα νόμου) occurs eight times in Paul’s epistles, all in Galatians and Romans (Galatians 2:16 3x; Galatians 3:2, 5, 10; Romans 3:20, 28). Surprisingly, the phrase is exceedingly rare outside of the Pauline corpus. Moo writes, “As to its distinctiveness, the phrase is not found in the LXX, is not used by any other NT author and is extant in an equivalent Hebrew parallel only in 4QFlor 1:7, *ma’as’ey torah*.”¹⁸⁴ This Qumran document, also known as 4QMMT, contains the *only* occurrence of “works of the law” that is extant outside of the eight times Paul uses the phrase. 4QMMT will be quoted and discussed below in the section on Romans 4:3.

The genitive νόμου might be descriptive, “law-works.” It could also be an objective genitive. Professor Kuske writes, “As an objective genitive, it would be the object of the verbal

¹⁸³ *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 99 n.16.

¹⁸⁴ “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 45 (1983), 91.

idea ‘do’ expressed by ἔργων. People try to ‘do’ God’s law.”¹⁸⁵ Though either is possible, the view taken in this paper is that νόμου is an objective genitive.

When Paul says, “works of the law” does he have in mind all the works which the law requires: civil, ceremonial, and moral? Or is he thinking only of the ceremonial law? This question was asked by some at the time of the Reformation.

John Calvin wrote in his commentary on Romans,

It is a matter of doubt, even among the learned, what the works of the law mean. Some extend them to the observance of the whole law, while others confine them to the ceremonies alone...But this difficulty may be very easily removed: ...in order to take away the power of justifying from all works, he has mentioned those, if there be any, which can possibly justify.¹⁸⁶

Luther wrote in his Galatians commentary:

It is evident that Paul speaketh not of the ceremonial law, as some affirm, but of a far weightier matter...The word ‘works of the law’ reacheth far; it extendeth to all that is contrary to grace...The work of the law, then according to Paul, signifieth the work of the whole law, judicial, ceremonial, or moral. Now if the moral law do not justify, much less doth the ceremonial law justify.¹⁸⁷

As is clear from the quotes above, Luther and Calvin considered the question of whether Paul has in mind works of the law generally or only works of the ceremonial law. They both came down firmly on the side of “works of the law generally.” In recent times this question has come up again in a slightly different form. New Perspective scholars suggest that Paul has in mind only certain works of the law, namely those works which separate Jew from Gentile (circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath). “Works of the law,” they say, are not equivalent to what the Reformation would call “good works” but rather “works of the law” refers specifically to those aspects of the law which separate Jews from Gentiles, the “boundary marking” aspects of the Law. In support of their view, they strongly emphasize the context in which Paul gave this

¹⁸⁵ *A Commentary on Romans 1-8*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2007), 165.

¹⁸⁶ *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, Translated by John Owen, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 130.

¹⁸⁷ *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Erasmus Middleton (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 65-66.

speech recorded in Galatians 2. The men from Jerusalem were, in effect, forcing the Gentile believers to observe food purity laws in order to gain full acceptance. Peter, by his hypocritical actions, had endorsed their opinion. The issue was not, they say, works in a broad sense. The issue is actually quite *narrow*: forcing Gentiles to observe food laws. NT Wright puts it this way:

What, then, are the ‘works of the law,’ by which one cannot be ‘justified’ in this sense? Again, the context is pretty clear. They are the ‘living like a Jew’ of Galatians 2:14, the separation from ‘Gentile sinners’ of Galatians 2:15. They are not, in other words, the moral ‘good works’ which the Reformation tradition loves to hate. They are the things that divide Jew from Gentile: specifically, in the context of this passage (and we have no right to read Galatians 2:16 other than in the context of Galatians 2:11-15) the ‘works of the law’ which specify, however different Jewish groups might have put it at the time, that ‘Jews do not eat with Gentiles.’¹⁸⁸

James Dunn makes similar remarks:

[Paul’s] denial that justification is from works of law is, more precisely, a denial that justification depends on circumcision or on observance of the Jewish purity and food taboos. We may justifiably deduce therefore that by ‘works of the law’ Paul intended his readers to think of *particular observances of the law like circumcision and food laws*.¹⁸⁹

Opponents of the New Perspective are right to point out, however, that Paul very quickly moves from this *narrow* situation to a *broad* discussion of the whole law. In verse 19, Paul declares that he has “died to the law.” In verse 21 Paul rejects “justification through the law.” In both passages it is apparent that Paul is thinking not only of food laws, but of the law generally. The point is that even though Paul is addressing a specific situation, he is thinking broadly. The point is made well by Henri Blocher:

In order to repel his adversaries’ propaganda regarding these specific works, Paul appeals to the more general and foundational principle that accomplishing legal works is not the way to reach divine acceptance...A remarkable contrast emerges: whereas the new perspective strategy consists in narrowing down the issue, to zero in on what really was of burning interest to Paul, Jew-Gentile relations, Paul’s strategy constantly seeks to broaden horizons and to bring into the discussion the more global truths of the gospel.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, 116-117.

¹⁸⁹ “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 108. Italics original.

¹⁹⁰ “Justification of the Ungodly (Sola Fide)” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 2: Paradoxes of Paul*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 487-488.

One more thing is yet to be considered before we leave the phrase ἔργα νόμου for the moment. The thesis of this paper is that Paul was combating legalism or works-righteousness,¹⁹¹ but does the phrase “works of the law” itself mean “legalism”? This opinion has been championed by scholars such as Ernst De Witt Burton and Daniel P. Fuller.

Burton wrote in his Galatians commentary, “νόμου is evidently used qualitatively, and in its legalistic sense...By ἔργα νόμου Paul means deeds of obedience to formal statutes done in a legalistic spirit, with the expectation of thereby meriting and securing divine approval and award, such obedience, in other words, as the legalists rendered to the law of the O.T. as expanded and interpreted by them.”¹⁹²

This interpretation, that the phrase ἔργα νόμου itself means legalism has been taken up in more recent times by Daniel P. Fuller. In his article, “Paul and ‘the Works of the Law,’”¹⁹³ Fuller first brings up a point that C.E.B. Cranfield had made: “the Greek language used by Paul had no word-group to denote ‘legalism,’ ‘legalist,’ and ‘legalistic.’”¹⁹⁴ There is no Greek word for “legalism.” According to this line of thinking, Paul sometimes used the word νόμος and always used the phrase ἔργα νόμου to denote what we in English would call “legalism.”

Should this interpretation be accepted? It has a surface appeal because the thesis presented in this paper is that Paul opposed legalism. This interpretation also seems to have the support of the Formula of Concord:

However, in order to avoid all misunderstanding as much as possible and to teach and maintain the real difference between the works of the law and the works of the Spirit...the distinction between these two kinds of works is due to the difference between the two kinds of people who make an effort to keep this law and will of God. For as long as human beings are not reborn but do act according to the law and do perform its work because they are commanded, either out of fear of punishment or desire of reward, they are still under the law. St. Paul calls the works of such people works of the law in the

¹⁹¹ Legalism and works-righteousness are here used as synonyms both meaning any attempt to make human works a part of justification.

¹⁹² *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 120.

¹⁹³ *Westminster Theological Journal*, 38 (1975): 28-42.

¹⁹⁴ “St. Paul and the Law,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17, 1 (1964): 55. Quoted by Fuller, 28.

strict sense [Rom. 2:15; 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 10], for they are coerced by the law as in the case of slaves, and they are saints of the stripe of Cain.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, it is conviction of this paper that some (not all) Jews of Paul's day used the law and the works commanded by it in a legalistic way. Some Jews tried to use their law-works as a means toward justification before God. It does not follow, however, that the word "law" or the phrase "works of the law" itself ever means "legalism." The phrase itself is neutral. ἔργα νόμου simply means "works that the law commands."

This issue has been written about at some length by both Thomas Schreiner and Douglas Moo.¹⁹⁶ Moo rejects the interpretation that the word "law" (νόμος) in Paul ever means legalism for two reasons. First, even though it's true that Greek had no one word for legalism, Paul had plenty of ways to express the concept without changing the meaning of a single word (νόμος). When Paul says that the Jews were "seeking to establish their own righteousness," (Romans 10:3) he is expressing the concept of legalism without using the single word, "legalism."¹⁹⁷ Second, Moo suspects that νόμος is taken to mean "the legalistic misuse of the law" because those scholars think that Paul usually uses νόμος to refer to the Mosaic Law in a broad sense, including both law and gospel. When Paul makes negative comments about the law, then, he must be using the word νόμος in an unusual way. Moo suggests that some of the difficulty disappears when it is realized that Paul usually uses νόμος to mean, not the Pentateuch as a whole, but the Mosaic legislation. Here are Moo's own words:

"Secondly, the motivation for interpreting *nomos* as legalism is usually, explicitly or implicitly, the desire to avoid attributing to Paul an overly negative evaluation of the OT economy. This, in turn, suggests that some of those who want to avoid any absolute law/gospel antithesis in Paul do so because they understand *nomos* to include the OT revelation as a whole; and, understandably, they want to vindicate Paul from the charge

¹⁹⁵ Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration, VI:17, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb, Timothy Wengert, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 589-590. In a footnote the editors explain that "the stripe of Cain" was "an expression Luther used for works-righteousness, e.g. WA 10/1/1:326, 16; 340, 17-341, 10; 343, 8-348, 2; Lenker 6:226-42; and WA 42:191, 8-18; LW 1:258-59."

¹⁹⁶ "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," 73-100. See especially pages 85-89.

¹⁹⁷ Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," 86.

of Marcionism...Essentially, then I am suggesting that, at least in some cases, *nomos* is interpreted to mean legalism because the term is given a broad sense, embracing at times the Pentateuch as a whole...In other words, the interpretation of *nomos* to mean legalism has its roots in what I would argue is a fundamentally wrong conception of Paul's use of *nomos*. I would maintain that Paul distinguishes promise and law *by definition* (see Gal. 3:15-25 and Rom. 4:13-16), so that the denial that justification can come through the law (e.g. Gal. 3:11) is not a denial that those "under the law" could be justified. It *does* constitute a denial that man could ever be justified *by means of* the law (see Gal. 2:21; 3:21).¹⁹⁸

Many who interpret "works of the law" as itself referring to legalism contend that *even if* a person were able to obey the entire law they would still not gain salvation thereby because the works were done in a legalistic spirit.¹⁹⁹ Thomas Schreiner rightly contends that this statement is at least misleading. Jesus told the expert in the law, "Do this [what is written in the law] and you will live" (Luke 10:28). Paul set the same standard in Romans 2:13, "those who obey the law will be declared righteous." If a person did obey all the commandments perfectly, he would gain life. Paul, however, points out the practical problem with that: all humans (except Jesus) are under the power of sin and transgress the law. Schreiner writes, "Hübner's understanding that people will be cursed *even if* they obey the entire Law, because such obedience would be legalistic, is contradicted by Paul. The apostle clearly states that *if* one could obey the whole Law, then that person would live (Gal 3:12, 21; Rom 10:5; cf. Lev 18:5). Of course, Paul believes such perfect obedience is a practical impossibility, and thus no one can be justified by doing the 'works of the law.'"²⁰⁰ One could make a case in Hübner's defense that works done with the goal of earning one's way to heaven could be presented as a sin against the first commandment, idolatrously trying to take God's glory for self by earning a place in heaven. Schreiner would not disagree with this. In fact, he says, "Thus, any boasting in human works is a perverse delusion since good works are lacking in any case, but those who are trying to impress

¹⁹⁸ Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," 87-88.

¹⁹⁹ H. Hübner, *Was heisst bei Paulus Werke des Gesetzes?* in *Glaube und Eschatologie: Festschrift für Georg Kümmel zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Grässer and O. Merk (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985): 123-133.

²⁰⁰ "Works of the Law" in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 978. Italics original.

God with their good works do not come to grips with their failures, thinking they have done enough good to merit favor with God. Such boasting lies at the heart of the human sin, the desire to heap glory and praise upon oneself instead of giving glory, thanks, and praise to the one and only God (Rom 1:21-23).”²⁰¹ Schreiner’s simple point against Hübner is that, if a person would obey the whole law perfectly, including the first commandment, that person would live.

In conclusion, the phrase “works of the law” itself is neutral, but Paul’s opponents were wrong in trying to be justified by these, in themselves neutral (or even good), works of the law. Their attempt to be justified by the works of the law was sinful for several reasons: 1) it was motivated by sinful pride and a desire to boast (Rom 3:27; Eph 2:8-9); 2) it betrayed a lack of willingness to take God at his word when he speaks of the seriousness of sin. In other words, the attempt by sinful human beings to obtain justification by their own works is a rebellion against God who says that it is impossible for sinful flesh to be justified before him (Psalm 143:1-2). Therefore even though the phrase “works of the law” is in itself neutral, the attempt by sinful human beings to be justified by the works of the law is sinful works-righteousness.

The next recurring phrase to consider in verse 16 is πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Stated negatively, justification is “not by works of the law.” Stated positively, justification is “through/by faith in Jesus Christ” (διὰ/ ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). The view taken in this paper is that Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is an objective genitive (“faith in Jesus Christ”), rather than a subjective genitive (“the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”). This view is presented without argumentation because it is not essential to a discussion of the target of Paul’s polemic. New Perspective authors themselves are divided on this question. James Dunn considers Χριστοῦ to be an objective genitive. N.T. Wright considers it to be a subjective genitive. Even those who consider πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ to be referring to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, still affirm that the benefits of his work are appropriated by faith in him.

“Faith” language forms a third triplet in verse 16 along with the “justify” and “works” language discussed above. The occurrences of διὰ/ ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ are highlighted below.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 978.

οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου

ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ

Paul preached that God's verdict of not guilty had nothing to do with a person's works (ἔργα), but was rather a gift to be received διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ "through faith in Jesus Christ." Faith is simply the receiving organ through which (διὰ + genitive) the gift is applied to the individual. Lightfoot makes the observation that in justification language Paul never uses "διὰ πίστιν, 'propter fidem' which would involve a doctrinal error."²⁰² διὰ with the accusative (πίστιν) means "because of" rather than "through." "Because of faith" would involve a doctrinal error because it would imply that faith is a work which the individual does, whereas in Paul's terminology faith is not a work but simply receives the gift given. Therefore διὰ with the genitive ("through") is appropriate.

Now that each individual phrase has been considered, a larger portion should be considered: οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου. The phrase ἐὰν μὴ in the first part of the verse is peculiar because ἐὰν μὴ usually means "except." The verse would then be, "A person is not justified on the basis of the works of the law except through faith in Jesus Christ," and Paul could be misunderstood as saying, "a person can be justified by the works of the law as long as he also has faith in Christ." This interpretation is impossible. Not only does it contradict the second half of the verse (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου), but it also is exactly what the Judaizers were apparently proclaiming: A person is justified through faith in Christ plus observing the law.

James Dunn, however, makes a case that ἐὰν μὴ does in fact mean "except" in Galatians 2:16. Dunn suggests there can be seen in Galatians 2:16 a step forward in Christian thought in which Paul first comes to a realization for himself and then is able to make a clarification for

²⁰² *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, first edition 1865), 115.

his fellow Jews. According to Dunn, in the first part of verse 16 (οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), Paul says that works of law cannot justify unless they are joined with faith in Christ. Dunn writes,

According to verse 16a the common ground (between Peter and Paul) is that “a man is not justified from works of law *except* through faith in Jesus Christ.” Notice how he expresses the last phrase - “except through faith in Jesus Messiah”. 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 Messiah*. The only restriction, that is, to covenantal nomism is faith in Christ.²⁰³

In the second part of the verse, however, Dunn says that Paul advances beyond that belief to a more radical belief that works of the law cannot justify at all and that only faith in Christ justifies. Professor Dunn says,

[I]n repeating the contrast between justification from works of law and justification through faith in Christ, Paul alters it significantly: what were initially juxtaposed as complementary, are now posed as straight alternatives – ‘...knowing that a man is not justified from works of law *except* through faith in Jesus Christ, we have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified from faith in Christ, and *not* from works of law...’...In other words, in v. 16 Paul pushes what began as a qualification on covenantal nomism into an outright antithesis.”²⁰⁴

Again Dunn writes, “Indeed, it is quite likely that Gal. 2.16 reflects the step by which Paul’s thinking hardened these two propositions into a clear-cut antithesis.”²⁰⁵ If this is true, we see Paul’s thought developing before our eyes. In this regard it should be remembered that Paul did not develop his gospel in his own mind, but rather “received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12).²⁰⁶ Schreiner adds, “Furthermore, it seems strange that Paul would reproduce for the Galatians a change of mind in the midst of a single sentence!”²⁰⁷

²⁰³ “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 112. Emphasis original.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 113. Emphasis original.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 112.

²⁰⁶ This is not to deny, however, that Paul would think about the gospel which he received and gain new insights into it.

²⁰⁷ *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 162.

The first statement from Dunn above seems to suggest that Paul simply gained Jewish-Christian assent with the first part of the verse and then tried to push them forward into a new belief in the second part of the verse. One wonders, however, if Paul would open himself up to the charge of dishonesty and hypocrisy if he put forward as common ground something which he did not actually believe (that man is justified by works of the law and by faith in Christ).

Thomas Schreiner rightly points that the Galatians, who heard this letter read out loud, would likely be confused by such a shift. “If this were so, Paul’s both-and position regarding works of law and faith, then followed by his utter rejection of works of law, would confuse the Galatians.”²⁰⁸ Paul’s meaning in the first half of the verse, therefore, is the same as his meaning in the second half. He is repeating simply for emphasis. He uses two different exclusive particles *ἐὰν μὴ* and *οὐκ* for variety within such repetition.

Finally, there are two plausible solutions to the problem posed by *ἐὰν μὴ*. The phrase *ἐὰν μὴ* here could simply mean “but.” F.F. Bruce opts for this. He says, “Here *ἐὰν μὴ* means ‘but’, the previous option, *ἐξ ἔργων νόμου*, being excluded.”²⁰⁹ The other solution is to say that *ἐὰν μὴ* modifies only *οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος*. Paul would then be understood as saying “a man is not justified except through faith in Christ.” This is the option taken by Burton, who writes,

ἐὰν μὴ is properly exceptive, not adversative...but it may introduce an exception to the preceding statement taken as a whole or to the principal part of it – in this case *οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου* or *οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος* alone. The latter alternative is clearly to be chosen here, since the former would yield the thought that a man can be justified by works of law if this be accompanied by faith, a thought never expressed by the apostle and wholly at variance with his doctrine as unambiguously expressed in several passages.²¹⁰

Lightfoot gives the same interpretation: “*ἐὰν μὴ* retains its proper meaning, but refers only to *οὐ δικαιούται*, ‘he is not justified from works of law, he is not justified except through faith.’”²¹¹

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.

²¹⁰ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 121.

²¹¹ *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, 115.

The verse ends with an allusion to an Old Testament Scripture passage, Psalm 143:2 (LXX: 142:2).

LXX: οὐ δικαιοθήσεται ἐνώπιόν σου πᾶς ζῶν.²¹²

2:16: ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ.

Paul's quotation is loose but nevertheless clear. The New Perspective asserts that Paul's Judaizing opponents²¹³ were not doing works of the law in order to *earn* God's favor. It is telling, however, that in the last clause of 2:16 Paul makes use of Psalm 143:2 (LXX: 142:2), "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you." As N.T. Wright has observed about other passages,²¹⁴ when Paul gives an Old Testament quotation, he almost always has in mind also the context of that Old Testament passage. Since Paul reached for a passage that emphasizes human unworthiness before God, it is fair to conclude that Paul felt his Judaizing opponents were not taking sufficient account of their unworthiness. There are grave dangers in "mirror reading,"²¹⁵ but the above suggestion has something further to commend it in the fact that Paul inserts what appears to be his opponents' slogan (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) into a Bible passage that speaks strongly about a human's utter unworthiness before God.

New Perspective authors will counter that the Judaizers understood grace. Their only problem was that they narrowed the grace of God to include only Jewish people. They "confined grace to race."²¹⁶ Paul, however, sees the Judaizers not simply as those who narrow the grace of God, but as those who "nullify the grace of God" (2:21 NASB). The Greek word used in verse

²¹² All quotations from the Septuagint are taken from the Libronix version of Rahlfs, Alfred, *Septuaginta*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935.

²¹³ Paul in this speech is confronting *Peter*, but Peter was acting hypocritically under peer pressure (2:12-13). Paul's real theological opponents are the Judaizers.

²¹⁴ *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, 182.

²¹⁵ "Mirror reading" refers to the practice of reconstructing the position of Paul's opponents based solely on what Paul says. This is a necessary exercise but it becomes dangerous when the exegete reads a positive statement of Paul and assumes that his opponents held the exact opposite viewpoint. Cf. John M.G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73-93.

²¹⁶ N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume X: Acts – 1 Corinthians*, 650.

21 is ἀθετέω which BDAG defines as “to reject something as invalid, *declare invalid, nullify, ignore.*”

Galatians 3:10 – 14

Greek Text

10 ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν· γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά. 11 ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιούται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι Ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. 12 ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ Ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς. 13 Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα, ὅτι γέγραπται, Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὁ κρεμάμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου, 14 ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.

Translation

¹⁰For as many as are from works of the law, they are under a curse. For it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not persevere in all the things written in the book of the Law to do those things.” ¹¹And it is clear that no one is justified in God’s sight by the law, because “the righteous will live by faith.” ¹²But the law is not based on faith. Rather, the one who has done these things will live by them. ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse in our place, because it is written, “cursed be everyone who is hung on a tree.” ¹⁴[This happened] so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus so that the promise of the Spirit might be received through faith.

Discussion

In contemporary Pauline scholarship, especially since Krister Stendahl, the error of the Judaizers is almost always stated in terms of the way they viewed the justification *of the Gentiles*. In Galatians 3:10, however, it becomes apparent that there was a major problem with the way the Judaizers viewed *their own* justification. Paul boldly asserts, “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse” (Galatians 3:10a; ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν).

Why are those who rely on the works of the law cursed? Since the law which they rely on requires perfect obedience, they fall under the law’s curse. Paul continues, “For it is written, ‘cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’”

(Galatians 3:10b; γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά). Since they have not rendered the perfect obedience (“everything”) which the laws requires, they fall under its curse. That the law requires perfect obedience is evident from the cluster of words in this verse emphasize the “doing” of “all” the law (ἐμμένει πᾶσιν... ποιῆσαι).

This is the most natural way to read Galatians 3:10, but New Perspective authors insist that another interpretation must be adopted. E.P. Sanders gives some reasons for moving away from the interpretation given above. One reason is that the Jews of Paul’s time did not see the law as requiring perfect obedience. Sanders writes, “It would, in short, be extraordinarily un-Pharisaic and even un-Jewish of Paul to insist that obedience to the law, once undertaken, must be perfect.”²¹⁷

In response it can be said that Paul the Christian is certainly not bound to his past Pharisaic views. Additionally, a strong argument can be made that some of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries did indeed view the law as requiring perfect obedience. A. Andrew Das points out that “Gamaliel...saw God as demanding a strict and perfect obedience with little or no room for failure,”²¹⁸ and that at Qumran “perfection was the standard by which the community members were to try to live.”²¹⁹

Another reason Sanders gives for moving away from the traditional interpretation of 3:10 is that Paul has chosen the quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26 not because it contains the word “all,” but because it contains the words “cursed” and νόμος.²²⁰ In response it can be said that none of the words in the passage should be discarded as unimportant.

Despite Sander’s objection, seeing the law as demanding perfect obedience is the only way to explain the logical connection between what Paul says and the proof text he cites. As Das has pointed out,²²¹ Paul says that those who rely on works of the law are cursed. On the other

²¹⁷ *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 28.

²¹⁸ *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 43. See also 32-36.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 43. See also 18-19.

²²⁰ *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 21-22.

²²¹ *Paul and the Jews*, 21.

hand, the proof text says that all those who *do not* do works of the law are cursed! “Paul appears to be forcing the passage to support the opposite of what it actually says.”²²²

The only way to resolve this apparent conflict is to interpret the passage in the following manner. The law demands perfect obedience. If that perfect obedience is not rendered, the law pronounces a curse. Therefore, all those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse because they do not obey the law perfectly and thus fall under its curse. Das explains the logic of the passage this way:

Galatians 3:10 forms what the ancients called an enthymeme, a logical argument in which one of the premises is missing because it should have been obvious to the original readers. The stated premise is, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in this book of the law.” Paul concludes, “All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.” The premise that needs to be supplied by the reader to complete the argument is, “All who rely on the works of the law do not observe and obey all the things written in this book of the law.” People simply are not capable of doing all that the Law requires and thus fall under its curse. This fundamental human inability is central to Paul’s critique of the Law.²²³

In verses 11 and 12, Paul contrasts “believing” and “doing” as two contradictory paths as regards the justification of a sinner before God. “The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who *does* these things will live by them’” (Galatians 3:12). Westerholm writes, “Faith and deeds (or faith and the law) are seen – in this context at least – as exclusive alternatives.”²²⁴ The Judaizers had chosen the “doing” approach to justification and were in this sense guilty of works-righteousness.

Verse 13 says that Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρως τοῦ νόμου). With the word “us” (ἡμᾶς), Paul likely is referring to all of humanity, not simply the Jews. One might think that since only the Jews have the Mosaic Law, only the Jews would fall under its curse. However, in other places Paul speaks of the Gentiles as also having the requirements law written in their hearts (Romans 2:15). Since Gentiles fall short of the law written on their hearts, they too fall under the curse of the law and need redeeming.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Paul and the Jews*, 36-37. See also *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 146.

²²⁴ *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The ‘Lutheran’ Paul and His Critics*, 305.

Christ redeemed humanity by becoming a curse (κατάρα) in their place. The word ὑπὲρ here carries the meaning of substitution.²²⁵ Christ was cursed as the substitute for all of humanity. Schreiner sums up the verse nicely, “Paul teaches that Christ took upon himself the curse that sinners deserved, that he stood in their place and absorbed their punishment.”²²⁶

It is in Galatians 3:13-14 where theologians trained in the old/“Lutheran” perspective might notice the most glaring difference between their interpretation and that of the New Perspective. The interpretations given by New Perspective authors differ here. N.T. Wright, for example, sees in these verses the theme that the Jews were still under a “continuing exile” until the redemption of Christ. The present author does not feel qualified to present Wright’s interpretation. The New Perspective interpretation which will be presented is that of James Dunn. Dunn sees “those from works of the law” (ὅσοι ... ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) in verse 10 as those whose understanding of the law is too exclusively focused on its boundary marking features (like circumcision). Dunn states:

Those who are ἐξ ἔργων νόμου are those who have understood the scope of God’s covenant people as Israel *per se*, as that people who are defined by the law and marked out by its distinctive requirements. Such an understanding of the covenant and of the law inevitably puts too much weight on physical and national factors, on outward and visible enactments, and gives too little weight to the Spirit, to faith and to love from the heart. Such an understanding of the people of God inevitably results in a false set of priorities...To thus misunderstand the law by giving primacy to matters of at best secondary importance was to fall short of what the law required and thus to fall under the law’s own curse (Deut 27.26).²²⁷

In other words, according to Dunn, “those from works of the law” majored in minors, placing emphasis on circumcision rather than love which is the true fulfillment of the law. The conception of the problem often shapes one’s understanding of the solution. If the “curse” (κατάραν; v.10) is the curse which falls upon a wrong understanding of the law, then the purpose of Christ’s death was to redeem (ἐξηγόρασεν; v. 13) the Jews from such a wrong understanding of

²²⁵ For a thorough presentation of evidence from the papyri which shows that ὑπὲρ can have substitutionary force, see Daniel Wallace, 383-389.

²²⁶ *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary, 217.

²²⁷ “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 134-135.

the law. Because this point shows such a stark difference between the “Lutheran” perspective and the New Perspective, Dunn needs to be heard here at length in his own words:²²⁸

The thought [of Christ becoming a curse in our place] clearly refers back to v.10...Paul must intend ‘the curse of the law’ to be understood in light of v. 10. That is to say, the curse of the law is not simply the condemnation which falls on any transgression and on all who fall short of the law’s requirements. Paul has in mind the specific short-fall of his typical Jewish contemporary, the curse which falls on all who restrict the grace and promise of God in nationalistic terms, who treat the law as a boundary to mark the people of God off from the Gentiles, who give a false priority to ritual markers. The curse here has to do primarily with that attitude which confines the covenant promise to the Jews as Jews: it falls on those who live within the law in such a way as to exclude Gentiles as Gentiles from the promise...It was that curse which Jesus brought deliverance from by his death. This may seem at first a surprisingly narrow understanding of the redemptive effect of Christ’s death, especially when a systematized theology of the atonement tends to stress deliverance from the power of sin (and the condemnation of transgression). But Paul’s meaning and intention here is in fact quite narrow and specific...the purpose of Christ’s redemptive work can be specified quite properly as the removal of *that* curse, as the deliverance of the heirs of the covenant promise from the ill effect of the too narrow understanding of the covenant and law held by most of Paul’s contemporaries.²²⁹

It bears repeating that one’s understanding of the problem will shape one’s understanding of the solution. Professor Dunn’s understanding of the problem in Galatians 3:10-14 is restricted to a misunderstanding of the law, therefore Christ’s redemption is restricted to a redemption from such a misunderstanding. The “Lutheran” perspective formulates the problem differently, and thus formulates the solution differently as well. The problem according to the “Lutheran” perspective is that no one obeys the law perfectly but rather transgresses the law and thus everyone falls under its curse. If the problem is transgressions of the law rather than a misunderstanding of the law, then the redemption won by Christ is a redemption from

²²⁸ Because of the length of the quotation 1.5 line spacing has been retained for readability.

²²⁹ “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 137-138. Italics original.

transgressions, not simply from a too narrow view point. In the exegesis of verse 10 given above it has been argued that the “Lutheran” construal of the problem is correct, and thus also their construal of the solution is correct as well. This understanding of Christ becoming a curse in our place as a redemption from transgressions is clear in other Pauline passages. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). 2 Corinthians 5:21 is significant because it parallels Galatians 3:13 in that it uses substitution language (ὕπερ) and speaks of Christ becoming something which he was not on our behalf. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ).

It seems doubtful that Dunn would deny that one purpose of the death of Christ was to pay for sin, especially in view of such clear passages as 1 Corinthians 15:1. It seems that he contends for a narrow view of Christ’s redeeming work *in this passage*. In support of his interpretation that the purpose of Christ’s redemption was to free the Jews from a narrow understanding of the law which excluded Gentiles, Dunn points out that the first half of verse 14, “so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus”²³⁰ (ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), is parallel to Ephesians 2:14-15, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”

Ephesians 2:14-15 clearly states that one purpose of Christ’s death was to bring down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. The parallel of Galatians 3:14 with Ephesians 2:14-15 was pointed out already by Lightfoot, who said of Galatians 3:14, “the sequence of thought here is exactly the same as in Ephes. ii. 14-18.”²³¹ Since Paul talks about the “coming” (γένηται) of the blessing to the Gentiles as a purpose (ἵνα) of Christ’s death, he may have in mind the fact that Christ’s death destroyed the partition which kept Gentiles from the people of God and the blessing of Abraham. It seems, however, that Christ destroyed the partition of the law by fulfilling the law (Luke 2:21; Galatians 4:5; Romans 10:4) and then taking on himself the curse

²³⁰ My Translation.

²³¹ *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*, 140.

for all of the transgressions of the law (Galatians 3:14) as humanity's substitute. In other words, the view that Christ's death brought down the partition of the law so that the Gentiles could become part of the covenant people by no means robs Galatians 3:13 of its full force: Christ the substitute was punished for all the transgressions of his people the Jews, and also of the whole world (ἡμῶν likely refers to all of humanity in view of Paul's teaching of a universal atonement elsewhere, e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

N.T. Wright also undercuts the traditional interpretation of verses 13 and 14:

When you ask people, "Why did the Messiah become a curse for us?" the normal answer is something like, "So that we might be freed from sin and share fellowship with God for all eternity." Paul's is radically different: "So that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, and so that we (presumably Jews who believe in Jesus) might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." That is where Paul at least thinks his argument is going. Once again, it is the context, not traditions brought in from elsewhere, that really counts, and we must pay close attention.²³²

Wright has rightly called attention to Paul's actual wording, but in defense of the traditional interpretation "the blessing of Abraham" is in the same context as Christ taking on "the curse" which falls on those who transgress the law, so it is entirely proper to say that the blessing of Abraham involves freedom from sin. Also, this blessing certainly includes "eternal life,"²³³ (ζῆσεται; 3:12) which is "fellowship with God for all eternity." Also, when one thinks of the blessings which Abraham received, "the imputation of righteousness" (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3) quickly comes to mind. "The imputation of righteousness" to Abraham is found in the context of Galatians 3:10-14 (Genesis 15:6 is quoted in Gal. 3:6). In fact, Paul himself makes the connection between the blessing of Abraham and righteousness by faith in 3:8. "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'" The traditional interpretation of the passage, therefore, need not be doubted.

Romans

In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul makes the charge and argues the case that the whole world is under sin (3:9). Paul starts off in chapter 1:18ff by charging the Gentiles with suppressing the natural knowledge (1:19-21) of God and turning to idolatry (1:22-23) and sexual sins (1:24-27),

²³² *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, 124.

²³³ *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary, 209.

and finally with more subtle sins of the heart (1:29-31). In chapter two he turns to indict the moralist and the Jew, who imagine that they will escape the eschatological judgment of God. Relevant for this thesis is the fact that Paul's Jewish interlocutor seems to think that the mere possession of the law will secure for him a favorable verdict on the Last Day. Paul needs to press home to his interlocutor: "It is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Romans 2:13). Mere hearing is not enough, Paul says, one actually needs to *do* the law. One might think of John the Baptist who rebuked a similar idea in some of the Jews who thought that they would escape God's fiery judgment simply because they were physical descendant of Abraham (Matthew 3:9-10).

This has led some to think that Paul is mounting an attack, not on works-righteousness, but rather on its opposite: presumption on the grace of God. F.C. Grant writes, "If anything, Judaism erred on the side of over-emphasizing the free grace of God."²³⁴ The strange fact, however, is that works-righteousness and presumption upon God's grace can live in the same heart. Human beings are complex creatures. The prophet Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Romans 3:19-20

Greek Text

19 Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ, ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῆ καὶ ὑπόδικος γένηται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῷ θεῷ. 20 διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας.

Translation

¹⁹Now we know that everything which the law says, it speaks to those in the law, so that every mouth might be shut and all the world be held accountable to God. ²⁰Therefore by works of the law all flesh will not be justified before him, because through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Discussion

From Romans 1:18 all the way up until the section under consideration (3:19-20), Paul has been demonstrating that the entire world is under sin. Paul now brings his argument to a

²³⁴ F.C. Grant, *Ancient Judaism and the New Testament*, (Edinburgh-London, 1960), 64. I owe this quotation to Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 168 n. 39. Räisänen cites the quotation approvingly.

climax by declaring that “by works of the law all flesh will not be justified before him”²³⁵ (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ).

In the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, to what does the word νόμου refer? Does it refer to the Mosaic Law in all its parts, civil, ceremonial and moral, or does it refer to the eternal will of God for human conduct? Professor David P. Kuske interprets all occurrences of νόμος in verses 19 and 20, including the time it occurs in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, as referring, not to the Mosaic Law, but only to the moral law, “God’s revealed will for all people of all time.”²³⁶ Kuske writes,

A popular interpretation found in quite a few commentaries is that *law* in this verse refers to the Mosaic Law. But that isn’t possible for two reasons: (1) The Mosaic Law applied only to the Jews, so it doesn’t condemn the whole world as the previous context and the following ἵνα clause require, and (2) the Mosaic Law came to an end with the completion of Christ’s saving work (Gal. 3:23-25; Col. 2:16-17) and so, after that time, no longer applied to anyone. The verbs λέγει and λαλεῖ are both present tense and so refer to a law that is speaking to people at the time Paul is writing this letter.²³⁷

Godet seems to follow this view. He writes,

Besides, the expression, *all flesh*, which evidently embraces the Gentiles, could not be applied to them if the law were here taken as the ceremonial law. Hence it appears that the last words of our verse refer to the moral, and not the ceremonial law, which decides the meaning of the term: *the works of the law*.²³⁸

F.F. Bruce says that νόμος in verse 19 and 20 refers to the law of God in whatever form it may take. The law may be written in the Mosaic legislation or written on the heart. Bruce writes,

So, when Paul says (3:20) that through law comes knowledge of sin, he says something that is true in principle of Jews and Gentiles alike; and when he says in the same context that by works of law no human being will be justified in God’s sight, this too is equally valid for Jew and Gentile. Whether the ‘works of law’ are performed in accordance with a code promulgated by express divine authority, or in accordance with the conscience, the

²³⁵ My Translation.

²³⁶ *A Commentary on Romans 1-8*, 162.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Dr. Talbot W. Chambers, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 144.

moral law within...or in accordance with an accepted standard of decent behavior – no matter, these are not the grounds on which men and women are accepted by God.²³⁹

There is lexical justification for taking νόμος as referring not to the Mosaic legislation, but to the eternal will of God (moral law). In Romans 2:27 Paul says that, “the one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker” (καὶ κρινεῖ ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα σὲ τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου). Paul here talks about an uncircumcised person who fulfills the law (ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα). Obviously this uncircumcised person does not obey the Mosaic legislation, but rather the eternal will of God (the moral law). In 1 Corinthians 7:19 Paul does not use the word νόμος, but he does seem to make a distinction between the Mosaic legislation and the eternal, immutable will of God. “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts” (ἡ περιτομὴ οὐδὲν ἐστὶν καὶ ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδὲν ἐστὶν, ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ). Another factor pointing to a generic use of νόμος in Romans 3:20 is Paul’s use of πᾶσα σὰρξ. “All flesh,” both Jew and Gentile, will not be justified by works of law.

As Professor Kuske mentioned, many interpreters believe that νόμου in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου refers to the Mosaic Law (and by “Mosaic Law” most mean the Mosaic legislation to the exclusion of the gospel promises found in the Torah). Among them is Douglas Moo. Moo is of the conviction that when Paul uses νόμος he most often has in mind the Mosaic legislation. In his article, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,”²⁴⁰ Moo says, “What is vital for any accurate understanding of Paul’s doctrine of law is to realize that Paul uses *nomos* most often and most basically of the Mosaic Law.”²⁴¹ Again Moo states, “unless indications to the contrary exist, *nomos* should be taken to mean Mosaic Law.”²⁴² In his Romans commentary,

²³⁹ *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 53.

²⁴⁰ *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 73-100.

²⁴¹ “‘Law,’ ‘Works of Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” 80.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 82.

Moo gives the statistic that “more than 90 percent of the occurrences of νόμος in Paul refer to the Mosaic Law.”²⁴³

In his comments on 3:20 Moo writes, “Paul uses the phrase ‘works of the law’ instead of the simple ‘works’ because he is particularly concerned in this context to deny to Jews an escape from the general sentence pronounced in v. 19.”²⁴⁴ In a footnote Moo adds, “Contra, e.g., Melancthon, Haldane, and Morison...who think that νόμος refers to divine law generally. While we agree with these expositors that the verse has ultimate application to all people, the reference to the law of Moses here is clear.”²⁴⁵ Leon Morris also sees νόμου as a reference to the Mosaic Law.²⁴⁶

Moo does recognize the universal applicability of the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, even though in his view νόμου means the Mosaic Law. He writes,

But since “works of law” are simply what we might call “good works” defined in Jewish terms, the principal enunciated here has universal application; nothing a person does, whatever the object of obedience or the motivation for that obedience, can bring him or her into favor with God.²⁴⁷

Professor Kuske’s concern is that if νόμου is interpreted to mean Mosaic Law, then someone might be able to say, “I can’t be justified by the works of the Mosaic Law but I can be justified by some other type of works.” In his Romans commentary, Kuske says, “If the law

²⁴³ *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 145. In “‘Law,’ ‘Works of Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” Moo compiled these passages as at least possible references to the law “in its Mosaic form”: Rom 2:12a,b, 13a,b, 14a,c, 17, 18, 20, 23a,b, 25a,b, 26, 27a,b; 3:19b, 20a,b, 21, 27b, 28, 31b; 4:13, 14, 15a,b, 16; 5:13a,b, 20; 6:14, 15; 7:1a,b, 2a,b, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7a,b,c, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 22, 23a,c, 25a,b; 8:2b, 3, 4; 9:31a,b; 10:4, 5; 13:8; 1 Cor 9:20a,b,c,d, 15:56; Gal 2:16a,b,c, 19a,b, 21; 3:2, 5, 10a,b, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21a,b,c, 23, 24; 4:4, 5, 21a; 5:3, 4, 14, 18; 6:13; Eph 2:15; Phil 3:5,6, 9; 1 Tim 1:8,9. This makes 102 total occurrences of νόμος in which Moo sees at least a possible reference to the Mosaic Law. These occurrences are compiled on “Chart I” in Douglas Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” 76.

²⁴⁴ *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 209.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 209 n.62.

²⁴⁶ *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 143 n. 171.

²⁴⁷ *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 209.

referred to here is taken as the Mosaic Law (cf. the footnotes in numerous study Bibles), then people can be led to believe that these words apply especially or only to Jews.”²⁴⁸ Moo recognizes this concern and answers it in this way:

Any restricted definition of “works of the law” *can* have the effect of opening the door to the possibility of justification by works – “good” deeds that are done in the right spirit, with God’s enabling grace, or something of the sort. This, we are convinced would be to misunderstand Paul at a vital point. The heart of his contention in this section of Romans is that *no one* is capable of doing *anything* to gain acceptance with God; this is why for *everyone* faith is the only possible way to God.²⁴⁹

Thus, even though Moo takes νόμου as the Mosaic Law, his interpretation and application come out at the same place as Professor Kuske’s.

Another objection that Professor Kuske had to taking νόμου as referring to the Mosaic Law in 3:20 is that Paul is obviously aiming in 1:18-3:20 to convict the whole world of sin, both Jew and Gentile. Furthermore, 3:20 is seen by most commentators as the summation and summary of everything since 1:18. In 3:19 Paul says “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that *every* mouth may be silenced and *the whole world* held accountable to God.” However we interpret νόμος in verses 19 and 20, it needs to convict the whole world, not just Jews. Therefore, Professor Kuske says, νόμος in 19 and 20 is the eternal will of God (moral law) and not the Mosaic Law. Thomas Schreiner, however, thinks that that conclusion does not necessarily follow. He writes, “How could the whole world be liable to God’s judgment because of a law given to the Jews? The answer is not that difficult. If the Jews, who had the privilege of being God’s covenantal and elect people, could not keep the law, then it follows that no one, including the Gentiles, can.”²⁵⁰

The Lutheran commentator Anders Nygren has a view similar to Schreiner’s:

It is manifest enough that the Gentiles, who have not the law, are sinners under the wrath of God. When, therefore, the law stops the mouth of those who have the law, compelling

²⁴⁸ *A Commentary on Romans 1-8*, 166.

²⁴⁹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 209-210. Italics original.

²⁵⁰ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 168.

them to confess that they are the veriest of sinners, the result is clear. “The whole world is held accountable to God,” and all without exception stand under wrath.²⁵¹

Therefore even those who see νόμος as referring to the Mosaic Law, still see verses 19 and 20 as convicting the whole world of sin.

A decision here is difficult, but if pressed this author would lean slightly toward seeing νόμου in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου as referring to the Mosaic Law. My reason for this is Romans 3:28-31. There Paul says that if justification were to come by works of the law (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου), then God would be the God of Jews only. If νόμου in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου means the eternal will of God and not the Mosaic Law, then God would not necessarily be the God of the Jews only if men were justified by works of the law. Since ἔργα νόμου seems to be a technical term, it should be given the same meaning every time it occurs. Having said that, Professor Kuske makes strong points and his interpretation could very well be correct.

Whether νόμου in the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου is seen as having universal applicability even though it refers to the Mosaic Law (Moo), or whether it is seen as having universal applicability because it refers to God’s moral law (Kuske), the statement of Luther still holds true: “This word ‘works of the law’, reacheth far; it extendeth to all that is contrary to grace.”²⁵²

The New Perspective says that in the first century, “the works of the law” functioned as boundary markers which marked off the parameters of the people of God. These boundary markers showed who was “in” and who is “out.” If a person wore the “badges of membership;” that is, if he was circumcised, followed food purity laws, and kept the Sabbath, this served as evidence that he was “in” the people of God. If a person did not do these “works of the law,” he was “out.”

According to the New Perspective, Paul rejected “the works of the law” as a means to define the people of God because they drew the boundary lines too narrowly. If circumcision and food laws are the badges of membership, then only Jews can be members. Paul knew that God wanted to expand his people to include also the Gentiles, and so Paul asserted that the only boundary marker, the only badge of membership in the people of God is faith.

²⁵¹ *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Carl Rasmussen, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), 143.

²⁵² *Commentary on Galatians*, 65.

“Therefore, by the works of the law no one will be justified before him” (διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ). Why is no one able to be justified by the works of the law? Because works of the law are too ethnically exclusive, the New Perspective answers.

Consider, however, several passages taken from the argument leading up to Romans 3:20. “All who *sin* under the law will be judged by the law” (Romans 2:12). “Do you dishonor God by *breaking* the law?” (Romans 2:23) “You...are a lawbreaker” (Romans 2:27). “We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (Romans 3:9). *Sin* is the reason that works of the law do not justify. No one is able to be justified by the works of the law because all have broken the law. The emphasis in Romans 3:20, therefore, is not on narrow boundary markers, but on sin. N.T. Wright, even though he is a promoter of the “boundary marker” interpretation, is absolutely correct in giving this apt analogy: “To appeal to Torah is like calling a defense witness who endorses what the prosecution has been saying all along.”²⁵³

James D.G. Dunn admits that he needs to insert a thought into 3:20 in order for his interpretation to work. He calls this insertion a “hidden middle term.”

There is, we might say, therefore, a hidden middle term in 3:20 between ‘works of the law’ and ‘shall be justified’ – a middle term which Reformation exegesis largely missed, as indeed most exegesis deriving from the controversies of the Reformation period in general. The connection of thought in 3:20 does not run directly from ‘works of the law’ to ‘shall be justified’ and is not aimed directly at works of the law *as a means to achieving* righteousness and acquittal. The connection of thought is more indirect... In a word, the hidden middle term is the function of the law as an identity factor, the social function of the law as marking out the people of the law in their distinctiveness (circumcision, food laws, etc.). It is ‘hidden’ at 3:20 simply because it could be taken for granted in the Roman world of this period... ‘hidden’ too simply because it was clear enough already in 2:1 – 3:8 and need not complicate the final summary statement beyond the sufficiently clear phrase “works of the law.”²⁵⁴

A simpler explanation would be that there is no hidden middle term and that the thought *does* run directly from “works of the law” to “justification.” A simple reading of this passage, with no hidden middle terms, indicates clearly that some Jews thought that they could be justified by doing the law.

²⁵³ N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume X: Acts-1 Corinthians*, 459-460.

²⁵⁴ *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, 159.

If Paul needed to deny that anyone can be justified by doing works of law, it follows that there were some who thought they could be. This attitude can fairly be labeled works-righteousness. Thomas Schreiner is correct when he says, “Nonetheless, there is probably a suggestion of legalism when ‘works of the law’ is connected to justification...Despite their sin and failure to keep the law, some thought they could obtain entrance into God’s presence through their observance of the law.”²⁵⁵

Romans 3:27 – 31

Greek Text

27 Ποῦ οὖν ἡ καύχησις; ἐξεκλείσθη. διὰ ποίου νόμου; τῶν ἔργων; οὐχί, ἀλλὰ διὰ νόμου πίστεως. 28 λογιζόμεθα γὰρ δικαιούσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου. 29 ἢ Ἰουδαίων ὁ θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν; ναὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν, 30 εἶπερ εἷς ὁ θεὸς ὃς δικαιώσει περιτομὴν ἐκ πίστεως καὶ ἀκροβυστίαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως. 31 νόμον οὖν καταργοῦμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ νόμον ιστάνομεν.

Translation

²⁷Therefore where is boasting? It has been shut out. Through what law? Of works? No, but through a law of faith. ²⁸For we are of the settled conviction that a person is justified by faith without the works of the law. ²⁹Or is God only [the God] of Jews? Is he not also [the God] of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles. ³⁰Since “God is one,” he will justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith. ³¹Therefore do we invalidate the law? May it never be! On the contrary, we reinforce the validity of the law.

Discussion

After spending more than two chapters demonstrating that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23), Paul then proclaimed the good news that all “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). In verses 27-31 Paul goes on to speak about what implications God’s saving activity in Christ has for his hearers. Paul’s syntax in these verses changes from the long, involved sentences in verses 21-26, to short, sentence fragments in verses 27-31. Dunn makes perceptive comments about the effect of these changes on the listener:

Following the log-jam of prepositional phrases and somewhat tortuous syntax of the preceding paragraph (vv21-26), the change of style is abrupt. The staccato interchange of

²⁵⁵ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 174.

brief question and answer would give relief after the intensity of concentration required to catch the full force of what had obviously been a major statement of the letter's central theme. The change is certainly deliberate and shows Paul's awareness of the need to vary his style in order to retain the attention of those listening to his letter read out.²⁵⁶

Paul begins by asking the question, "where then is boasting (ἡ καύχησης)?" He then quickly answers his own question, "it is excluded." What type of boasting does Paul have in mind in 3:27? David Kuske wrote that "καύχησης means 'boasting or bragging about what a person has accomplished.' Here [Rom. 3:27] it would be what a person has done to help earn God's acquittal."²⁵⁷ New Perspective authors strongly deny that Jews boasted in this sense.

According to the New Perspective, the Jews boasted about many things. They boasted that they were God's favored nation. They boasted that God had made a special covenant with them. They boasted that God had given them the law as a gift, showing them how to live within the covenant. They boasted that since they had the law, they were specially equipped to teach the ignorant God's way. The one thing they did *not* boast about, however, is that they had kept the law well enough to achieve God's favor.

First it can be said that keeping the law did play a part in the Jewish boast. Simon Gathercole devoted a monograph to the question of Jewish "boasting" in this verse and in that book he wrote, "Fundamentally, the boast in 3:27 is tied up with two things, which in the Jewish mindset are really a unity. First, Israel's election and gift of the Torah are (rightly) emphasized by the New Perspective. Second is the conviction that God would vindicate his people at the *eschaton* on the basis of their obedience."²⁵⁸ Gathercole quotes Jubilees 35:2, "I will do everything just as you have commanded me because this thing is an honour and a greatness for me and a righteousness for me before the Lord."

Even New Perspective authors will sometimes admit that law keeping was a part of the Jewish boast. "The 'boast' in question," NT Wright says, "is the 'boast' of Romans 2:17-20: the 'boast' that Israel could take its place within the single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world, the boast not merely of superiority (and perhaps salvation) because of Torah-possession (and the

²⁵⁶ *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary, 185.

²⁵⁷ *A Commentary on Romans 1-8*, 185.

²⁵⁸ *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5*, 226.

attempt at Torah-keeping) but of a superior *calling* within God’s purposes.”²⁵⁹ The biggest part of the boast, in Wright’s view, is that the Jew has a special calling in God’s plan for the world. The part I want to point out however is that, for Wright, “the attempt at Torah-keeping” does play a part (albeit a parenthetical part) in the Jewish boast.

The question then becomes, does the fact that Torah-keeping constituted a part their boast make them guilty of works-righteousness? The answer of this paper is “yes” because *any* boasting in what “I” have done makes one guilty of works-righteousness. The New Perspective says “no” because alongside the boasting in Torah-keeping the Jews had a deep consciousness of the grace of God in electing them and giving them the law.

Boasting in anything that “I” have done in relation to salvation is definitively ruled out by Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast (ἵνα μή τις καυχῆσθῃται).” Since these verses are addressing a primarily Gentile audience, we see that “boasting” was not an exclusively Jewish temptation. All humans are prone to boasting and works-righteousness. Lutheran theology refers to this as the *opinio legis* which is an attribute of the sinful nature. Schreiner’s comment is appropriate, “Nonetheless, Paul often engages in a polemic against legalism in his letters (Rom. 3:20, 27-31; 4:1-8; Gal. 2:15-21; 3:1-14; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:2-11), not because he was anti-Semitic but because all human beings (not just Jews) are prone to pride and inclined to temptation to boast before God because of good works they have done.”²⁶⁰

Romans 3:28 became a storm center of controversy during the Reformation because Luther added the word “alone” (*allein*) to “by faith” in his German translation of the Bible. Luther defended his translation by making two points. First, using the word *allein* would be how a German would express the meaning of the Greek words Paul writes. Luther writes,

But it is the nature of our German language that in speaking of two things, one of which is affirmed and the other denied, we use the word *solum* (*allein*) along with the word *nicht* [not] or *kein* [no]. For example, we say, ‘The farmer brings *allein* grain and *kein* money’...It is the nature of the German language to add the word *allein* in order that the word *nicht* or *kein* may be clearer and more complete.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, 210-211. Italics original.

²⁶⁰ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 544.

²⁶¹ *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, vol. 35, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 189.

The leading Greek-English lexicon (that of Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich) concurs with Luther's translation. In the entry for πίστις BDAG has, "Luther's insertion of the word 'alone' in v.28 is hard to contest linguistically."²⁶²

However, Luther's reasons for inserting *allein* go beyond purely linguistic considerations. Luther argued that the words, "not by the works of the law" demand that Paul be understood as saying that a man is justified by faith alone:

Now I was not relying on and following the nature of the languages alone, however, when, in Romans 3[:28] I inserted the word *solum* (alone). Actually the text itself and the meaning of St. Paul urgently require and demand it. For in that very passage he is dealing with the main point of Christian doctrine, namely, that we are justified by faith in Christ without any works of the law. And Paul cuts away all works so completely, as even to say that the works of the law – though it is God's law and word – do not help us for justification [Rom. 3:20]...But when all works are so completely cut away – and that must mean that faith alone justifies – whoever would speak plainly and clearly about this cutting away of works will have to say, 'Faith alone justifies us, and not works.'²⁶³

Many Pauline scholars today concur with Luther. In fact, they point out that this interpretation did not originate with Luther. C.K. Barrett writes, "The 'only' (which Origen, not Luther, was the first to bring to the interpretation of this verse) is fully warranted by Paul's own 'to the exclusion of works of law.'²⁶⁴ Luther also pointed out that he was not unprecedented in saying that faith alone justifies: "Moreover, I am not the only one, or even the first, to say that faith alone justifies. Ambrose said it before me, and Augustine and many others."²⁶⁵

Do New Perspective authors affirm justification by faith alone? On the one hand, Professor Dunn and Bishop Wright assert that they believe in justification by faith alone. Dunn writes, "I affirm as a central point of Christian faith that God's acceptance of any and every person is by his grace alone and through faith alone."²⁶⁶ In his book *Justification: God's Plan*

²⁶² BDAG 2dα

²⁶³ *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 35, 195.

²⁶⁴ *The Epistle to the Romans*, Black's New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 78-79.

²⁶⁵ *Luther's Works: American Edition*, 197.

²⁶⁶ "The New Perspective: Whence, What and Whither?" in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 23.

and Paul's Vision, which is a response to a book written against his teaching on justification by Calvinist theologian John Piper,²⁶⁷ N.T. Wright also affirms that he believes justification is by faith alone. In identifying the issues between himself and Piper, Wright says, "Second, the question is about the *means* of salvation, how it is accomplished. Here John Piper, and the tradition he represents, have said that salvation is accomplished by the sovereign grace of God, operating through the death of Jesus Christ in our place and on our behalf, and appropriated through faith alone. Absolutely. I agree a hundred percent."²⁶⁸ There is, however, some indication in his writings that N.T. Wright believes that *initial* justification is by faith alone, but that *final* justification on the Day of Judgment will be on the basis of the entire Christian life. After saying, "...appropriated through faith alone. Absolutely. I agree one hundred percent," Bishop Wright continues by giving this qualification:

But there is something missing – or rather, *someone* missing. Where is the Holy Spirit?...Part of my plea in this book is for the Spirit's work to be taken seriously in relation both to the Christian faith itself and to the way in which that faith is 'active through love' (Galatians 5:6). And the way in which that Spirit-driven active faith, at work through love and all that flows from it, explains how God's final rescue of his people from death itself has been accomplished (Romans 8:1-11).²⁶⁹

Both Calvinist and Lutheran theologians would rightly contend that the Spirit's work is taken seriously among them. The Holy Spirit is active in justification by working faith in the hearts of unbelievers. "Faith" also is a "gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is clear that faith is worked by the Holy Spirit because "no can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3; see also 1 Cor 2:14, Rom 8:9). "Faith" worked by the Holy Spirit personally receives God's not guilty verdict (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8). The Holy Spirit is not "missing" from the Lutheran or Calvinist doctrine of justification. In the above quote, however, N.T. Wright seems to be referring to the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification (as it is called in Lutheran and Calvinist dogmatics), also called "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22), or "good works" (Ephesians 2:10). These good works done by a Christian by the power of the Spirit are indeed evidence that he has been justified before God (James 2:24), but the "exclusive particles"

²⁶⁷ *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007).

²⁶⁸ *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, 10. Emphasis original.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 10-11. Emphasis original.

which Paul uses when speaking of justification exclude good works, even good works done by a believer through the power of the Spirit, from justification itself. In Romans 3:28 Paul writes, “a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law,”²⁷⁰ (χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου). In Ephesians 2:8-9 he says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων), so that no one can boast.”

A distinction between *initial* justification and *final* justification should not be made because the final justification on the Last Day will simply be the public pronouncement of the not guilty verdict which the believers received through faith during his lifetime. Both *initial* justification and *final* justification are by faith alone because a person is justified through faith in Christ and without the works of the law (Romans 3:28). This applies not just to the person who is newly entering the Christian faith, but rather this principle applies to believers throughout their lives. Paul’s words in Galatians 3 suggest that there should not be a distinction between how a person enters the Christian faith and how the Christian is finally justified before God. Paul’s words suggests that the Christian should not begin with faith alone as the means for initial justification and then end with the whole Christian life as the basis for final justification. Paul writes to the Galatians: “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard...After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Galatians 3:2-3). It is a legitimate fear that if the whole Christian life is made the basis for final justification, Christians, after beginning with faith alone, will thereby be encouraged to attain their goal by human effort. Although good works will be evidence on the Last Day that a person has been justified (John 5:29; Matthew 25:34-36), they will not cause or merit God’s public “not guilty” verdict.

Bishop Wright points to Romans 2:13 as support for his position that *final* justification will be on the basis of the entire Christian life:

It is strange, above all, that the first mention of justification in Romans is a mention of justification by *works* – apparently with Paul’s approval (2:13: ‘It is not the hearers of the law who will be righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified’). The right way to understand this, I believe, is to see that Paul is talking about *final* justification...The point is: who will be vindicated, resurrected, shown to be the covenant people, on the last day? Paul’s answer, with which many non-Christian Jews would have

²⁷⁰ My Translation.

agreed, is that those who will be vindicated on the last day are those in whose hearts and lives God will have written his law, his Torah.²⁷¹

It should be noted that according to Wright, Paul was in agreement with non-Christian Jews in the matter of final justification; the only difference being that Paul saw “works” as Christian works which flow from faith in Jesus Messiah and done by the power of the Spirit. The above quotation is in full accord with the New Perspective’s assertion that there was no disagreement between Paul and non-Christian Jews about the place of faith and works.

There is another possible interpretation of Romans 2:13 which seems to fit better into Paul’s line of argument. Paul’s objective in Romans 1:18-3:20 is to convict the world of sin so that in 3:21-5:21 he can present Jesus Christ as God’s solution to sin. If Paul is going to convict the world of falling short of God’s standard, Paul needs to set that standard. Paul does so in verses 6-13:

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Because of sin, however, no human being meets this standard, and therefore need to be justified in a way other than “doing,” namely by receiving justification as a free gift (Romans 3:24).

Wright and others claim that “the doers of the law” (2:13) are Christians. There is, however, no mention of faith in the context. Therefore it is more likely that Paul is here setting the standard for vindication on the Last Day. Paul will spend the rest of Romans 2 and most of Romans 3 demonstrating that nobody meets that standard. Douglas Moo endorses this interpretation:

We think, therefore, that vv.7 and 10 [of Romans 2; Moo gives the same interpretation for verse 13] set forth what is called in traditional theological (especially Lutheran) language “the law.” Paul sets forth the biblical conditions for attaining eternal life apart from Christ. Understood this way, Paul is not speaking hypothetically. But once his doctrine of universal human powerlessness under sin has been developed (cf. 3:9 especially), it becomes clear that the promise can, in fact, never become operative

²⁷¹ *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* 126. Italics original.

because the condition for its fulfillment – consistent, earnest seeking after good – can never be realized.²⁷²

The discussion has moved far afield from Romans 3:28, but the purpose of the digression was to investigate whether New Perspective authors profess justification to be by faith alone. N.T. Wright seems to teach that *initial* justification is by faith alone but that *final* justification will be on the basis of the entire Christian life lived in the power of the Spirit. Bishop Wright should be heard in his own words on this matter:

The point of *future* justification is then explained like this. The verdict of the last day will truly reflect what people have actually done. It is extremely important to notice...that Paul never says Christians *earn* the final verdict, or that their “works” must be complete and perfect. He says, ‘Those who by patience in well-doing...seek for glory honor and immortality’ [Romans 2:7]. They are seeking it, not earning it. And they are seeking it through patient, Spirit-driven Christian living in which – here is the paradox at the heart of the Christian life which so many have noticed but few have integrated into Paul’s theology of justification – from *one point of view* the Spirit is at work, producing these fruits (Galatians 5:22-23), and from *another point of view* the person concerned is making free choices, the increasingly free...decisions to live a genuinely, fully human life which brings pleasure – of course it does! – to the God in whose image we are being made. As long as theologians, hearing this kind of proposal, shout “synergism”...we shall never get anywhere...I am not saying for one moment that “God does part of it and we do part of it” (one classic form of “synergism,” but not Paul’s). Paul’s regular paradoxes, which we have already noted, remain the best way of putting it...“I worked harder than any of them – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).²⁷³

Lutheran theology affirms that the Spirit will produce fruit in the lives of those who have been justified by faith alone, and that the new nature of a believer, empowered by the Spirit, works together (synergism) with God in living a life of sanctification. Lutheran theology rightly insists, however, that this new life of the believer be kept out of the doctrine of justification. Paul says that “a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28) and “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Ephesians 2:8-10). Those “good works,” however, have nothing to do with a person’s salvation because Paul says that “you have been saved...not by works.” It thus

²⁷² *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 142.

²⁷³ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, 192.

appears that justification, *initial* and *final*, is by faith alone. The good works for which Jesus will commend believers on the last day (Matthew 25:35-36), are evidence that they have been justified by faith alone, but they are in no way a cause of final justification.

Similar to N.T. Wright, James Dunn professes that justification is by faith alone, but seems to think that this refers only to initial justification. Dunn comments on Romans 3:28, “Luther’s translation ‘by faith alone,’ may be regarded as faithful to the thrust of Paul’s argument so long as the scope of Paul’s contrast is kept in mind.”²⁷⁴ Dunn does not specify what he means by “the scope of Paul’s contrast” but he is apparently referring to his narrow view of “works of the law” as boundary markers between Jews and Gentiles. Dunn’s interpretation seems to be, “a person is justified by faith alone apart from any ethnic boundary markers.” This is clear from the following quotation which is taken from the same commentary on Romans 3:28:

The only difference between *οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου* and *χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου* is that the former regards the works of the law as characteristically and distinctively Jewish practices (“identity marker”), while the latter depicts works of the law as marking the boundary between Jew and Gentile (“boundary marker”). This more precise specification of “works of the law” means that there is no real contradiction with 2:13.²⁷⁵

The reader will recall that Romans 2:13 states that “the doers of the law will be declared righteous” (*οἱ ποιηταὶ νόμου δικαιωθήσονται*). The purpose of giving the above quotation from Professor Dunn is twofold. First, to demonstrate further that Dunn sees “works of the law” as limited to signs of Jewish identity and boundary markers between Jews and Gentiles. Second, it demonstrates that his interpretation of “works of the law” as boundary markers (and not works generally) allows him to say that although a person is not justified by Jewish boundary markers, nevertheless in the end it will be the Christian, Spirit driven “doers of the law” who will be justified. To put it another way, Professor Dunn suggests that his interpretation of “works of the law” as boundary markers best harmonizes Romans 3:28 with Romans 2:13. It is the contention of this paper, however, that it is the Lutheran distinction between law and gospel which best harmonizes 2:13 and 3:28. The law says that the doers of the law will be justified (2:13). It is not, however, possible to be justified by the law because nobody does the law sufficiently. Paul, therefore, presents another way: the gospel. The gospel says that those who believe in Jesus are

²⁷⁴ *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary, 187.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 188.

justified apart from doing the law (3:28). Justification by way of Romans 2:13 is a dead end for the sinner. Paul intends it to be a dead end so that he can show the way of faith in Romans 3:28. Professor Dunn, rather than seeing the Lutheran distinction between law and gospel as a key to understanding Romans 3:28, actually sees the distinction as part of the problem with Lutheran exegesis of the passage:

And I argue that an integral aspect of ‘works of the law’ was the concern to maintain Israel’s distinctiveness and separateness from the (other) nations, and that this aspect has been but should not be ignored in our attempts to explicate Paul’s key formulation, ‘a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law’ (Rom. 3:28). The problem, if I may put it so, is that Luther’s fundamental distinction between gospel and law was too completely focused on the danger of self-achieved works-righteousness and too quickly transposed into an antithesis between Christianity and Judaism.²⁷⁶

It is perhaps true that Lutheran exegesis has not paid sufficient attention to the cultural overtones of Paul’s words, but it is equally true that in Romans 3:27-31 Paul is indeed aiming to destroy a “self-achieved works-righteousness,” as is indicated by the phrases “boasting is excluded” (3:27) and “apart from works of the law” (3:28). Cultural overtones and a polemic against works-righteousness are not mutually exclusive.

One last note is necessary on Dunn and Wright’s harmonization of Romans 2:13 with 3:28. In their interpretation of Romans 2:13 as referring to Christians who do the law by the power of the Spirit, both Dunn and Wright say that Paul’s doctrine of *final* justification is similar to final judgment according to works in Judaism. Professor Dunn comments on 2:13, “Like his fellow Jews and the whole prophetic tradition, Paul is ready to insist that a doing of the law is necessary for final acquittal before God; but that doing is neither synonymous with nor dependent upon maintaining a loyal membership of the covenant people.”²⁷⁷ In an above quotation, N.T. Wright drew a similar parallel between Paul and non-Christian Judaism. Also commenting on Romans 2:13, Wright states: “The point is: who will be vindicated, resurrected, shown to be the covenant people, on the last day? Paul’s answer, with which many non-Christian

²⁷⁶ “The New Perspective: Whence, Where, and Whither?” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 22.

²⁷⁷ *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary, 98.

Jews would have agreed, is that those who will be vindicated on the last day are those in whose hearts and lives God will have written his law, his Torah.”²⁷⁸

This is the danger of the New Perspective. The New Perspective first declares Judaism free of works-righteousness and then forms the interpretation of Paul to fit with Judaism. This is very dangerous from the perspective of those who still see non-Christian Judaism as containing elements of works-righteousness. It is important to contend that Paul preached a doctrine of justification “by faith alone apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28). No works are allowed into the Pauline picture of justification; they, along with boasting, have been excluded.

The strongest proof passage for the New Perspective interpretation of “works of the law” as boundary markers between Jews and Gentiles is Romans 3:29-30. “Or is God [the God] of Jews only? Is he not also [the God] of Gentiles? Yes; also of Gentiles. Since God is one, he will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith”²⁷⁹ (ἢ Ἰουδαίων ὁ θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν; ναὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν, εἶπερ εἷς ὁ θεὸς ὃς δικαιοῦσιν περιτομὴν ἐκ πίστεως καὶ ἀκροβυστίαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως). The particle “or” (ἢ) indicates an alternative. If justification were by the works of the law, then God would be only the God of Jews, since he has provided salvation only for the Jews. This indicates a strongly ethnic meaning for “works of the law.”

Gathercole admits the “force and initial attractiveness of this argument” but warns against the danger of “simply collapsing the meanings of the two pairs of verses (3:27-28 and 29-30) together. The word ‘Or’ (ἢ) often joins together two questions and means something like, ‘Or, to put it another way....’”²⁸⁰ He points to Romans 2:3-4. “So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or (ἢ) do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” The ἢ which introduces the second question does not present an exact alternative to the first question. Gathercole concludes, “Thus there are points

²⁷⁸ *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* 126.

²⁷⁹ My Translation.

²⁸⁰ Simon Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1-5*, 231.

of similarity in the rhetorical aims of each case, but not exact correspondence.”²⁸¹ Still, it is hard to resist the conclusion that “God being the God of Jews only” forms an exact correspondence to “justification by the works of the law.”

Thomas Schreiner contends that in verse 29 a new argument is being introduced and that it has no connection with verse 28. “If Paul had wanted to signal a logical connection between verses 28 and 29...then verses 28 – 29 would have been joined by a γὰρ. Instead, verse 29 is introduced with ἦ...indicating that a fresh argument is being introduced...Now in verses 29 – 30 he submits another argument in support of justification by faith.”²⁸² This is an attractive alternative, but are there other instances when ἦ serves to introduce a new argument?

I concede to the New Perspective that even though “the works of the law” are not *limited* to circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath, they certainly are included. If justification was by works of the law, then salvation would only be available to Jews, since only Jews are circumcised, obey Mosaic food laws, and keep the Sabbath. It does not follow, however, that works of the law are *limited* to boundary markers or that ethnic exclusivity has been Paul’s target all along.

Romans 4:3

Greek Text

3 τί γὰρ ἡ γραφή λέγει; Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

Translation

³For what does the Scripture say? “And Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Discussion

Some Jews of Paul’s time believed that their obedience to the law would be credited to them as righteousness. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls there is a letter known as 4QMMT. The MMT stands for *Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah*, which is Hebrew for “some of the works of the law.” It should be noted that this letter contains the only extant example of the phrase “works of the

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, 205.

law” outside of Paul. The author gives his interpretation of various Mosaic Laws and then adds this concluding paragraph:

Now, we have written to you some of the works of the Torah, those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen that you possess insight and knowledge of the Torah. Understand all these things and beseech Him to set your counsel straight and so keep you away from evil thoughts and the counsel of Belial. Then you shall rejoice at the end time when you find the essence of our words to be true. And it will be reckoned to you as righteousness, in that you have done what is right and good before Him, to your own benefit and to that of Israel.²⁸³

The author of this letter believed that doing what is right and good in the sight of God would be reckoned as righteousness. It should also be noted that “doing what is right and good” certainly seems to include moral works in the author’s conception of “works of the law” in addition to ceremonial works.

In contrast to the writer of 4QMMT, the apostle Paul taught that faith is reckoned as righteousness “apart from works” (Romans 4:6). Paul uses Genesis 15:6 as a proof passage from the Old Testament. In Romans 4:3 Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην).

Even Genesis 15:6 was misinterpreted by Paul’s contemporaries to mean that Abraham’s *faithfulness* was credited to him as righteousness. Dunn writes, “Now we know how that verse was interpreted at the time of Paul... It was taken as a reference to Abraham’s *faithfulness* in obeying God’s commands.”²⁸⁴ Dunn cites 1 Maccabees 2:52, “Was not Abraham found faithful when he was tested, and it was credited to him as righteousness?”²⁸⁵ (Ἀβρααμ οὐχὶ ἐν πειρασμῷ εὐρέθη πιστός, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην;)

By contrast, when Paul says that *πίστις* was credited to Abraham as righteousness (Romans 4:9; Ἐλογίσθη τῷ Ἀβραὰμ ἡ πίστις εἰς δικαιοσύνην), he is clearly referring to Abraham’s

²⁸³ Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Edward Cook, trans. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 364.

²⁸⁴ “The New Perspective: whence, what and whither?” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 47.

²⁸⁵ My Translation.

trust or belief in God's promise, not to his faithful obedience to God's command. This is clear from Romans 4:20-22, "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.'" Commenting on the quotation of Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:6, Hans Dieter Betz writes that "in Jewish tradition there is an uneasy union between Abraham's 'faith' and his 'works.' Paul dissolves the union and argues that not his works justified Abraham (Rom. 4:2) but his faith (Rom 4:16)."²⁸⁶

Romans 9:30 – 10:4

Greek Text

30 Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὅτι ἔθνη τὰ μὴ διώκοντα δικαιοσύνην κατέλαβεν δικαιοσύνην, δικαιοσύνην δὲ τὴν ἐκ πίστεως, 31 Ἰσραὴλ δὲ διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν. 32 διὰ τί; ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ' ὡς ἐξ ἔργων· προσέκοψαν τῷ λίθῳ τοῦ προσκόμματος, 33 καθὼς γέγραπται, Ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον προσκόμματος καὶ πέτραν σκανδάλου, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ καταισχυνθήσεται. 1 Ἀδελφοί, ἡ μὲν εὐδοκία τῆς ἐμῆς καρδίας καὶ ἡ δέησις πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν εἰς σωτηρίαν. 2 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτοῖς ὅτι ζῆλον θεοῦ ἔχουσιν ἀλλ' οὐ κατ' ἐπίγνωσιν· 3 ἀγνοοῦντες γὰρ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὴν ἰδίαν [δικαιοσύνην] ζητοῦντες στηῆσαι, τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑπετάγησαν· 4 τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι.

Translation

³⁰Therefore what shall we say? That the Gentiles, the ones not pursuing righteousness, obtained righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith. ³¹But Israel, the ones pursuing the law of righteousness, did not attain to the law. ³²Because of what? Because not by faith but rather as if by works. They stumbled on the stone of stumbling. ³³Just as it has been written, "Behold I put in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. And the one believing upon him will not be put to shame. ¹Brothers, on the one hand the good pleasure of my heart and request to God on behalf of them is for [their] salvation. ²For I testify concerning them that they have zeal for God but it is not according to knowledge. ³For because they were ignorant of the righteousness of God and

²⁸⁶ *Galatians*, Hermeneia, 141.

because they sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Discussion

In Romans 9-11 Paul is wrestling with the painful reality that so many Israelites have rejected the Gospel. In verses 30-31 he points out a sad irony. On the one hand “Gentiles, those *not* pursuing righteousness, obtained righteousness, but the righteousness from faith”²⁸⁷ (ἔθνη τὰ μὴ διώκοντα δικαιοσύνην κατέλαβεν δικαιοσύνην, δικαιοσύνην δὲ τὴν ἐκ πίστεως). Now we expect Paul to go on by saying, “On the other hand, Israelites, those who *do* pursue righteousness, have not attained righteousness,” but, as N.T. Wright has quipped, “Paul rarely says just what we expect.”²⁸⁸

Paul's sentence in verse 31 reads literally, “But on the other hand, Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not attain to the law” (Ἰσραὴλ δὲ διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν). Instead of saying that Israel pursued “righteousness,” Paul says that they pursued “the law of righteousness.” Paul has destroyed his own parallelism. Each word has a counterpart except νόμος. The disrupted parallelism is clearly seen when the clauses are placed directly on top of each other:

ἔθνη τὰ μὴ διώκοντα δικαιοσύνην

Ἰσραὴλ δὲ διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης

What does the “law of righteousness” mean? Douglas Moo suggests that the genitive is objective and “that we should understand the phrase to mean ‘the law whose object is righteousness’: the law ‘promises’ righteousness when its demands are met.”²⁸⁹ The NIV 2011 reflects this understanding of the genitive, “the law as the way of righteousness.” Similarly, Thomas Schreiner labels δικαιοσύνης an objective genitive and suggests the understanding that “Israel was seeking the law ‘for righteousness,’ for a right relationship with God.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ My Translation.

²⁸⁸ N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume X: Acts – 1 Corinthians*, 648.

²⁸⁹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 625.

²⁹⁰ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 537.

Instead of saying that Israel did not obtain “righteousness” he says they did not “attain to the law (εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν).” Thomas Schreiner inserts the word “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) and translates, “Israel did not attain *righteousness* in regard to the law.” Schreiner writes,

This last phrase probably means that Israel did not attain *righteousness* with reference to the law. In this interpretation εἰς νόμον is an adverbial accusative of general reference. And that δικαιοσύνη is the implied object of the verb φθάνω is supported by v. 30, for in the latter verse Paul says that the Gentiles “pursued [Sic; obtained?] righteousness” (κατέλαβεν δικαιοσύνην).²⁹¹

Moo however, makes a convincing argument for not inserting the word “righteousness.” Moo writes, “Schreiner suggests that the object of οὐκ ἔφθασεν in v.31b is righteousness, εἰς νόμον being an accusative of reference...but εἰς is a regular way to complete the verb φθάνω.”²⁹² The view presented in this paper is that Paul *is* saying that Israel did not obtain righteousness, but he says it in a more indirect way than Schreiner suggests. The interpretation endorsed here is this: Israel did not attain to the law in the sense that they did not meet all the laws demands and therefore did not obtain the righteousness promised by the law.

Why did Israel fall short of the law? Paul answers in 9:32: “Because not from faith but as from works”²⁹³ (ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐξ ἔργων). Paul’s language is elliptical and therefore words need to be imported from the previous verse. “Because [they pursued the law of righteousness], not from faith but as if from works.” They mistakenly thought that they could accomplish the law and by that doing of the law they could obtain righteousness. In theory this was true but, as in Romans 2 – 3, they had failed to take sin into account.

Sin rendered it impossible for them to attain the law of righteousness by works. Ernst Käsemann comments, “ὡς in the secondary clause is striking...The Jews act out of an

²⁹¹ “Israel’s Failure to Attain Righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:3,” *Trinity Journal* 12 (1991): 213.

²⁹² *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 626 n. 41.

²⁹³ My Translation.

illusion.”²⁹⁴ The thought that they could accomplish the law and obtain righteousness by works was a sad illusion. Thomas Schreiner picked up on the illusionary aspect of Israel’s attempt to attain righteousness by works. “Nevertheless, even though Israel failed to obey the law, she still fell prey to the illusion that her works were good enough to obtain righteousness, and this is the essence of legalism.”²⁹⁵ Schreiner comments further on this verse, “The phrase, ‘as from works’ is most naturally interpreted as saying that the Jews thought they could gain righteousness by their works....To think that one could gain righteousness by such works is legalism.”²⁹⁶

While it was improper to pursue the law “as from works,” it would be proper to pursue the law “from faith” (ἐκ πίστεως). What does it mean to pursue the law from faith? It means to recognize that the righteousness God demands in the law is given as a gift through faith. Schreiner writes, “For, to pursue the law from faith is to trust God for righteousness, but to pursue it ‘as from works’ is to look to one’s own efforts for salvation.”²⁹⁷

Faith receives the righteousness accomplished by Christ, rather than trying to establish righteousness on one’s own. Moo writes, “For it is only in Christ that the demand of the law is fully met; and only, therefore, by accepting him in faith that a person can find the righteousness that the law promises (Rom. 3:31; 8:4).”²⁹⁸

Another interpretation is possible: “to pursue the law from faith” means to render obedience to God which flows from a heart of faith rather than from a heart which is seeking to gain righteousness before God by works. New Perspective authors often say that Paul does not consider the doing of good works a bad thing. Paul encourages and exhorts believers to do good works. This is absolutely true. Paul does not object to doing God’s will (μὴ γένοιτο!). What Paul objects to is trying to establish a right relationship with God by doing his will. God gives a right relationship with him as a gift. To reject that gift and instead try to earn it is sinful, and this is the

²⁹⁴ *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 278.

²⁹⁵ “Israel’s Failure to Attain Righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:3,” 220

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 219.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁹⁸ *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 627.

particular sin Paul is preaching against in this section. Those who receive God's gift will still want to do his will. They will "pursue the law from faith."

Verses 32 and 33 say that some Jews "stumbled on the stone of stumbling" (προσέκοψαν τῷ λίθῳ τοῦ προσκόμματος). Most likely the "stone" is Christ, because the passage Paul quotes in verse 32 (Isaiah 28:16) is quoted in 1 Peter 2:6 as a reference to Jesus Christ. This conclusion is strengthened by the second half of the quote from Isaiah, "the one believing upon him will never be put to shame,"²⁹⁹ (ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ καταισχυθήσεται). Because Paul says that the Jews stumbled over Christ, some say that Paul is in this section faulting to the Jews only for their failure to believe in Jesus Christ. Schreiner makes a persuasive argument against this. "The assertion that Paul's *only concern* is that the Jews failed to believe in Christ is an example of a one dimensional reading of a text, when at least two dimensions are visible."³⁰⁰ Clearly, more is going on in this text than the Jews' failure to believe in Jesus. Schreiner observes that focusing exclusively on verse 33, "effectively mutes the voice of verse 32"³⁰¹ which says that the Jews pursued the law "as from works." Another reason Paul may have chosen this quotation is that it contains the word πιστεύων "believing." Righteousness before God is obtained by believing/trusting, not by working.

Schreiner further suggests that the Jews' rejection of Jesus is connected to their determination to pursue righteousness by works. "It is precisely because they desired to achieve their own righteousness that they failed to believe in Christ, for believing in Christ gives all glory to God while observing the law means that glory and praise accrue to human beings."³⁰² If true, this account for the close connection Paul makes here between works-righteousness and unbelief.

The participles ἀγνοοῦντες, ("not knowing") and ζητοῦντες, ("seeking") in 10:3 are circumstantial causal,³⁰³ ("because they were ignorant of God's righteousness and because they sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness."³⁰⁴)

²⁹⁹ My Translation.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 216. Emphasis original.

³⁰¹ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 539.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 542.

³⁰³ Rightly Schreiner, *Romans*, 542.

³⁰⁴ My Translation.

What does it mean that the Israelites “did not know God’s righteousness?” How could Israel not know? Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is a concept which is taken from the Old Testament, especially Isaiah (41:2, 6; 42:21; 45:8; 46:13; 51:5; 56:1; etc.) and the Psalms (22:31; 31:1; 35:24; 35:28; etc.), books which were thoroughly studied by many Jews of the time. How is it possible, then, that the Israelites were “ignorant” of God’s righteousness? Schreiner contends that the Israelites were ignorant that God’s righteousness was a gift and not something for which they should work. “Israel was ignorant that God’s saving righteousness was a gift of God’s grace, and thus instead of trusting God in Christ for their righteousness they sought to establish ‘their own’...righteousness.”³⁰⁵

Another reason many Israelites declined God’s righteousness is that they were working to establish their own (10:3). This is another indication that Paul is opposing works-righteousness. The Jews were “seeking to establish their own righteousness”³⁰⁶ (τὴν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην ζητοῦντες στήσαι). The righteousness they were seeking to establish would be “theirs” because they secured it for themselves by their obedience to the law. “Seeking to establish” (ζητοῦντες στήσαι) forms a parallel to “pursing the law of righteousness” (διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης) in 9:31. The Jews were exerting considerable effort to obtain “righteousness,” a good standing before God. What is so tragic is that the righteousness they sought could be theirs simply by faith, as the Gentiles were experiencing. Schreiner writes on this verse, “The point we want to make here is that the use of the law to establish one’s own righteousness is the very heart of legalism.”³⁰⁷

James Dunn takes “their own righteousness” to mean “theirs and not the Gentiles.” His Romans commentary states that with “their own,”

Paul is thinking of Israel’s claim to a righteousness which was theirs exclusively, shared by no other people, possessed by them alone... Paul’s criticism of his people is that they sought to make firm and clear the notion that God’s saving power was extended to them exclusively. In Paul’s mind, this is clearly the same criticism as that already leveled in 9:32: they sought to establish righteousness as something peculiar to them, by

³⁰⁵ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 543.

³⁰⁶ My Translation.

³⁰⁷ “Israel’s Failure to Attain Righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:3,” 219.

observances of the law which set them apart from other peoples, by works of the law (circumcision, Sabbath, etc.) which marked out a righteousness peculiarly their own.³⁰⁸

Against Dunn's interpretation it can be said that in the immediate context, the contrast is not strictly between righteousness for Israel as opposed to righteousness for others. The contrast is rather between Israel's own righteousness and God's righteousness. "For since they were ignorant of the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness"³⁰⁹ (10:3). Dunn denies that "their righteousness" is set in opposition to "God's righteousness." "So the thought is not of 'their own' as opposed to 'God's,' that is, 'their righteousness' as something accomplished by them."³¹⁰ The fact that "their own righteousness" is sandwiched between two references to the righteousness of God, seems to indicate that the contrast is between Israel's own righteousness and God's righteousness, rather than between Israel's righteousness and the Gentile's righteousness.

One final indication that Paul is addressing works-righteousness in 9:30-10:4 is the final clause of verse 3. "They did not submit to God's righteousness." In other places, Paul uses the similar concept of "obedience/obey" as synonym for "faith." Paul's goal in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles is that they might come to "the obedience of faith"³¹¹ (εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως; Romans 1:5). In Romans 1:5 πίστεως is an appositive to ὑπακοὴν, meaning "the obedience which is faith." Later in Romans 10 Paul says that not all the Israelites, "obeyed the gospel" (ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ; Rom. 10:17) or "accepted the good news" as the NIV 84 has it. Here in 10:3 "they did not submit to God's righteousness," means essentially the same thing as "they did not obey the Gospel" in 10:17. Moo comments on this phrase, "another way to put the matter would be to say that the Jews have not responded to God's righteousness in faith."³¹²

What does "God's righteousness" (τῆ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ) mean here? Mountains of literature have been written about the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. Here it may be briefly said that

³⁰⁸ *Romans 9 – 16*, Word Biblical Commentary, 595.

³⁰⁹ My Translation.

³¹⁰ *Romans 9 – 16*, Word Biblical Commentary, 595.

³¹¹ My Translation.

³¹² *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 633.

God's righteousness here has the double meaning of *both* God's saving action in Jesus, his cross and resurrection by which he declared the whole world "not guilty" (Romans 4:25), *and* the righteous status that God gives as a gift through faith in Jesus. A double meaning is supported by Moo:

"The righteousness of God," in this sense, as I argued earlier³¹³ embraces on one side God's activity of "declaring right" and on the other the status of "being right" with God that people receive when they respond in faith to that activity. Paul's language in this verse implies the activity of both of these concepts. The nuance of divine activity is evident in the language of the last clause of the verse: the Jews 'have not submitted to the righteousness of God.'...But the second participial clause in the verse – "seeking to establish their own righteousness" – suggests that "righteousness of God" includes also the nuance of "righteous status."³¹⁴

Many Jews did not submit to this righteousness of God. They did not believe in Jesus and they did not accept God's free gift of a righteous status before him. Why did they not submit to the righteousness of God? The two participial phrases in 10:3 provide the reasons: 1) they were ignorant that God's righteousness is a gift and not something to be earned, 2) they wanted to establish a righteousness of their own, rather than receive righteousness as a gift.

Schreiner's comments serve as an excellent summary of this section:

Israel is not censured for trying to impose the law on Gentiles but for pursuing the law 'as from works' (v.32); that is, the fault of Israel is that they were attempting to gain righteousness via works. One cannot deny, therefore, that Israel is criticized here for a legalistic attitude toward the law. This does not mean that all Jews in the OT or in the second temple period were legalists. It does mean that many Jews who heard and rejected the gospel were guilty of legalism because they believed that they could secure righteousness through Torah rather than through faith in Christ.... The Jews who heard the gospel and rejected it focused on achieving instead of believing.³¹⁵

Philippians 3:1-9

Greek Text

³¹³ Moo here refers to his Excursus on "Righteousness' Language in Paul," appended to his comments on Romans 1:17. Found in Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 79-90.

³¹⁴ *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 633-634.

³¹⁵ *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 539-540.

1Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί μου, χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ. τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐκ ὀκνηρόν, ὑμῖν δὲ ἀσφαλές. 2 Βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομὴν. 3 ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή, οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες, 4 καίπερ ἐγὼ ἔχων πεποίθησιν καὶ ἐν σαρκί. εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἄλλος πεποιθέναι ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον. 5 περιτομῇ ὀκταήμερος, ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος, 6 κατὰ ζῆλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος. 7 [ἀλλὰ] ἄτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, ταῦτα ἤγημαι διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ζημίαν. 8 ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ ἠγοῦμαι πάντα ζημίαν εἶναι διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου, δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα ἐζημιώθην, καὶ ἠγοῦμαι σκύβαλα, ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω 9 καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει,

Translation

¹Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! For my part, to write the same things to you again is not burdensome for me. For your part, it is reinforcement for you. ²Watch out for the dogs! Watch out for the evil workers! Watch out for the mutilation! ³For *we* are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and who boast in Christ Jesus and do not put confidence in the flesh. ⁴Although I have [grounds for] confidence even in the flesh. If someone else thinks that he can put confidence in the flesh, I more: ⁵circumcised as an eight-day old, from the nation of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew from Hebrews, a Pharisee in regard to the law, ⁶in regard to zeal, persecuting the church, in regard to righteousness in the law, I became blameless. ⁷But whichever things were gain for me, these things I have come to consider loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I also consider all things to be loss because of the surpassing greatness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. But I consider [those things which I lost] garbage, so that I might gain Christ ⁹ and so that I might be found in him, not having my righteousness, the one from the law, but rather the one through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God upon faith.

Discussion

There are several reasons why Philippians 3:1ff. is particularly helpful in an investigation of the target of Paul's polemic. First, it forms a distinct unit which stands by itself. Bible readers

have long been confused by verse 1 because Paul seems to be wrapping up his letter (Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί μου, “Finally, my brothers,”), but then he launches into a warning about the Judaizers. Moisés Silva suggests the following as a possibility: “It is perhaps not too far-fetched to speculate that Paul stopped writing or dictating after the words (χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ); by the time he returned to the document he had decided he must include a doctrinal discussion, just to be safe (ἀσφαλές, *asphales*). We may be grateful he did.”³¹⁶ Others, like Gordon Fee and Peter T. O’Brien, see no need for such speculation. Fee points to the fact that τὸ λοιπόν is sometimes used simply to introduce “the final matter to be taken up.”³¹⁷ O’Brien notes that τὸ λοιπόν could function in a “vague sense”³¹⁸ to mark a transition as in 1 Thessalonians 4:1. At any rate, Philippians 3:1-11 (we will only examine verses 1-9) is a distinct section of Paul’s letter to the Philippians which is devoted completely to warning against the Judaizers and thus is an excellent source of information for Paul’s polemic.

Second, Philippians 3:1-11 is a rare place in which Paul reaches the emotive heights of Galatians. Paul calls the Judaizers “dogs” (κύνας; 3:2). He equates their cardinal doctrine, circumcision, with “pagan lacerations (like those of the prophets of Baal, 1 Kings 18:28);”³¹⁹ calling it, and indeed the Judaizers themselves, “the mutilation” (τὴν κατατομήν). O’Brien calls this name “derogatory”³²⁰ and “scathing.”³²¹ Here Paul comes close to what he said in Galatians 5:12, “As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves (ὄφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς).” Clearly, Paul is here forcefully and passionately combating a false teaching. The observation which Martin Franzmann made about Galatians also applies here. “Our easy age, which discusses heresy with ecumenical calm over

³¹⁶ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 145.

³¹⁷ *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 288.

³¹⁸ *Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 348.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 357.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 356.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 357.

tea cups, can learn of this letter the terrible seriousness with which the all-inclusive Gospel of grace excludes all movements and all men who seek to qualify its grace.”³²²

Finally, Philippians 3:1-11 gives in summary form Paul’s polemic against the Judaizers. Paul had instructed the Philippians before about their destructive doctrines. Now, he writes the same things to them (τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν; 3:1) as a reinforcement (ὑμῖν δὲ ἀσφαλές; 3:1). To do this is not burdensome for Paul (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐκ ὀκνηρόν; 3:1), because he knows how important it is that the false teaching of the Judaizers be avoided.

Βλέπετε... Βλέπετε... Βλέπετε, begins this section of “powerful rhetoric.”³²³ The NIV obscures the rhetorical effect of this verse by reproducing the Βλέπετε only once in translation. Paul could not have delivered a stronger warning than this threefold “watch out!”

The first designation, dogs (κύνας), turns the tables on the Judaizers. Dogs were considered unclean because they roamed around and ate all kinds of unclean things.³²⁴ It thus became a pejorative name among Jews for the “unclean” Gentiles. Paul says that in reality, the Judaizers are the ones who are “unclean.”

The second designation, the evil workers (τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας), could be taken in one of two ways. The first option focuses on the “works” (ἔργα) which the Judaizers were promoting as necessary for justification. The Judaizers obviously regarded these as “good works.” However, since the Judaizers based their justification before God on these “works,” they were in reality “evil works,” and the Judaizers themselves were those who do evil. The NIV84 seemed to favor this option (“those who do evil”). Even though this first option would support our thesis, it is not to be preferred because if it were correct, we might expect κακοὺς to be a substantive direct object (“those who do evil things”) rather than an attributive adjective,³²⁵ “those evil workers” (τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας).

More likely is the second option, which sees the designation ἐργάτας as a reference to the vigorous missionary activity of the Judaizers. Jesus said of the Pharisees that they “travel over

³²² *The Word of the Lord Grows*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 62.

³²³ Fee, 293.

³²⁴ Fee, 295; O’Brien, 354-355.

³²⁵ Daniel Wallace in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* has this verse listed under examples of an attributive adjective, 306.

land and sea to win a single convert” (Matthew 23:15). The Judaizers had that same missionary zeal (Galatians 4:17). Paul calls opposing missionaries “workers” also in 2 Corinthians 11:13 (ἐργάται δόλιοι).³²⁶ The missionary activity of the Judaizers was a nuisance for Paul. It must have been superlatively frustrating for him to hear that the Judaizers were close to destroying his own missionary labors in Galatia. This, along with the fact that in Paul’s estimation they were promoting a soul-destroying doctrine (Galatians 5:4), makes it understandable that Paul would call them “the evil workers” (τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας).

The final designation “the mutilation” (τὴν κατατομήν) has already been discussed. A few things can be added here. Paul plays on the word περιτομή “circumcision” by replacing the prefix περι-, which means “around,” with an intensifying κατα-. Paul refuses to call them the περιτομή because in reality he and his converts are the true περιτομή. “For *we* are the circumcision” (ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή). By this, along with the following words, “[we] who worship by the Spirit of God,” (οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες), Paul apparently means that he and those who agree with him on this issue are the true people of God. Paul makes a similar claim in Romans 2:28-29, “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.”

The second half of verse 3 is important for our thesis. “[It is we] who boast in Christ Jesus and do not trust in the flesh”³²⁷ (καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες). Paul faults the Judaizers for what they have decided to make the basis of their confidence. Cognates of πείθω show up three times in verses 3 and 4 (πεποιθότες perfect active participle masculine nominative plural; πεποιθήσιν feminine noun; πεποιθέναι perfect active infinitive). πείθω means “depend on, trust in.”³²⁸ Paul’s polemic is directed against what the Judaizers trust in for justification. They, at least to some extent, trust in themselves (ἐν σαρκί) rather than on Christ.

³²⁶ O’Brien, 355.

³²⁷ My Translation

³²⁸ BDAG 2a. Emphasis original.

A similar polemic is found in Paul's traveling companion Luke when he records the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-collector. In describing the attitude of the Pharisees (Luke 18:9), Luke uses the same word (πείθω) which Paul uses to describe the Judaizers in Philippians 3:3. Luke 18:9 says, "And [Jesus] also said to some who were confident in themselves that they were righteous,"³²⁹ (Εἶπεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τινὰς τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι)." The parable which follows depicts a Pharisee who, even though he thanks God, is clearly self-righteous.³³⁰ Moreover, this Pharisee's "confidence in himself that he was righteous," was based not on ethnic heritage, nor on ethnic boundary markers, but upon moral uprightness, fasting, and gifts to the poor. "God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evil doers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." It is also interesting to note that Jesus here speaks of Pharisaic self-righteousness in close connection with "justification" language. Not only does Luke use the word "righteous" (δίκαιοι), but Jesus ends the parable by saying, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified (δεδικαιωμένος) before God" (Luke 18:14). Luke and Jesus, then, share in Paul's polemic against works-righteousness.

In Philippians 3:3, Paul faults the Judaizers for trusting in the flesh (ἐν σαρκί). What it means to trust in the flesh Paul will enumerate in verses 5 and 6. It must be noted that the first four items (περιτομῆ ὀκταήμερος, ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων) fit very well with the New Perspective emphasis that Paul's polemic was directed against Jewish reliance on ethnic heritage. The last three items (κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος, κατὰ ζήλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος) fit very well with the traditional emphasis that Paul's polemic was directed against works-righteousness. Works-righteousness as defined in this paper (namely, the view that something a person does is part of the basis for his justification before God), is equivalent to Paul's conception of "confidence in the flesh."

In verse 4 Paul begins to show the Philippians that trusting in the flesh is worthless. He does this in a very effective way. Paul proves that he could, if he wanted to, beat the Judaizers at

³²⁹ My Translation.

³³⁰ If the Pharisee is not self-righteous, then the point of comparison with the humble tax-collector falls apart.

their own game. He issues a bold challenge: “If anyone thinks that he has ground for trusting in the flesh, I have more”³³¹ (εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἄλλος πεποιθέναι ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον).

The last three elements of Paul’s boast, listed in verse 6, are well beyond what Paul received from his ethnic descent. The phrases *κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος*, *κατὰ ζῆλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*, *κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος* describe Paul’s achievements. This fact is acknowledged by James Dunn. “This is now well beyond confidence in ethnic status. There is at least an element of self-achievement and of pride in self-achievement in both Gal. 1.14 and by implication in Phil. 3.6.”³³²

“In regards to righteousness in the law, [I] became faultless” (*κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος*). Commentators recognize this as the climax of Paul’s list of reasons for confidence in the flesh. O’ Brien writes, “Finally, the *culmination* of these personal achievements is expressed in the third *κατὰ*-statement.”³³³ Fee also says that this phrase “brings the catalogue to its climax; everything else is pointing here.”³³⁴

“Righteousness” (*δικαιοσύνην*) is a crucial element in this important phrase. *δικαιοσύνη* can have different nuances. It can mean “ethical uprightness,”³³⁵ that is, behavior which meets certain demands. It can also mean ‘right standing with God.’ Since this word appears prominently multiple times in this section of Philippians (once here in v. 6 and twice in v. 9), it will be necessary to consider the specific nuance of the word each time it occurs. In this verse *δικαιοσύνην* seems to have the nuance of “ethical uprightness.” BDAG lists this verse under definition 3c: “the quality or characteristic of upright behavior, *uprightness, righteousness... uprightness as determined by divine/legal standards.*”

³³¹ My Translation.

³³² “Philippians 3:12-14 and the New Perspective on Paul,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 480.

³³³ *Philippians*, 378.

³³⁴ *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 309.

³³⁵ J.A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Most commentators concur. O'Brien writes about δικαιοσύνη in verse 6: "δικαιοσύνη is thus used to designate 'uprightness, righteousness', that characteristic required of human beings by God, with reference to the divine commands as amplified and applied through the oral law."³³⁶ Fee writes, "...the concern for 'righteousness' in this passage is not ultimately with 'right standing,' but with 'right living.'"³³⁷ He also adds that in verse 6, "'righteousness' denotes 'upright behavior.'"³³⁸ Silva comments, "Accordingly, 'the righteousness which is in the law' describes an *observable* standard of conduct, that is, the righteous way of life prescribed by the OT."³³⁹ Lenski is a rare dissenter. He writes, "δικαιοσύνη is forensic as always; but here the judges who pronounce the verdict: 'Righteous because blameless!' are the Jews and Judaizers."³⁴⁰

Despite Lenski, the view taken here is that δικαιοσύνη means moral uprightness in verse 6. Paul took pains to ensure that his behavior was in conformity with the demands of the law, both moral and ceremonial. Though the meaning "uprightness" is to be preferred here, it is not unrelated to the meaning "right standing with God." Before his conversion, Paul considered his uprightness to be the basis for his right standing with God.

It is interesting to note that the NIV 84 translated (δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ) "legalistic righteousness." There is no way a New Perspective interpreter could accept that translation because they do not believe that the pre-Christian Paul was "legalistic" in the sense that he tried to earn his right standing before God. The translation committee of the NIV 2011 changed the translation to "righteousness based on the law." This translation could fit either the "Lutheran" perspective or the New Perspective.

Now that the word "righteousness" in verse 6 has been considered, we turn to the other word in verse 6 which jumps off the page: blameless (ἄμεμπτος). Paul says that "as regards

³³⁶ O'Brien, 379.

³³⁷ Fee, 310.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, 322.

³³⁹ Silva, 152.

³⁴⁰ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Galatians, Ephesians, Philipians*, (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1946), 834.

righteousness in the law, [I] became blameless.” The little word “blameless” has caused no small amount of scholarly discussion.

What does Paul mean when he says, “I was blameless”? In order to answer this question we need to answer a couple of related questions. First, does “blameless” mean “sinless/perfect”? BDAG says that *ἄμεμπτος* comes from the verb *μέμφομαι* “to blame” and offers “blameless” and “faultless” as meanings.³⁴¹ The word *ἄμεμπτος* is also used to describe the parents of John the Baptist: Zechariah and Elizabeth. Luke 1:6 states, “And they were both righteous before God, going about in all the commands and judgments of the Lord as blameless ones,”³⁴² (ἦσαν δὲ δίκαιοι ἀμφότεροι ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ, πορευόμενοι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς καὶ δικαιώμασιν τοῦ κυρίου ἄμεμπτοι). Job is described in the Septuagint as “truthful, *blameless*, righteous, God-fearing, refraining from every evil deed,”³⁴³ (Job 1:1; ἀληθινός, ἄμεμπτος, δίκαιος, θεοσεβής, ἀπεχόμενος ἀπὸ παντὸς πονηροῦ πράγματος). It does not seem that Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Job are being called “sinless” by the respective authors of those books. It’s worth noting that Zechariah goes on to sin by not believing the message of the angel which God sent to him (Luke 1:20). At the end of the book of Job, Job repents of the sin of charging God with injustice (Job 42:6). It would be unreasonable to assume that these recorded transgressions were the first time either Zechariah or Job had sinned. *ἄμεμπτος* therefore, does not mean “sinless.” All the commentators that this author has consulted agree. Fee, says, “Paul’s present point, of course, is not his sinlessness...”³⁴⁴ Similarly, Silva says, “the word ‘faultless’ does not at all reflect any illusion regarding sinlessness...”³⁴⁵ O’Brien says that “*ἄμεμπτος* should not be pressed to mean that Paul completely filled the law or entirely avoided transgressions.”³⁴⁶ N.T. Wright correctly observes that, “‘blamelessness under the law’ is not the same as ‘sinless,’ and the remarkable

³⁴¹ BDAG

³⁴² My Translation.

³⁴³ My Translation. Emphasis mine.

³⁴⁴ Fee, 310.

³⁴⁵ Silva, 151.

³⁴⁶ O’Brien, 380.

ascription of the latter to Jesus in 2 Corinthians 5:21 is not something we can imagine even Saul of Tarsus saying of himself.”³⁴⁷

If “blameless” does not mean “sinless,” what then does it mean? Three elements to what Paul means by “blameless” have been correctly pointed out by commentators: 1) living an *exemplary* lifestyle, 2) scrupulousness, 3) regular atonement for any transgressions. First, the exemplary character of Paul’s former lifestyle is emphasized by *ἄμεμπτος*. Silva states, “[blamelessness] must be viewed as a fairly standard way of expressing exemplary conformity to the way of life prescribed by the OT.”³⁴⁸ O’Brien makes a similar statement: “‘Blameless’ appears to describe an exemplary way of life that is in conformity with the OT as interpreted along Pharisaic lines.”³⁴⁹ Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Job (all three characterized as blameless), could be pointed to as examples of those who lived a life in conformity with God’s commands. Similarly, other Jews likely looked to Saul of Tarsus as an exemplary Jew; “a model Jew in every way,”³⁵⁰ as O’Brien says.

Second, by *ἄμεμπτος* Paul means to say that he was scrupulous or meticulous about everything which the law demanded. He was very careful not to leave anything undone. Lightfoot paraphrases, “I *omitted* no observance no matter how trivial’, for *μέμφεσθαι* applies to sins of omission.”³⁵¹ Fee says that Paul, “scrupulously adhered to the pharisaic interpretation of the Law, with its finely honed regulations for Sabbath observance, food laws, and ritual cleanliness.”³⁵² No one could possibly fault Paul for being negligent of God’s commands.

Thirdly, when discussing the word “blameless” many commentators mention that Saul undoubtedly made sacrifices to atone for the times when he did transgress the law. Wright says that Paul’s blamelessness, “no doubt included regular repentance for unintentional sins, and

³⁴⁷ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, 147.

³⁴⁸ Silva, 151.

³⁴⁹ Peter T. O’Brien, 380.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 381.

³⁵¹ J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 148. Emphasis original.

³⁵² Fee, 309.

regular offering of sacrifice.”³⁵³ This is true, but it is also possible that the pre-Christian Saul was not always conscious of his sin. Several commentators are reminded of the rich young ruler in the Gospel accounts (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22).³⁵⁴ In regard to the commandments the young man claimed, rather naively, “all these I have kept since I was a boy” (Mark 10:20). The attitude displayed by the rich young man could possibly be similar to the attitude of the pre-Christian Saul. On the other hand, from Romans 7:7-10 it appears that Paul’s conscience struck him when the law told him that coveting was a sin. “Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.” (Romans 7:7-10).

This makes it difficult to decide whether Paul was actually blameless or if he simply considered himself blameless even though in reality he was not. Thomas Schreiner seems to think that it was an imagined blamelessness. Schreiner writes, “[Paul] considered himself blameless.”³⁵⁵ Schreiner speaks of Paul’s “so-called blamelessness.”³⁵⁶ The following quotation spells out Schreiner’s interpretation more clearly: “He *thought* he was blameless before God, but in actuality he was guilty of profound sin. In persecuting the church, he was convinced that he was pleasing God, but, in fact, he was opposing God and Christ Jesus.”³⁵⁷

Others, such as Peter T. O’Brien, think this “blamelessness” to be real. O’Brien writes, “The testimony of this phrase in v. 6 must not be altered to read: ‘as to righteousness in the Law I *thought* myself blameless [but in fact I was wrong]’³⁵⁸... Instead he speaks of his blamelessness

³⁵³ *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 147

³⁵⁴ O’Brien, 379; Fee, 309 n.20.

³⁵⁵ “An Old Perspective on the New Perspective,” 146.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ Bracketed words are original.

as an objective fact, as incontestable as his circumcision, his membership in the tribe of Benjamin, and his persecution of the church.”³⁵⁹

Although Schreiner makes a strong point that the pre-Christian Paul has committed grave sins in that he persecuted the church, O’Brien’s interpretation is to be preferred. Paul is demonstrating that he has more reasons for boasting than the Judaizers (3:4), therefore he likely is listing things that are real. The view taken in this paper is that in one sense the pre-Christian Paul was “blameless” in the same way that Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Job were “blameless.” Both the pre-Christian Paul and the group mentioned were “blameless” in the sense that they took great care to follow the law of God. The difference is that the pre-Christian Paul relied on this blamelessness as his righteousness before God, whereas the group mentioned above put their confidence in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus (cf. Luke 1:77). Therefore, the pre-Christian Paul was guilty of works-righteousness because he put confidence (*πείθω*) in his blamelessness for his justification before God. The “blamelessness” of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Job are spoken of positively because theirs flowed from hearts of faith. Paul speaks negatively of his “blamelessness,” calling it “loss” and “trash” because it flowed from a heart of unbelief and works-righteousness. Unbelief and works-righteousness go together, as is seen from Romans 9:31-33.

In Paul’s view, the Judaizers were trying to persuade his converts to “put confidence in the flesh.” Paul dissuades his converts from putting their trust in the flesh by saying in effect, “I have reasons for such confidence in the flesh. In fact I have more reasons for confidence than the Judaizers do. I used to put my confidence in the flesh, in my heritage as a Jew and in the things I accomplished as a Pharisee. But now I see that such things are worthless for gaining righteousness before God. Everything I used to put so much confidence in is actually worthless when it comes to my standing with God.” In verse 7 Paul says that “whichever things were gain for me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ” (*ἅτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, ταῦτα ἤγημαι διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ζημίαν*). The word for “loss” (*ζημίαν*) is used in Acts 27:10 for the heavy loss of cargo from a ship. Paul underwent a heavy loss when he became a believer in Jesus.

When Christ was added to Paul’s “bank account” through faith, when he “gained Christ” (*κερδήσω*), all of the merit which had been accruing to him through his works were taken out of

³⁵⁹ O’Brien, 380.

his “bank account” before God. Paul suffered great loss. Was Paul sad about this great loss? Not at all! Those things which he had put his confidence in and anything else (πάντα) which might interfere with his relationship with Christ he now considered “garbage” (σκύβαλα). σκύβαλα is a harsh word which Paul used for anything which might interfere with his relationship with Jesus. The word σκύβαλα could be regular house garbage which is thrown away, or it could even be used for feces. Under the entry for σκύβαλα BDAG has, “useless or undesirable material that is subject to disposal, *refuse, garbage*. (in various senses ‘excrement, manure, garbage, kitchen scraps)...*consider everything garbage/crud* Phil. 3:8... (“to convey the crudity of the Greek...: ‘It’s all crap.’”).” Why does Paul use such harsh language for his Jewish heritage and former blamelessness under the law? The thought of this sentence is similar to Jesus’ statement in Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple.” It is not that fathers and mothers in themselves are harmful. To the contrary, they are great gifts of God; but they can become harmful to one’s relationship with Christ if they are loved more than Christ. In the same way, Jewish heritage and a blameless life are both in and of themselves good things. However, when they interfere with one’s relationship with Jesus because confidence for salvation is placed in them instead of Jesus, then they become “harmful loss” and disgusting garbage (σκύβαλα). The Judaizers were urging Paul’s converts to put confidence in the flesh. Paul warns them that putting confidence in fleshly things turns those things into disgusting garbage (σκύβαλα).

Instead of putting confidence in the flesh, Paul wanted to be “found in him” (εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ; 3:9). Many commentators assign little force to εὑρεθῶ. O’Brien, for example, writes, ‘to be found in Christ’ really means “‘to be in him’ ...The idea of ‘finding’ has virtually dropped out.”³⁶⁰ The view taken here, however, is that (εὑρεθῶ) has an eschatological force referring to the state Paul will be “found in” at the Parousia of Jesus. Jesus asked, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (πλὴν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐλθὼν ἄρα εὕρήσει τὴν πίστιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς;). Paul did not want Jesus to find him clinging to works-righteousness on the Last Day, so he discarded it and vehemently dissociated himself from it, calling it loss (ζημίαν) and detestable garbage (σκύβαλα).

³⁶⁰ O’Brien, 392.

In verse 9, Paul puts “my righteousness, the one from the law” (ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου) in stark contrast (ἀλλὰ) to “the one through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God upon faith”³⁶¹ (τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει). Silva even talks about the “explicit opposition between the righteousness that comes from God (*ek theou*) and that which comes from the law (*ek nomou*).”³⁶²

Here in verse 9 the interpreter is again forced (twice) to give a nuance for δικαιοσύνη. The choice is again between “moral uprightness” and “righteous status.” To make a decision on the first occurrence (ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου) is much more difficult than it was in verse 6. Fee explains, “The difficulty stems from the first phrase, ‘not having my own righteousness based on law,’ which picks up on v. 6, where ‘righteousness’ denotes ‘upright behavior’; yet in the rest of the sentence ‘righteousness’ seems to refer to one’s relationship with God.”³⁶³ In other words, ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου is obviously connected to verse 6, where it denoted upright behavior; but it is also clearly contrasted in this verse with τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει which clearly refers to right standing.

Most commentators say that Paul changes the meaning of δικαιοσύνη in the same verse; ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου is taken to mean moral behavior and τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει is taken to mean a right standing with God. Hansen writes,

Usually we would expect that a word has the same meaning in both cases when the same word is used side by side in the same sentence. But by setting up this strong contrast between his own *righteousness that comes by the law* and the *righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith*, Paul presents two different meanings for the word righteousness. Paul’s own righteousness from the law denotes his own upright behavior determined by the law. The righteousness that comes from God does not come from Paul’s good moral conduct or from a superior level of conduct empowered by God, but from God’s judicial verdict of a righteous standing before God.³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ My Translation.

³⁶² *Philippians*, 160.

³⁶³ Fee, 322.

³⁶⁴ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 239.

According to Hansen, then, *δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ* in verse 6 and *ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου* in verse 9 have the same sense: moral uprightness. Hansen’s view can be charted like this:

Philippians 3:6	Philippians 3:9a	Philippians 3:9b
<i>δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ</i>	<i>ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου</i>	<i>τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην</i>
moral uprightness	moral uprightness	righteous status

O’Brien seems to interpret each occurrence of *δικαιοσύνη* in a different sense. In verse 6 he takes *δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ* to denote moral uprightness. In verse 9a he takes *ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου* to mean “a moral achievement.” In verse 9b he takes *τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην* to mean a righteous status before God. O’Brien writes,

At v. 6 it was suggested that *δικαιοσύνη* designated an uprightness or righteous behavior that was rooted in the law (*ἐν νόμῳ*) ... In v. 9 the thought is somewhat nuanced: *δικαιοσύνη* describes Paul’s own moral achievement, gained by obeying the law (*ἐν νόμῳ*) and intended to establish a claim upon God, particularly in view of the final judgment. *δικαιοσύνη* was nothing other than self-righteousness, and Paul, writing now as a Christian, gladly jettisons it in favour of a different kind of righteousness.”³⁶⁵

Again O’Brien says,

[T]he apostle is using *δικαιοσύνη* in two different senses here in this one verse [3:9]. The earlier reference to *δικαιοσύνη* described Paul’s own moral achievement, gained by obeying the law and intended to establish a claim upon God, especially in relation to the final judgment; it clearly had ethical connotations. The second kind of *δικαιοσύνη*, that which comes from God, is not some higher kind of moral achievement but is a relational term, denoting basically a right relationship with God. It has to do with ‘the status of being in the right’ and thus of being acceptable to him.³⁶⁶

O’Brien’s view can thus be charted like this:

Philippians 3:6	Philippians 3:9a	Philippians 3:9b
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³⁶⁵ O’Brien, 394-395.

³⁶⁶ O’Brien, 396.

δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ	ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου	τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην
moral uprightness	A moral achievement	righteous status

The exegesis of O'Brien is essentially adopted here with the slight exception that this paper takes both occurrences of δικαιοσύνη in verse 9 to mean "a right relationship with God." The difference between the two kinds of righteousness is that one is a right relationship with God which has been earned as an achievement and the other is a right relationship with God which has been given as a gift. In closing up the comments on Paul's pre-Christian righteousness, Douglas Moo's comments are worth noting: "Paul sees his pre-Christian righteousness as involving, though perhaps not 'based on,' his own performance. See esp. v.3, which introduces the whole text with a contrast between 'boasting in Christ Jesus' and 'putting confidence in the flesh.' It is this synergism that Paul as a Christian rejects in favor of the 'altogether extrinsic' righteousness given by God through faith."³⁶⁷ This extrinsic righteousness which Paul the Christian valued so highly will now be considered.

Paul's own righteousness (ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην) did him no good before God, he needed, as the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession* says, "the righteousness of another."³⁶⁸ Paul received the righteousness he needed in order to stand before God as a gift from God (τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην). The preposition ἐκ of τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην denotes source and clearly indicates that this righteousness (=right standing) is a gift from God. Paul considered this righteousness, as Hansen poetically puts it, "not a righteousness that he achieved, but a righteousness that he received."³⁶⁹ Lutheran theology calls this an "alien righteousness" because it is bestowed on the sinner from the outside as a gift of God. It does not come from within the sinner ("intrinsic righteousness"). From Romans 4 it is apparent that this "righteousness from God" is imputed (ἐλογίσθη; 4:3) to the believer through faith. The Lutheran dogmatician Adolf Hoenecke wrote,

³⁶⁷ *The Letter to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 636 n. 25.

³⁶⁸ Ap III: 184, *Concordia Triglotta*, (Milwaukee, Northwestern), 205. This quotation is owed to Adolf Hoenecke, who adds, "This term is even suggested by Philippians 3:9," *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, volume 3, trans. James Langebartels, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 384.

³⁶⁹ Hansen, 239.

Thus the method of justification is imputation...In fact, it is expressly said that a foreign righteousness is imputed to the sinner...Paul clearly says beyond all doubt, 'Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith' (Php 3:9)...Particularly striking is Philippians 3:8,9. Paul wants to obtain Christ so that he is found in him, not having his own righteousness from the law but the righteousness that comes from faith, namely, the righteousness that is imputed by God to faith.³⁷⁰

This imputed righteousness is not a “fictitious righteousness”³⁷¹ which E.P. Sanders accuses the Lutherans of believing in, but a real right standing with God which he bestows upon faith (ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει; Phil. 3:9).

The object of faith is Jesus Christ, Χριστοῦ being an objective genitive (“faith *in* Christ”). Hansen rightly points out that, “Paul is not advocating faith by itself as the means or basis of this extraordinary righteousness. Faith in Christ looks away from self-achievement and looks to Christ.”³⁷² “Confidence in the flesh” (ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες; 3:3) means confidence in one’s self for justification before God. By contrast, “faith in Christ” (πίστεως Χριστοῦ) means dependence on Christ for one’s justification before God. Hansen makes another excellent comment on the use of “faith” in 3:9: “By referring twice to *faith in Christ* in his definition of the *righteousness from God*, Paul highlights the crucial difference between righteousness achieved by keeping the law and righteousness received by dependence on Christ.”³⁷³

³⁷⁰ *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 326.

³⁷¹ *Paul*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 48-49. This quotation is owed to Wilfried Härle in his article “Rethinking Paul and Luther,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006): 303-317. The fact that Sanders calls the Lutheran imputed righteousness “imaginary” is interesting because the Roman Catholics have made the exact same charge against the Lutherans. Adolf Hoenecke writes, “It is well known that the papists ridicule imputed righteousness as totally imaginary and illusory, because it is not inherent, infused, habitual, thus not real. Concerning this point, Gerhard writes, ‘They call this faith, by which one establishes with certainty that his sins are forgiven on account of Christ’s satisfaction, a creation of Luther, and they call the righteousness of Christ imputed to us through faith an imaginary and putative, as is known from Bellarmine,’” *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 327.

³⁷² *The Letter to the Philippians*, 242.

³⁷³ *Ibid*, 242.

At the end of this discussion on Philippians 3:1-9, the views of the New Perspective interpreters will be considered. In his book, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, N.T. Wright devotes a section to Philippians 3. His comments are worth quoting at length:³⁷⁴

At first sight, the final phrase of Philippians 3:6 (“According to righteousness in the law, I became blameless”) looks like a classic statement of “covenantal nomism” (well, it would, wouldn’t it, from a new perspective point of view?). The keeping of the law was not a way of earning anything, of *gaining* a status before God; the status was already given in birth, ethnic roots, circumcision and the ancestral *possession* of Torah. All that Torah-obedience then does – it’s a big “all,” but it is all – is to consolidate, to express what is already given, to inhabit appropriately the suit of clothes (“righteousness”) that one has already inherited. The old perspective reader will then want to come back and say, “Yes, but that’s the point at which Saul of Tarsus and those like him reckoned it was all up to them; they had to do it, they had to cooperate with God’s grace, they were basically synergistic, they approached the final judgment with God’s grace in one hand and a pile of their own good deeds in the other.” But at that point a beyond-both-perspectives reader should come back and say, “A plague on both your houses! You are both failing to see both the parallel and the distinction, in this respect, between second-temple Judaism and Pauline theology.”³⁷⁵

Wright goes on to explain that the parallel between Pauline theology and Judaism is that both were interested in answering the question, “how can we tell in the present time who will be vindicated on the day.” Unfortunately, however, he does not directly answer the objection raised by “the old perspective reader” other than by saying, “that’s not the point.” He writes, “The old perspective wants to know what account is given [by the Jews] of this ‘doing of the works of Torah’ which then follows [God’s covenant grace]. Is that, too, all of grace, or does some human merit creep in after all?...[M]y urgent comment is: that’s not the point!”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Because of the length of the quotation, I have left the block quote at 1.5 line space for readability.

³⁷⁵ *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, 145. Emphasis original.

³⁷⁶ *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*, 146.

Though James Dunn is perhaps the most ardent promoter of the new perspective, he also seeks to find common ground with those of the old/"Lutheran" perspective. Philippians 3:6 (κατὰ ζήλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος) is one place in which Dunn thinks that the two sides can share common ground: "In short, if the first half of the list of Paul's pre-Christian grounds for confidence before God gives substance to the insight and emphasis of the new perspective, then it could equally be said that the second half of the list gives as much substance to the emphasis of the old perspective."³⁷⁷ A Lutheran exegete could also give wholehearted endorsement to this statement from Dunn commenting on 3:9:

Paul's point is rather that faith alone is the basis for a right relationship with God – the trust in God and reliance on God which Abraham had so exemplified in regard to the promise of an heir (Rom. 4.16-21) as the medium through which, on the basis of which, out of which life should be lived (Rom. 14.23). Anything which detracted from or diminished or obscured that fundamental religious insight Paul was opposed to. And that included *both* the confidence in birth and religious tradition, *and* confidence arising from being a superlative practitioner of that tradition.³⁷⁸

"Anything which detracted from or diminished or obscured that fundamental religious insight," is what this paper would call works-righteousness, and Dunn says that "Paul was opposed to" that. Here it appears that the "Lutheran" perspective and the New Perspective might simply be using different words to refer to the same thing.

The sentence which comes directly before the paragraph sighted above, however, demonstrates that there is still an impasse between Professor Dunn and the "Lutheran" perspective. Dunn writes, "Here again [referring to 3:9] it misses the mark to see the former righteousness as something earned or achieved." Dunn was cited before as saying that "There is at least an element of self-achievement and of pride in self-achievement in both Gal. 1.14 and by implication in Phil. 3.6."³⁷⁹ If righteousness before God is not what Paul was aiming at achieving, then what was Paul trying to achieve? Certainly one can aim at achieving something besides righteousness, but righteousness is very prominent in the argument of verses 2-9. It is the

³⁷⁷ "Philippians 3.2-14 and the New Perspective on Paul," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 480.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 483.

³⁷⁹ "Philippians 3:2-14 and the New Perspective on Paul," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 480.

climax of Paul's list of achievements in verse 6 and, in verse 9, two different kinds of righteousness are contrasted. It seems likely, then, that righteousness was the object which Paul aimed to achieve by his works and that the pre-Christian Paul was therefore guilty of works-righteousness.

Conclusion

This concluding section will summarize the main arguments put forward in this paper for a polemic against works-righteousness in Paul. Six points will be summarized in this concluding section, three negative and three positive. Negatively, this section will summarize three weaknesses of the New Perspective. Positively, it will make three observations from Paul's letters which indicate a polemic against works-righteousness.

First, the New Perspective rests on a shaky foundation, namely, that the Jews of Paul's time were not work-righteous. In the review of Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, it was observed that while Sanders speaks much about grace in Judaism, the primary sources which he quotes do not speak a great deal about grace; whereas they do speak a great deal about following laws. Sanders says that all of this discussion of laws in the Rabbis is a response to the grace of God shown them in the covenant. It was observed, however, that according to the Rabbis, the selection of the Israelites by God to be the covenant people was not entirely of grace. According to one explanation, God offered the covenant to all nations and only the Israelites accepted it. According to another explanation, God selected the Israelites to be the covenant people because he foresaw that they would obey his laws.³⁸⁰ Even the covenantal aspects of Palestinian Judaism, therefore, are not entirely of grace.

Second, the New Perspective does not recognize that works-righteousness can be (and perhaps often is) subtle. E.P. Sanders found no evidence of a *thesaurus meritorum* by which an Israelite could tap into the merit piled up by Abraham's good works.³⁸¹ Nor did Sanders find evidence that an individual Israelite needed to perform more good deeds than bad to inherit the world to come. Sanders concluded that Judaism was free of works-righteousness. N.T. Wright said that first-century Jews were not proto-Pelegians and that they therefore were not guilty of

³⁸⁰ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 87-88.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, 183-184.

works-righteousness. The trouble is that works-righteousness does not need to look exactly like any of those things. Works-righteousness can take the form of a first-century Christian Jew telling a first-century Christian Gentile that he needs to be circumcised according to the law of Moses or else he will not be saved (Acts 15:1). Paul fought against this specific form of works-righteousness.

Admittedly, there are some gracious elements to Palestinian Judaism. There is forgiveness for those who repent and make atonement. God graciously dwells with his people despite their sin and uncleanness. The Qumran covenanters were thankful to God because they felt that God had elected them to be part of “the community of the perfect of way.” Palestinian Judaism was not 100% works-righteous. In the view of the apostle Paul, however, even a little bit of works-righteousness destroys grace. “If by grace, then it is no longer by works, if it were, grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:6).

When New Perspective authors find traces of grace in Judaism, they declare Judaism free of works-righteousness. The old/”Lutheran” perspective takes the opposite approach. When theologians from the “Lutheran” perspective find traces of works-righteousness, they sound the alarm; and rightly so, because works-righteousness is dangerous to Christian faith. “Lutheran” perspective theologians take their cue from Paul, who declared, “Mark my words! I, Paul tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all... You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” The Judaizers could have responded, “Christ is of great value in our eyes. We believe in Christ. We believe in grace.” From Paul’s perspective, however, trust in works, even a cultural work like circumcision, destroys faith in Christ and nullifies grace (Galatians 2:21). Professor Daniel Leyrer puts it this way, “While it is important that we do not miscast Paul’s Jewish opponent as someone who knew nothing of God’s grace, it is just as important that we identify ‘soft’ legalism as legalism. And legalism in any form is deadly.”³⁸²

There are traces of works-righteousness in covenantal nomism itself. True, one “gets in” by the gracious covenant, but one must “stay in” by works. To teach that one must maintain his covenant status by means of the works of the law is to teach a form of works-righteousness. If, as

³⁸² Leyrer, Daniel P. “Does Paul Need to Be ‘Un-Lutheranized’?” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 107.4 (2010): 299.

James Dunn says, “Galatians is Paul’s first sustained attempt to deal with the issue of covenantal nomism,”³⁸³ then Galatians is also Paul’s first sustained attempt to deal with works-righteousness because covenantal nomism is work-righteous.

Third, Professor James Dunn insists that a “hidden middle term” must be inserted into Romans 3:20, “by works of the law all flesh will not be justified before him.” Dunn says that the thought does not run directly from “works of the law” to “justified” so that the works are a means to justification. Rather, “the thought is more indirect.”³⁸⁴ According to Dunn, the works of law have a merely social function of clearly marking the Jews as the people of God, and because they are the people of God, they are saved. It seems much simpler to conclude that some Jews saw their works as the means to their justification before God. Paul tells his fellow Jews that, because of sin and transgression of the law, it is not possible to be justified by means of works.

Three arguments for a Pauline polemic against works-righteousness will now be presented from the Pauline letters themselves. First, in Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:20, Paul makes allusion to Psalm 143:2 (LXX Psalm 142:2). The psalmist pleads with the Lord, “Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.” The fact that Paul alludes to this Psalm is an indication that he wanted his opponents to consider their unrighteousness before God. This indication is strengthened by the fact that Paul inserts what was likely his opponents own slogan into the Psalm verse, “by works of the law shall no flesh be justified before him,” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ; Rom. 3:20).

Second, Paul consistently contrasts “faith in Christ” and “works” in the doctrine of justification. Put another way, Paul contrasts “believing” and “doing” as two opposing ways to justification. In Romans 9:31-10:4. Paul says that many Gentiles have received righteousness by the “believing” route, but also that many Jews have tried the “doing” route (“as from works,” ὡς ἐξ ἔργων, 9:32) and failed. “Doing” and “believing” are contrasted in Galatians 3:12: “The law is not based on faith. On the contrary, ‘the man who does these things will live by them.’” Paul clearly implies that his opponents have chosen and are encouraging others to choose the “doing” route to justification before God. This “doing” route can fairly be called works-righteousness.

³⁸³ “The Theology of Galatians: The Issue of Covenantal Nomism,” in *The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition*, 173.

³⁸⁴ *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, 159.

Third, Paul warns the Philippians against “trusting in the flesh,” which, according to Paul, the Judaizers would try to get the Philippian Christians to do if those “evil workmen” (τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, Philippians 3:2) came to Philippi. “Trusting in the flesh,” according to Paul, includes trusting in ethnic heritage (Phil 3:5), but it also includes trusting in one’s performance of the law (κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος; Phil 3:5). Trust in one’s performance of the law for justification before God can fairly be called works-righteousness.

A key issue in this debate is the definition of works-righteousness. Is it works-righteousness if a person is doing the works prescribed by God’s law in order to maintain his good standing in God’s sight, a good standing which he received by grace (covenantal nomism)? It is the view of this paper that covenantal nomism is works-righteousness because even though in covenantal nomism a person “gets in” to the covenant people by grace, he must “stay in” by works. Paul opposed covenantal nomism by saying “no one will be justified by works of the law” (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:20).

What was Paul’s critique of the Judaism of his day? Different scholars, even among those of the New Perspective, answer this question in different ways. E.P. Sanders points to Paul’s “exclusivist soteriology,”³⁸⁵ his belief that salvation is only found in Christ. The failure of the Jews, then, is not that they were work-righteous but simply that they have not believed in Jesus. The famous saying of Sanders is, “*This is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.*”³⁸⁶

Others, such as Bishop N.T. Wright and Professor James Dunn, say that Paul’s critique of Judaism, and some of Jewish Christianity, was that it was too narrowly nationalistic. The Judaizers wanted to define the people of God as those who wore the badges of covenant membership; namely, those who were circumcised, observed the Sabbath, and ate kosher. Paul contested such a narrow definition of the people of God because the Gentiles, of whom he was the Apostle, did not fit into that definition. Paul insisted that the only badge of membership, which shows that one belonging to the people of God is faith. Faith is the only boundary marker which separates the people of God from those who are not God’s people. This broad definition of the people of God is wide enough to include the Gentiles *as Gentiles*.

³⁸⁵ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 472.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 552. Emphasis original.

What was Paul's critique of the Judaism of his day? Many from the traditional perspective will say that Paul's critique of many of his fellow Jews, including the Judaizers, was that they were work-righteous. Many non-Christian Jews and the Judaizers were under the mistaken opinion that their works played a part in their justification before God. Against this Paul contends that justification is by faith in Christ and his atoning work alone apart from observing the law.

It is the contention of this paper that in order to account for everything which Paul says, all of the above answers need to be given a place in an explanation of Paul's polemic. Sanders is correct in saying that Paul criticized some of his fellow Jews for their failure to believe in Jesus the Messiah (Romans 9:32-33; 10:16). Paul also agonized over this failure and prayed for their conversion (Romans 9:1-5; 10:1).

Dunn and Wright are also correct in noting the enormously important place which Jew/Gentile issues have in Paul's writings and thought. Against the Judaizers, Paul insisted that both Jew and Gentile are "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). Professor Daniel Leyrer rightly comments, "No biblical interpreter should deny the place of racism in the problems between Jews and Gentiles as the early church got its start."³⁸⁷

Nor are those interpreters wrong who see a polemic against works-righteousness in Paul's letters. Paul clearly contrasts *doing* and *believing* when it comes to justification before God (Galatians 3:11-12; Romans 9:32; cf. also Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:28). Many of Paul's opponents were promoting the *doing* route to justification before God. Paul fights vigorously against such works-righteousness with his doctrine of justification by faith alone.

³⁸⁷ "Does Paul Need to be 'Un-Lutheranized'?" 300.

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