

# The New Perspective on Paul

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**GROVE BOOKS LIMITED**  
RIDLEY HALL RD CAMBRIDGE CB3 9HU

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## Preface

I wish to thank the following people who read a draft of this booklet and offered suggestions and corrections: Dr Jeremy Begbie, Dr Markus Bockmuehl, Dr Mark Bonnington, Prof James D G Dunn, Dr Philip Jenson, Dr Ian Paul, and Dr Tom Wright. None of them is, of course, responsible for any errors, deficiencies or strange interpretations that may remain.

This booklet is dedicated to Jean Lynch

**The Cover Illustration** is by Peter Ashton

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**First Impression** December 2002

**Reprinted** April 2005

**ISSN** 1365-490X

**ISBN** 1 85174 518 1

# 1

## Introduction

*The publication of E P Sanders' Paul and Palestinian Judaism in 1977 sparked the beginning of a revolution in the way that many interpret Paul's writings.*

According to one of its critics, 'The potential significance of the [New Perspective] school for the whole Christian faith can hardly be exaggerated.'<sup>1</sup> But what is this 'New Perspective,' and why are people either very excited by it, or very worried about the perceived threat it poses? The purpose of this book is to summarize some of the main ideas of the New Perspective (NP) and its leading proponents, to survey some issues it raises for a traditional Reformation understanding of Paul, and to suggest what I believe is a way forward in reading Paul that benefits from the genuine contribution made by this new approach.

Although scholars dispute the authorship of several of Paul's letters (especially Ephesians and the Pastoral epistles), I have included references to them in this booklet for the sake of completeness; to discuss their authenticity here would require far more space than is available. Likewise, I have included evidence from the book of Acts without defending its general historical reliability. Perhaps others will explore these subjects in future Grove booklets.<sup>2</sup>

In order to save space, I will refer to works listed in the bibliography simply by title in the footnotes; details of items not appearing in the bibliography will be given in full. The bibliography includes a number of works which are not cited in this text, but are given in order to offer further help for those who wish to pursue the subject in greater depth. The literature is rapidly expanding, probably assuring that a revised edition of this booklet (or a rebuttal!) will be necessary someday...

*The potential significance of the NP can hardly be exaggerated*

# 2

## The 'Old' Perspective and its Problems

*In order to understand the NP, it is important first to know what 'Old Perspective' it seeks to correct.*

Essentially the NP represents a 'reformation' of a few notions Christians have inherited primarily from the Protestant Reformation. The NP however is not a return to pre-Reformation Roman Catholicism, but an attempt to interpret Paul *in his own context*, apart from the categories and issues of the sixteenth century. Scholars holding NP views do not see themselves as a particular religious movement; disagreeing among themselves about a number of interpretative details, they do not reflect any one particular theological persuasion. Most NP writers have not set out deliberately to undermine insights from the Reformation, much less to distort the teachings of Paul. But their conclusions do challenge some cherished views. That is producing heat, as well as light!

Influenced by Martin Luther's spiritual experience, a traditional Protestant interpretation sees Paul reacting to a Judaism that was a religion of works instead of faith, of doing instead of trusting. Luther's own struggle to gain peace with God was resolved when he began to interpret Paul as teaching a fundamentally different way of relating to God in contrast to the way of Judaism. Luther read Paul's description of Jews and of Old Testament religion through the lens of his own experience of medieval Roman Catholicism that emphasized the importance of works of penance (not to mention the sale of indulgences) to help secure one's salvation. Luther's understanding of justification<sup>3</sup> by faith *alone*, apart from works, then became for him and his followers the decisive truth revealed in Christ, and the centre of Paul's theology.

At the risk of caricature and oversimplification, we can summarize some key points of the 'old' (primarily 'Lutheran') perspective as follows:

- 1 Judaism was (and, by implication, is) a religion of merit, in which one *earns* salvation.
- 2 Like Luther, Paul was not satisfied with his inherited religion and wanted to find a solution to the problem of his inability fully to obey God's demands; his broken relationship with God needed fixing.

- 3 Paul's essential religion—his understanding of God's character and his way of relating to Him—*fundamentally* changed when he became a Christian. Justification by grace through faith is something new that came only with the person of Jesus. It is the centre of Paul's theology, the heart of the gospel.
- 4 Paul's focus in his writings was on how *individuals* can come to find acceptance with God.
- 5 Paul thought that faith and works, understood respectively as believing and doing, stand in stark contrast as two different principles.
- 6 Similarly, law (OT religion) stands in opposition to grace (NT faith).

However, there are significant problems with each of these points.

### **1 'Judaism was a Religion of Merit'**

Most Jews who seek to observe the Torah (the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of what Christians call the Old Testament, and specifically, 'the law')<sup>4</sup> do not recognize their religion as one based fundamentally on *merit*. They too start with the grace and loving kindness of God. For them, as for the Psalmist, the law is a gift from God and a path of life (see for example Psalm 19.7ff; 119). God has chosen the Jews freely, apart from anything they have done (Deut 7.7f), and their religion teaches them to respond out of thankfulness to his loving kindness by seeking to show faithfulness in obeying what he requires. They do not see themselves as trying to *earn* God's approval. Those who view the law as divinely given appear to be basically satisfied with the way of life revealed for them in Torah.

### **2 'Judaism did not Resolve Paul's Burden of Guilt'**

There is little if any evidence that the pre-Christian Paul (Saul) was searching for a way out of a personal spiritual dilemma, Romans 7 notwithstanding.<sup>5</sup> According to Phil 3.6, Paul saw himself as blameless in regard to righteousness under the law. In Acts 23.1 Paul declares before the chief priests and Jewish council, 'Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God.' Furthermore, when he (rarely) refers to sin in his earlier life, what he has in mind is the sin of persecuting the church rather than failing to keep the law in general (1 Cor 15.9; 1 Tim 1.13–15; *cf* Gal 1.13; 2.15). Although he was present at the stoning of Stephen and may have been impressed by his courage, it is more likely that Paul the Pharisee set out on the road to Damascus as a zealous man with a mission (Gal 1.13, 23; Phil 3.6), confident in his relationship with God rather than consciously burdened with guilt. In

the temple sacrifices, in the Scriptures (especially the Psalms), and in repentance, the Jews already had a God-given way of bringing their failures to God and finding forgiveness from him.<sup>6</sup> Although Paul the Jew, like his fellow Pharisees, probably longed for the coming of a Messiah to bring freedom from Roman rule and to establish a lasting Davidic kingdom, he was not looking for a ‘solution’ to a personal problem of unforgiven sin.

### ***3 ‘Justification by Faith was a New Revelation’***

It is certainly true that Paul’s estimation of Jesus changed dramatically when he became a Christian, as did many aspects of his theology. But how much of his Jewish faith did Paul reject when he became a Christian? If the essence of Paul’s way of relating to God changed, what does this say about the nature and value of Old Testament faith? Have there been two ways of salvation? Without disputing at all that Paul teaches the doctrine of justification by grace through faith (and that he emphasizes it in Galatians, Romans and Philippians), more questions are in order. If justification is a *new* revelation in Christ, and if it is the *core* of the gospel, why is it absent in Paul’s preaching in Acts, apart from 13.39? Why does it play no major role in a number of his letters (1 and 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy)? A basic premise of Paul’s argument in Galatians and Romans is that justification by faith is *not* something new, but was true for Abraham (Gal 3.6–9; Rom 4). Abraham, David and the other faithful ones of the OT were acceptable to God because they trusted his promises and responded to the grace given to them. They did not know anything about Jesus, yet they were accepted by grace. Relating to God by faith has always been crucial; what changed with the coming of Christ is the content or precise object of that faith.

### ***4 ‘Paul’s Focus was on the Individual’s Relationship to God’***

A close reading of Paul’s letters reveals more of an emphasis on relationships between groups of people, and more specifically, Jews and Gentiles within the body of Christ, than on the individual’s relationship to God. Although his writings obviously do speak personally and powerfully to the human heart, Paul’s original intention was primarily to get groups of Christians to relate properly to each other and to God *corporately*. So for example, when Paul speaks of ‘the mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’ in Col 1.27, he is not talking about some individual’s experience of Christ, but about the surprising truth that Christ is in ‘you’ (the Greek is plural) Colossians as *Gentiles*—in contrast to the expectation that Messiah would come primarily to bless the Jews. When we fail to see Paul’s corporate emphasis, we run the risk of turning a faith that teaches our mutual interdependence into a religion of privatized piety, as though God were concerned only to save individuals instead of building his church and transforming his world.

### 5 *'Faith Replaced Works'*

The separation of belief and action, of faith and works is alien to the teaching of Jesus. It can lead to antinomianism<sup>7</sup> and the marginalization of a multitude of NT texts that emphasize the importance of what we do. It is a striking fact that apart from the Gospel of John,<sup>8</sup> every text in the New Testament about God's final judgment of humanity reflects the OT tradition of judgment according to deeds, not simply what a person professes.<sup>9</sup> We look in vain for a passage describing how God will ask people what they believed; their lives will have revealed it. To drive a wedge between belief and action is to encourage self-deception, cheap grace,<sup>10</sup> and the kind of thin pious veneer that James rightly rejects (James 2.14–26). That does not mean that salvation is *earned* by what we do; it is simply to affirm the biblical truth that the fruit we bear reflects who we really are and what we really believe. Fortunately the God to whom we will all give an account is gracious and understanding, already at work in us to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil 2.13).

### 6 *'Law Stood in Opposition to Grace'*

To set law directly opposite grace, and particularly the OT against the NT, is to repeat the ancient error of Marcion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century heretic who rejected the OT because of his insistence that the God reflected therein had nothing to do with the God of love revealed in Jesus. Marcion made Paul's writings his 'canon within the canon,' failing to see the positive role Paul continued to give the law (Rom 15.4; 1 Cor 10.11; 2 Tim 3.16). Law and grace are not opposites;<sup>11</sup> there was grace in the giving of the law, and true grace has inescapable principles, as does true love (cf 1 Cor 7.19).

This is not to say that Luther himself and all teachers in the Protestant tradition have fallen into the traps just noted. Luther would not recognize his theology in some of the six points above. However, many Christians have slipped into these common errors because concern about merit, human initiative, and categories inherited from the Reformation (and earlier doctrinal controversies) have controlled our understanding of a number of NT texts. As we shall see, the value of the NP is that by clarifying what Paul meant, it becomes possible for us to 'reclaim' more of our spiritual heritage in Judaism, to understand more closely a number of passages that were previously thought to contradict Paul's basic theology, and more importantly, to integrate what we believe with how we live.

# 3

## Three Advocates of the New Perspective

### E P Sanders

The 'New Perspective' is a phrase coined by J D G Dunn<sup>12</sup> to describe a different understanding of Paul based on the insights of E P Sanders. Although not the first to make the point,<sup>13</sup> Sanders argued from a wide survey of Jewish texts that the Judaism Paul opposed was not essentially a grace-less religion in which one sought to earn acceptance with God through good works. Instead of keeping the law to *gain* acceptance, Jews kept the law in (thankful) response to God's mercies, in order to *stay* within the covenant God had graciously given them. Distinguishing 'staying in' the covenant from 'getting into' the covenant, Sanders calls this pattern of religion *covenantal nomism*. The 'New Perspective' is therefore fundamentally a new perspective for non-Jews on biblical Judaism and the Judaism to which Paul was reacting in some of his letters, as well as a new perspective on Paul.

According to Sanders, the notion of God rewarding human merit was an undeniable part of Jewish theology, but not the idea of *salvation* earned by good deeds. For Sanders, Paul's problem with Judaism was not the personal guilt or burden produced by trying to live according to the law, but simply the fact that Judaism was not Christianity, a problem he never perceived until he became a follower of Jesus. Sanders emphasizes that Paul did not move from plight to solution, as though Paul were looking for a way out of a predicament, but from solution (the crucified Jesus is Messiah) to plight (therefore we must have been in a fix!). He also argues that the Protestant emphasis on *justification*, understood as God's judicial act of declaring our new status as forgiven, overlooks the more pervasive theme of our active *participation in Christ* in Paul's letters.

Scholars have rightly criticized Sanders for being selective in his use of his sources, for imposing a pattern on Jewish texts that did not naturally arise from them, and for not adequately explaining Paul's inner logic, including (on Sanders' reading) Paul's apparently arbitrary and complete abandonment of Judaism for Christianity. It is no secret that Sanders himself has something of a sceptical agenda (the entry for 'truth, ultimate' in the index to his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* refers only to three consecutive pages—all of which are blank!).

Recently a number of scholars have challenged Sanders' basic thesis about Judaism.<sup>14</sup> There does appear to be evidence that some Jews held to notions that people could attain merit before God, storing up a 'treasury of works' (4 Ezra 6.5; 7.77; 8.33, 36; 2 Baruch 14.12; see also Tob 4.9–10 and Psalms of Solomon 9.3–5). 2 Baruch 51.7 refers to those who have been 'saved because of their works,' although both it and 4 Ezra were written at least a generation after Paul. And no doubt some Jews in Paul's day misunderstood the teaching of the OT and thought in terms of personal merit, just as many Christians have misunderstood grace in the NT.

*Sanders debunked a caricature that showed the inferiority of Judaism as 'legalism' rather than grace*

Nevertheless, most scholars accept that Sanders has successfully debunked a caricature that had previously led some German scholars in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to seek to show the inferiority of Judaism as 'legalism' rather than grace—a caricature that has directly and indirectly contributed to the persecution of Jews. The 'old perspective' that Sanders attacks is reflected for example in parts of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by Gerhard Kittel,<sup>15</sup> a standard reference work that Protestant commentators in the 20<sup>th</sup> century accepted largely without question as authoritative. With this realization we should ask, what were the Jews that Paul opposed in his letters actually teaching about 'works'?

Galatians, perhaps the earliest letter we have from Paul, seems clear enough:

...we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.  
(Galatians 2.16)

Many other passages show Paul objecting to 'works of (the) law' (Gal 3.2, 5, 10; Rom 3.20) or setting the shortened expression 'works' opposite faith or grace (Gal 3.10; Rom 3.27; 4.2, 4, 6; 9.11, 32; 11.6; cf Eph 2.9; 2 Tim 1.9). There is no question that Paul saw works and faith as opposites. But what did he mean by those words?

## J D G Dunn

Criticizing the work of Sanders while building upon it at the same time, James Dunn has taken the NP discussion a step further.<sup>16</sup> Writing as one committed to the Christian faith, Dunn has played a major role in helping

many evangelical scholars to take on board Sanders' basic contribution. Unlike Sanders, Dunn sees more continuity between Paul's religion before and after the apostle's calling on the Damascus road. With Krister Stendahl, he thinks the evidence of Paul's letters indicates that the apostle saw himself more as *called* (to proclaim Jesus as Messiah, and to take that message to the Gentiles) than *converted* (in the sense of changing his essential religion). The argument from language is not conclusive in itself, since although Paul often speaks of his coming to faith in Christ as a calling, he also uses calling language of Gentiles who were pagans before they became Christians; their calling was surely a change in the essence of their religion. Nevertheless, Paul does not apply the sort of language he uses of converted Gentiles in 1 Thess 1.9–10 to himself or to Jews (see Gal 2.15). Dunn acknowledges that there is room for speaking of Paul's 'conversion' (he does not deny that recognition of Jesus as Messiah was central), but he sees it primarily in terms of a change from Jewish exclusivism (that insisted on keeping the law) to the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's family apart from the law.

Dunn's major contribution consists in his view that the 'works of the law' Paul opposed in Galatians primarily referred to circumcision (2.3, 7–9, 12; 5.2f, 6, 11; 6.12f, 15), keeping the religious calendar (4.10), and observing the dietary laws (2.12–14) that distinguished Jews from Gentiles. Drawing on insights from sociology, Dunn calls these particular 'works of the law' the *badges* or *boundary markers* of Judaism. Paul opposed these practices because they functioned to separate people whom Christ died to bring together. What little evidence we have of phrases approximating 'works of the law' in other Jewish texts<sup>17</sup> supports the view that Paul is talking about specific acts that marked one out as an insider in contrast to those outside the community. In

short, Paul's target was not an insistence on basic moral behaviour, but on particular religious practices that differentiated Jews from Gentiles, demonstrating the former group's status as members within God's covenant.

Today we take for granted the fact that Christians can eat bacon and work on Saturdays. But for the earliest Christians, all of whom were Jews, it was unthinkable to stop acting

like a Jew; the big issues were (1) what to require of Gentile converts and (2) how to relate to them while retaining biblical purity, a fact Acts chapters 10, 11 and 15 reflect acutely.<sup>18</sup> Since the NT had not yet been written, the only Bible these Christians possessed insisted that any male who wanted to be a part of God's people had to be circumcised (Gen 17.10–14). Like 'Messianic' Jews today who accept Jesus as their Messiah, why should the first Jewish

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when Paul wrote*

Christians have even thought of giving up their traditions anyway? Jewish distinctives were God-given, provided order, and helped to maintain their social identity and cohesion. These Christians had no reason to stop respecting their heritage of faith (they worshipped in the temple, Acts 2.46; 3.1; 5.12, 42, as did Paul himself 21.26; 24.17f). For conservative Jewish Christians who remembered how their forebears had given their lives in the Maccabean revolt to prevent the loss of the traditions of their ancestors, the answer was clear: if Gentiles wanted to join, let them become Jews.<sup>19</sup>

Dunn's approach has the strength of drawing our attention to the social and historical context when Paul wrote, and his suggestion about 'works of the law' has led many to think again. Nevertheless, not all texts referring to 'works' can be neatly identified and limited to specific 'badges of Judaism.' Rom 2.17ff, 3.9–20, 11.6 and Titus 3.5 seem to have something broader in mind, and Dunn himself has now clarified his earlier claim, acknowledging that the word can have a wider meaning in Paul. What is more, in some passages Paul clearly speaks of the 'boasting' of self-accomplishment (Rom 4.2; 1 Cor 1.29; 4.7; Eph 2.9; compare Gal 6.4) rather than a boasting in the gift of the law or election. Many still see Rom 4.4–5, Eph 2.8–10 and Phil 3.9 as texts that fit the 'Old Perspective' much better than the 'New.'

## N T Wright

N T (Tom) Wright is today the most influential popular writer who advocates a New Perspective reading. Although he disagrees in a number of points with Sanders and Dunn, he accepts the former's fundamental point about the 'pattern' of the Jewish faith and the latter's suggestion that the phrase 'works of the law' primarily refers to specific 'boundary markers,' rather than 'self-help moralism.' Like Sanders and Dunn, he emphasizes that in his letters Paul was not primarily concerned with how individuals with burdened consciences like Martin Luther's can find forgiveness, but with *what defines the people of God*—how the Gentiles could come to be accepted as God's own without having to 'get in' and 'stay in' as Jews.<sup>20</sup>

One of Wright's controversial contributions is what he says about 'justification.'<sup>21</sup> He thinks our notions of what Paul means by this term and related words have been unduly shaped and narrowed by controversies between Pelagius and Augustine (5<sup>th</sup> century) and between Erasmus and Luther (16<sup>th</sup> century) over human effort and grace. Reformed theology understands 'justification' to refer to how an individual *enters* a relationship with God. Furthermore, it typically emphasizes a judicial, law-court background for the word, seeing it referring to God's action of acquitting a person and regarding him or her as having a new status as righteous. This, in turn, is seen as the heart of Paul's gospel, which is basically about 'getting in.'

Wright responds that the word ‘justification’ is much richer in meaning. It is first of all *covenantal*, reflecting the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish belief that because of his faithfulness, God would act to sort out the world and deliver his people. Justification is not primarily about God’s dealings with individuals (as such) but with peoples. Second, it is indeed *law-court* language, but that should be seen within the context of God’s covenant faithfulness and his desire to deal with evil and to put all things right. Third, it is *eschatological*, relating not only to a past event of salvation but also to the present and future. Justification is just as much about the future deliverance of God’s people as it is about the past. More subtly, Wright argues that justification is not *how someone enters the people of God*; it is fundamentally *how you can tell who is in* (because God has already declared them to be acquitted).<sup>22</sup> It is a broader notion than some Protestants have previously thought.

Unlike Sanders, Wright sees Paul arguing from plight to solution. However, instead of understanding the plight as that of an individual whose relationship with God is broken (the ‘Old Perspective’ view), Wright sees the plight as the covenant people’s perceived state of exile. According to Wright, the Jewish people in the time of Paul believed that even though they had returned to inhabit the promised land, they still remained in a state of exile, awaiting God’s decisive action to restore his chosen ones and set things right. Christ came to accomplish that action, reflecting God’s saving faithfulness to his covenant people (righteousness). Fundamental to that was his death to deal with sin, which caused exile in the first place.

*Justification is just as much about the future deliverance of God’s people as it is about the past*

Wright has attracted fewer criticisms than Sanders and Dunn, although many scholars are not persuaded by his claims about Jewish perceptions of still being in exile. Theologically his approach integrates many texts (and makes for good preaching!); one wishes however that we had more explicit evidence in the NT for the exile motif to be as important and pervasive as Wright claims it to be. A number of evangelicals are more concerned about Wright’s adjustments to the notion of ‘justification,’ which is felt to threaten their traditional emphasis on God’s judicial declaration of a person’s new status as a result of a transfer of Christ’s righteousness to us (1 Cor 1.30; 2 Cor 5.21).

Many scholars have been deeply influenced by the insights of Sanders, Dunn and Wright, although there is considerable disagreement between them on particular points. In what follows, I wish to offer a few additional reflections on Paul. I am an heir of the theology of the Reformers, but I am wary of any theological system that absolutizes one particular way of interpreting Scripture for the sake of consistency; the Bible was given to transform us, not the other way around.

# Towards an Understanding of Paul 4

*The heart of the issue raised by the NP is the amount of continuity there remained for Paul between his Jewish heritage and Christianity.*

What changed for him when Jesus called him, revealing himself to be God's Messiah? What role did the Old Testament continue to play for him? What difference did it make, both in his theology and his life? One of the questions I set for my students is, 'If Paul the Christian had a son, would he have circumcised him?'

As I have read and re-read Paul's letters over the years, several crucial points have struck me.

1 As a Jew, Paul would have valued the law for many reasons, including the fact that it (1) revealed the character of God as holy, gracious and just (2) preserved a history of the Jewish people (3) provided a constitution for their nation (4) established orderly worship and (5) proved a fount of wisdom, instructing people how to have a proper relationship with God and how to live skilfully. Sanders, I believe, has successfully made the case that Jews did not generally consider the law as a hurdle to be jumped or a burden to be carried in order to *gain* acceptance with God, but as a gift showing the path in which they should walk as those already accepted by him. They therefore were to obey the law as *the* way of life. It was God's plan for them to depend upon the law (and upon God as they did so), rather than to rely on other paths that led away to idolatry.

*The Jews did not consider the law as a hurdle to be jumped in order to gain acceptance with God*

2 Paul the Pharisee would have agreed up to a point with Stephen's preaching in Acts 7 about Israel's disobedience. Although there were individuals whose lives, despite occasional failures, could be characterized as walking with God, there remained a national problem. The chosen people were also a stiff-necked people (Ex 33.3; Deut 31.27; 2 Chron 30.8; Jer 19.15; Acts 7.51–52a) who had a history of falling into idolatry, turning from the law, and rejecting the prophets God sent to them. That was surely a

plight that needed a solution. No doubt Paul longed for the day when God would establish his new covenant, putting his law in the hearts of the people and forgiving *all* of their sins—as reflected in release from all captivity, return to the promised land and the restoration of God’s full blessing there (Jer 31–33). But he would have expected that future to include the full continuation of the law as a way of life, not the changing of any of its distinctive customs (for example Jer 33.18; Acts 6.14).

*For Paul, clearly Jesus was under God’s curse pronounced by the law, since he was ‘hung on a tree’*

**3** Precisely because of his zeal to keep the law—in obedience to what he believed God wanted—Paul had persecuted Christians (Gal 1.13–14; Acts 26.9–11). He did so for at least two reasons. First, some Christians (probably Greek-speaking believers like Stephen, and perhaps those more concerned with bringing the gospel to Gentiles) were implying that not all requirements of the law had to be kept. Second, Paul was confident that regardless of whatever good things Jesus of Nazareth had said or done, he simply could not be the Messiah. Clearly Jesus was under God’s curse pronounced by the law, since he was ‘hung on a tree’ (Deut 21.23; Gal 3.13). That was not part of the Jewish expectation for a Messiah. The cross was a stumbling block to Jews (1 Cor 1.23).

**4** When Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9, 22, 26), he was confronted by the reality that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Instead of rejecting the law as false or as leading him away from the truth, Paul realized that Jesus must have been crucified and died under the law’s curse for a divine purpose. In the light of Christ, Paul had to re-evaluate his understanding of the purpose of the law. His own zeal for what he thought was a permanent, lasting way of life had actually prevented him from seeing God’s wonderful gift of deliverance in Christ for *all* people. The law itself was not the problem, but Paul effectively had to move from allegiance to the good gift of the law to allegiance to the ultimate gift in Christ. Otherwise, the good would become the enemy of the best, by excluding Gentiles.

*In the light of Christ, Paul had to re-evaluate his understanding of the purpose of the law*

**5** Critics have pointed out that the NP underestimates Paul’s own sense of sinfulness and need for redemption. Here we need to make a crucial distinction between Paul’s pre-Christian self-estimation, and his understanding of the human condition on the other side of his coming to faith in Jesus. There is no doubt that Paul saw sin in a new light when he realized that Jesus’ death had to be

part of God's plan to deal with it. As a Christian, he would have learned and pondered Jesus' teachings which clarified and intensified what it meant to fulfil the law (for example Matt 5.17–48; Luke 11.37–54; 1 Cor 9.21; Gal 6.2).<sup>23</sup> Reflecting on his own stubborn refusal to acknowledge that Jesus could be Messiah, he saw his Jewish faith in a new light, and arguably some of the things he says about the Jews echo his own experience (for example Rom 2.17–20; 10.2–4). But we lack clear passages that indicate that Paul was deeply troubled in himself *before* he met Christ.

**6** The widespread rejection of the gospel by the Jews to whom Paul preached formed the backdrop for the letters he sent. Although Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, he did preach in synagogues (Acts 9.20, 22; 13.14ff; 14.1ff; 17.1ff especially verse 2; 17.10, 17; 18.4ff, 19; 19.8), something confirmed in the synagogue punishment of 39 lashes Paul says he suffered five times (2 Cor 11.24; cf 1 Cor 9.20f). *This* is the Judaism about which Paul speaks in Romans 9–11 (and especially 10.3), a Judaism that in Paul's experience had been repeatedly saying no to proclamation in the Spirit that Jesus is the Messiah.

*We lack clear passages that indicate that Paul was deeply troubled in himself before he met Christ*

**7** Every time Paul speaks negatively about the law, it is in a context reflecting either (1) the fundamental rejection of Jesus by the Jews to whom Paul and others preached, or (2) the insistence by Jewish Christians that Gentiles had to adopt Jewish customs in order to join God's people. Philippians 3.7–9 could be read as though Paul has completely rejected his Jewish heritage. In context, however, he is responding to people in one or both of these two groups (3.2–6). It was reliance on his old way of life as a Pharisee, confident in his superior status as a Jew and zealously seeking to preserve the barriers separating Jews from outsiders, that led him to be a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. The old way of evaluating Christ on the cross is what he rejects (see 2 Cor 5.16), and anything that gets in the way of knowing Christ fully. So for Paul, when non-Christian Jews insisted that Jesus could not be Messiah (and thus continued to rely on the law instead of God's provision in Christ), or when Christian Jews required 'works of the law' of Gentile converts, both groups in effect reject the sufficiency of what Jesus has done for them on the cross.

**8** Paul says a number of negative things about the law. The law cannot put a person into a right relationship with God (Gal 2.16). The law reveals sin and thereby multiplies it (Rom 7.7; 5.20; 7.5; Gal 3.19); it is used by sin as a tool to condemn and imprison people (Gal 3.10f, 22; Rom 7.8–11). Because of human weakness it is powerless to change the human

condition (Rom 3.28; 8.3) and to give life (Gal 3.21). Now on the other side of faith in Christ, Paul sees that in some respects the law was intended only to be temporary: it served as a pedagogue (teacher) to guide the people of Israel until the time of maturity when Christ would come (Gal 3.23–25). It effectively separated Jews from Gentiles and marked them out as a distinct people. But Christ came to free people (Gal 4.3–5; 5.1), to make all who trust in him heirs of the Abrahamic promise of blessing (Gal 3.26–29), and thereby to do away with the Jew / Gentile distinction (Gal 3.28; Eph 2.11–16). To insist that Gentiles had to live under the yoke of the law was to turn the clock back to an era Paul *now* sees as bondage (Gal 4.1–5.1), a bondage from which people need deliverance because of their inability to fulfil the law’s demands (Gal 2.19; 3.13; 4.5, 8–10, 21–31; 5.1, 18). Jesus died to bring deliverance from bondage to the old way of sin and death, and to enable newness of life in the Spirit.

9 Although in effect Paul criticizes the law as bringing a curse and not belonging to faith (that is, faith *in Christ*; Gal 3.10, 12), he stops far short of rejecting it altogether. He does not say that each and every specific command in the Old Testament is obsolete; what he apparently has foremost in mind is the law with its curses for disobedience and its barriers against Gentiles. Likewise, he does not see law in general as a bad thing, because he is keen to uphold the law (Rom 3.31) and to fulfil it through love of the neighbour (Gal 5.14; Rom 13.8). He wants the Galatians to fulfil the ‘law of Christ’ by bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6.2; compare 1 Cor 9.21). Paul continues to use the OT as an authoritative and profitable source (1 Cor 10.11; Rom 15.4; 2 Tim 3.16) for Christian behaviour.

*Paul continues to use the Old Testament as an authoritative and profitable source for Christian behaviour*

10 It is possible to read Galatians as though the Judaizers (the people insisting that his readers had to keep the law) had no faith, and as though Paul set ‘doing’ opposite ‘believing.’ Both ideas can lead to caricaturing Judaism as only concerned with laws and Paul’s understanding of faith as unrelated to behaviour. Surely the Judaizers would respond that they too had faith in God and in Christ, which is precisely why they were insisting on obeying God’s commands in the law. The ‘faith’ that Paul is talking about in Galatians is a response of trust in what God is saying and revealing to *his people at the current time*. So when Paul says, ‘before faith came...’ (Gal 3.23) he does not mean faith as a principle, but specifically faith *in Christ* (3.19, 24f; 4.4). Abraham, living before the time of faith in Christ, was still an example of someone who lived by faith in God (3.6–9). Appreciating this helps us to see

that Paul did not set faith (as a principle) against works *per se* (in the sense of anything humans do), but faith *in Christ* opposite the insistence that Gentiles adopt works *of the law*.

**11** At no place in the New Testament does Paul set faith in Christ opposite loving one's neighbour. That simply was not the issue; his hearers were not trying to earn acceptance by caring for other people.

To Paul, such a dichotomy would be unthinkable, because what matters is not mental assent to a doctrine such as justification by faith, but *faith working through love* (Gal 5.6; 1 Tim 1.5). The 'works of the law' referred to in Gal 2.16; 3.2, 5, 10 are not to be confused with acts of kindness expressing love for the neighbour, which sums up the intention of the law and fulfils the law of Christ (5.13–14; 6.2). Judging by what he explicitly cites in Galatians, Paul's problem does appear to be with Jewish insistence on those aspects of the law which mark out *Jewish* identity, including circumcision (2.3, 7–9, 12; 5.2f, 6, 11; 6.12f, 15), observance of days, months, seasons and years (4.10), and diet (2.12–14). The 'works of the law' that Paul opposes in Galatians are essentially the outward signs of a transfer from being Gentiles to being Jews. To insist on *these* works is to re-erect the boundary between Jew and Gentile, a distinction no longer maintained in Christ (3.28). It is important to bear this in mind when comparing Paul's teaching with James 2.14–26; what James calls 'works,' Paul calls 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal 5.22ff).

*To insist on these works is to re-erect the boundary between Jew and Gentile*

**12** There remain a handful of passages that do not sit comfortably with the NP. Arguably the most difficult is Romans 4, where Paul sets Abraham's faith in contrast to justifying works in which one could boast (4.2), going on to contrast a gift (literally 'grace') with wages that are earned (4.4). From this many have claimed that some Jews must have seen justification as something earned by one's deeds. However, Paul does not actually say that in 4.5. His point in using the contrasting metaphor from the world of contract and employment may simply be to emphasize that righteousness is a free gift received by faith. Tom Wright observes, 'This is the only time he [Paul] uses this metaphorical field in all his discussions of justification, and we should not allow this unique and brief sidelight to become the dominant note, as it has in much post-Reformation discussion.'<sup>24</sup> Eph 2.8–9 sets grace and faith opposite works and boasting. There however Paul could well be speaking of a Jewish boasting in the distinguishing (and therefore separating) marks of the covenant given by God—particularly since he goes on to speak of Christ breaking down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles caused by the law (2.14–16).

# 5

## The New Perspective as Threat

*A number of evangelicals have reacted strongly to what they perceive in the New Perspective to be a wholesale rejection of Reformation truths.*

Carl Trueman lumps a New Perspective view of justification together with 'pluralist understandings of salvation and unitarian notions of God,' claiming that it is 'excluded by any honest reading of the UCCF Doctrinal Basis.'<sup>25</sup> Mark Seifrid opines that the entire structure of the new view will eventually crumble, despite its attractiveness.<sup>26</sup>

### Exit Justification by Faith?

A primary concern of evangelical critics of the NP is that the doctrine of justification by faith will be lost, or at least fudged. But to my knowledge, no proponent of an NP reading denies that Paul taught justification by grace through faith in Christ. Likewise, no NP proponent as far as I am aware denies that Paul would also have rejected any notion that a person can *earn* salvation. The question Sanders and others rightly raise is whether Paul's particular opponents ever did think that membership in God's people was something to be earned.

I think it is more likely that if asked, Paul's opponents would have agreed that they too believed that membership in God's people is based on the grace of God, and that they were demonstrating their faith by insisting on the keeping of the law. When Paul speaks about people seeking a righteousness of their own, according to the law (Rom 10.3; Phil 3.9), that is *his interpretation* of what people were advocating. In other words, although his opponents would not see

it that way, their view *in effect* meant self-reliance and reliance on what was temporary (the law) rather than acknowledging the sufficiency of God's gift of righteousness in Christ.

*It is possible to move beyond the trenches dug in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation centuries ago*

If the NP is leading to a revision of our understanding of 'justification' as a richer and deeper notion than some overly forensic concepts popular in Protestantism, so much the better—if it

is biblical. In the last decades a fruitful dialogue between Protestants and Roman Catholics over the meaning of the term has led many to see that it is possible to move beyond the trenches dug in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation centuries ago. The NP offers the possibility for recovering a shared tradition of justification as having covenantal and eschatological, as well forensic, aspects.

## Enter Salvation by Works?

Some evangelicals fear that the NP opens the door for semi-Pelagianism (a response to Augustinianism, emphasizing co-operation of grace and human initiative that could be summarized in the notion that ‘God helps those who help themselves’). The Protestant principle of justification by faith was hammered out in opposition to the notion of human effort, and any deviation in the former would seem to lead to a theology of self-reliance instead of dependence upon God’s grace.

*God accepts us wholly  
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A similar concern to protect the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrificial death for us (Jesus has done everything necessary for us) and the eternal security of individual Christians (salvation cannot be lost) can lead people to deny that we have *any* role to play in the outworking of our salvation. Thus, language of ‘participation’ theology can become suspect, as though humans are contributing to (and therefore earning) their relationship with God. The problem here is that philosophical assumptions, well-intentioned desire to exalt Christ, and particularly worries about the possibility of ‘merit,’ can lead us to deny the plain teachings of Scripture.

It is sadly confusing when preachers in their zeal to promote ‘faith alone’ (a phrase used only by James, who rejects it in Jas 2.24) set faith opposite doing good to others, when Christ summed up what is most important in terms of loving God and loving one’s neighbour (Mark 12.28–31 and parallels). He did not give us the Great Commandment in order for us to set it aside because we cannot do it; he gave it because it shows us what true faithfulness to God looks like, as seen supremely in his own example. That is not to deny that Christ has done something for us in his atoning death that we cannot do for ourselves. As in many Christian truths (for example the deity and humanity of Christ, the unity and Trinity of God, divine sovereignty and human responsibility), it is simply not a case of either/or but of both/and. God accepts us wholly by his grace, *and* real faith makes a difference in a person’s life.

The folly of separating faith and obedience appears most strikingly in the ‘lordship salvation’ debate still raging (somehow) after more than twenty years

in some evangelical circles in the United States. Zane Hodges, for example, argues for a distinction between receiving Christ as ‘Lord’ and receiving him as ‘Saviour.’<sup>27</sup> Valiantly seeking to uphold the notion of salvation by grace through faith ‘alone,’ he thinks that to insist on coming to Christ as our ‘Lord’ as well as our ‘Saviour’ logically means salvation by works, and lays a burden upon a potential believer. According to Hodges, preaching to unbelievers that Christ is and must be Lord is effectively a denial of grace. Never mind the fact that the Lordship of Christ was fundamental to Christian preaching as reflected in Acts (2.36; 10.36), to say nothing of its importance in the epistles (see Rom 10.9). Obedience to Christ as Lord is not a separate, advanced stage of Christian discipleship, but the unavoidable expression of allegiance to him. To deny that is actually a perversion of grace.

Another unfortunate result of the Protestant fear of ‘merit theology’ is the sidelining of the theme of Christ’s example in Christian ethics, often in reaction to the Roman Catholic emphasis on it. So some Protestants would prefer to speak of our being ‘conformed to Christ’ by God’s grace rather than our seeking to imitate Christ, because the latter sounds like human initiative apart from the Spirit (or echoes Roman Catholic emphases on *imitatio Christi*). Nevertheless, the NT clearly calls us to follow Christ’s example (Phil 2.5; Rom 13.14; 15.2f; see also 1 Cor 11.1; 1 Pet 2.21),<sup>28</sup> and any theology which has a problem with that fact needs to be revised.

## Exit Evangelization of the Jews?

By rehabilitating an emphasis on grace within Judaism, the NP certainly can be used to support the denial that Jews need to hear the gospel (because they always were and will be saved by grace through faith). Some argue that logically there are two separate covenants of grace (Judaism for Jews and Christ for Christians) that continue as such today. To put it crudely, what do the Jews need Christ for, if they can have a valid relationship with God the old way?

The NT leaves us in no doubt that the gospel originated within Judaism and continued to be preached to the people of Israel. It bears repeating that all of the very first Christians who preached Jesus were Jews. Peter was an apostle ‘entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised’ (Gal 2.7) and Paul’s passion for bringing the message of Christ to his ‘kindred according to the flesh’ is undeniable (Rom 9.3–5; Acts *passim*). The fundamental logic of Romans 11, that the failure of Jews to believe in Jesus as their Messiah was a breaking off of branches from the olive tree of God’s people—branches that

*The NT leaves us in no doubt that the gospel originated within Judaism and continued to be preached to the Jews*

will one day be restored (especially 11.20–24)—reflects Paul’s hope that one day the Jews *en masse* would come to trust in Jesus as their Messiah (Rom 11.25-27). That could not happen without a preacher (Rom 10.14, 17).

Regrettably, Christian behaviour towards the Jews in the past has made it very difficult to speak to the latter about God’s grace in Jesus,<sup>29</sup> but it does not remove the gospel imperative to share with *all* people the good news of what God has done in Christ. Likewise, although the NP would remind us that Jews were (and I would argue *are*) accepted by God on the basis of grace through faith, that does not negate the great commission to make known, in an appropriate way, the saving lordship of Jesus (Matt 28.18–20) to every person. He is the Messiah for Jews, as well as Gentiles, whether or not people choose to acknowledge him as such. The old adage still remains true: if Christ is not Lord of all he is not Lord at all.

## Other Concerns

There are at least three further areas in which NP interpreters have sometimes fallen short: *anthropology*, *eschatology* and *pneumatology*. In their zeal to correct past misinterpretations of Paul, some NP writers have failed to say enough about what Augustine and Luther got *right* about the human condition, and about grace being entirely independent of any human contribution. Stephen Westerholm and Peter Stuhlmacher eloquently argue this point in their works listed in my bibliography. Furthermore, Simon Gathercole emphasizes that the NP as a whole has not sufficiently addressed questions about the future dimension of justification in the Last Judgement, and the qualitative difference made by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Arguably this booklet reflects all of these weaknesses! I am certain however that neither James Dunn nor Tom Wright deny the fundamental truths of human inability to please God on our own and of our complete and utter need for grace. I am sure that both of them value the profound insights of Augustine and Luther. I also know that they are concerned to address fully how new perspective interpretations shed light on justification as a future event. Both would emphasize that the gift of the Spirit is a decisive difference. Despite the confident claims made on the backs of some recent publications, I am not persuaded that critics have managed to capsize the entire NP enterprise; for my own reviews of a few attempts, see the Grove website. What remains needed now is patience, as we all continue to study Scripture and seek to learn from one another.

# 6

## Benefits of the New Perspective

### Renewed Discussions and Insights

As we have seen, scholars are continuing to explore and to refine the interpretation of a number of texts in Paul's letters. Clearly not all of the texts perfectly fit one particular view, so the process will continue for *a long time*. Regardless of how and when the debate ends, it has led participants to a renewed excitement and sense of anticipation reading the Bible, as we are again

*Clearly not all of the texts perfectly fit one particular view*

reminded that no one has it entirely 'sewn up'! There are always new insights to be found in Scripture, and the NP has motivated scholars to dig more deeply, rather than simply to be content to repeat interpretations dating from the sixteenth century. As the discussion continues, we are being reminded by our differences of the tensions which exist in the text itself—tensions we do well to preserve and learn from rather than to explain away or ignore.

### Appreciation of Our Jewish Roots

In practical terms, the NP helps us better appreciate our Jewish heritage and what we continue to share in common with Judaism. That affects how we read and use the Old Testament, as well as how we relate to the Jewish people. The NP does not mean an end to our obligation for sharing the gospel with Jews; it actually helps us to build bridges with them and to build trust, so that we can speak from our shared heritage as we speak of the Messiah.

*The NP helps us to value our heritage in the OT, and to build bridges with Jews*

### Better Sense of the Text

In addition to the examples we have already seen, the NP sheds light on a number of texts. So for example, on an NP reading, the *Jewish* 'boasting' that Paul opposes in Rom 2.17, 23; 3.27–29 and 11.18 might not be the boast of an individual in his own meritorious deeds, but rather the nationalistic pride of Jews in the fact that *they* were the chosen, covenant people of God who have been given the law, and that by implication, one had to become a Jew and keep the law to join and stay in the family. That fits much better in the overall

context of the argument of Romans, although it may make us have to work harder to find parallels today.

The NP also helps us to resolve some so-called contradictions or ‘problem’ texts in Scripture. Luther did not utterly reject the letter of James, but he (and many since his time) had difficulty appreciating its value for the gospel of Christ because 2.14–26 seems to contradict directly Paul’s teaching (especially Gal 2.16; Rom 3.28).<sup>30</sup> Likewise, the positive outcome in the judgment according to works in Rom 2.7 and 2.10 (compare 2.14–16) does not fit well into Paul’s argument as understood according to some traditional Protestant interpretations; it has sometimes been dismissed as hypothetical, even though there is nothing in the text itself to support such a conclusion.<sup>31</sup>

Another benefit is a better theological assessment of writings as a whole. Because some scholars still consider justification by faith to be *the* central doctrine of Paul, when that theme is absent in a writing attributed to him the writing becomes suspect. Likewise, the absence of explicit teaching of justification by faith in texts about Paul in Acts forms one argument for denying the reliability of Luke’s account. Appreciating the fact that Paul only refers to justification in particular Jewish contexts, helps us to put his other writings into proper perspective.

## A More Balanced, Integrated Faith?

The NP does not deny the Bible’s power to speak to individuals, but it reminds us that authentic Christianity is fundamentally corporate. Texts that have often been read in the past as though originally meant to answer a person’s pursuit for security now are seen to address the problem of the maintenance of barriers separating one group of people from another. We find ourselves reminded acutely that the earliest theological battle within the church over conditions for membership was settled in favour of a more inclusive view.

At the same time, the NP can help our teaching preserve Christ’s emphasis on the importance of love for our neighbour and avoid the danger of antinomianism. Although grace-less moralism will always be an equal and opposite danger, recovery of the truth that what we do reflects who we are is vital if Christian witness is to have any integrity today.

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## Conclusion

The New Perspective has implications for our understanding of Paul's view of Judaism, the Old Testament, and ultimately the relationship of faith and 'works.' It offers us a way of reading Paul that avoids the dangers of Marcion and antinomianism, as it enables us to reclaim more of the Jewish roots of our faith. Although it may suggest that some revision is necessary, it does not undermine the truth of justification by grace through faith. More importantly it reminds us afresh of the inclusive and corporate nature of the Christian faith as preached by Paul.

# 7

## Bibliography for Further Study

### Websites

For those online, the best starting point is Mark M Mattison's ever-expanding collection of resources to be found at 'The Paul Page':

<http://www.thepaulpage.com>

For the latest writings of Tom Wright, one of the most prolific NP authors, go to:

<http://www.ntwrightpage.com>

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# Notes

- 1 S Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, p xiv.
- 2 In the meantime, for more on Pauline authorship see for example, L T Johnson with T C Penner, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Revised edition, London: SCM, 1999). On Acts and Paul, see R Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 1998).
- 3 The Greek root underlying the words 'justification,' 'justify' and 'justice' is the same root rendered by 'righteousness.'
- 4 The word 'Torah' means 'teaching,' and is often used simply as a summary for the teachings of the Jewish religion. It can refer to the Pentateuch alone or more broadly to Jewish oral interpretation built up over the centuries. Orthodox Jews regard both the written and oral Torah to be a gift from God.
- 5 See especially the influential essay by Krister Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Intropective Conscience of the West,' and particularly his discussion of Romans 7 in pp 92–94.
- 6 Strictly speaking, the law provided a means of atonement and forgiveness for *unintentional* sins; intentional sin such as David's sin against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah brought a curse of expulsion and left the sinner simply on the mercy of God (Num 15.30f).
- 7 That is, lawlessness and rejection of any principles of behaviour; 'antinomianism' comes from two Greek words meaning 'against law.'
- 8 John's Gospel emphasizes that by trusting in Christ, the decisive judgment has already taken place, but even in John, what people do is inseparably tied with their fate (for example John 15.6, 10 and the importance of love; cf also 1 Jn 1–2).
- 9 So for example Matt 25.31–46; Rom 2.5–11, 16; 14.10; 1 Cor 3.12–15; 4.5; 2 Cor 5.10; 11.15b; Col 3.24f; 2 Thess 1.6–12. The most important recent study of the relation of justification by faith and final judgement according to works is by Kent Yinger, another scholar influenced by the NP (*Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*). Yinger demonstrates that there is an essential similarity between Jewish and Christian teachings about final judgement; both traditions emphasize a wholistic view of human works (as a whole they demonstrate a person's character) and neither reflects a fundamental theology of merit.
- 10 The phrase is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (*The Cost of Discipleship* [2nd ed; London: SCM, 1959]).
- 11 John 1.17 is not intending an absolute contrast, but expressing in semitic fashion a comparison. A typically Jewish way to say 'this more than that' is to say, 'not this, but that,' as in Hos 6.6.
- 12 'The New Perspective on Paul,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 (1983) pp 95–122; re-published with an additional note in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*, pp 183–214.
- 13 See for example G F Moore, 'Christian Writers on Judaism,' pp 197–254; *Judaism* II:93–95.
- 14 So for example Hengel and Deines ('E P Sanders' "Common Judaism," Jesus, and the Pharisees'), and especially Carson, O'Brien, and Seifrid (eds), *Justification*. The final essay in the latter by Carson which summarizes this helpful survey of Jewish material implies a much more negative verdict on Sanders' picture of Judaism than the individual articles in

the book combine to offer. A second, companion volume is forthcoming but had not been published when this booklet went to press.

- 15 The English translation published in ten volumes by Eerdmans (1964–76) of the German original, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*.
- 16 His most important articles on this are collected in *Jesus, Paul, and the Law*; see his *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* for a full overview of Paul.
- 17 The only extant examples are all in the Qumran literature: ‘works of the Torah’ (4QMMT; 4Q265); ‘works of Torah’ (4Q174, although the correct reading may be ‘works of *today* [thanksgiving]’); ‘works in Torah’ (1QS 5.21; 6.18; 4Q258; 4Q261).
- 18 Some Jewish Christians were apparently surprised that God was interested in including Gentiles in the first place (Acts 11.18: ‘*even* to the Gentiles’).
- 19 For a thorough and helpful analysis of the gradual separation of Christianity from Judaism, see Dunn’s *The Partings of the Ways* (London: SCM, 1991).
- 20 Or as Stendahl puts it in reverse, ‘Where Paul was concerned about the possibility of Gentiles to be included in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man’s salvation out of a common human predicament’ (‘Conscience,’ p 86).
- 21 See especially his *What Saint Paul Really Said* pp 113–33.
- 22 *What Saint Paul Really Said* p 119.
- 23 On the general subject of Paul’s interest in Jesus, see D Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1995) and his Grove Biblical booklet B 7 *Paul and the Historical Jesus*.
- 24 ‘The Letter to the Romans’ p 491.
- 25 ‘Editorial Comment,’ in *Themelios* 26.1 (Autumn 2000) p 2.
- 26 ‘The “New Perspective on Paul” and its Problems,’ p 18.
- 27 *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Redencion Viva, 1989).
- 28 See my *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1–15.13* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), especially pp 208–236.
- 29 The question of whether the horrors of Christian behaviour towards the Jews in the past (and especially the Holocaust) should negate *in principle* the evangelization of the Jews is too large an issue to address here, apart from one assertion. Neither a long history of non-Christian persecution of the followers of Jesus (including the massacre of millions of Armenian believers at the beginning of the 20th century) nor our own human failures could in any way undermine the apostolic confidence that Jesus was, is, and shall ever be the saving Lord over all.
- 30 A closer look at the texts reveals that Paul and James mean different things by the words ‘faith’ (Paul: ‘faith that works through love’ [Gal 5.6]; James: ‘empty profession’ [Jas 2.14, 19]), ‘works’ (Paul: ‘religious actions that mark out Jews from Gentiles’; James: ‘acts of compassion and love towards the neighbour’ [Jas 2.15–16; what Paul would call ‘fruit’]), and ‘justified’ (Paul: ‘declared by God to be acquitted’; James: ‘vindicated, demonstrated to be right’ [Jas 2.18, 24]).
- 31 Note that Paul does not say that the people in 2.7, 10 *merit* or *earn* what they receive.

The so-called 'New Perspective' suggests that traditional Protestant understandings of Paul, shaped by the Reformation, need revising—in particular the contrast between faith and works.

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