

# **The New Perspective Critique of Luther: A Response**

**Bart Eriksson**

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Faculty of Theology

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**Supervisor: Prof Ernest van Eck**

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## **PREFACE**

Unless otherwise noted all references to Luther's writings come from Luther's Works. American Edition 55 vols. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86.

## ABSTRACT

The New Perspective is a modern movement in New Testament scholarship which challenges Protestant interpretations of Paul's writings. However, since the New Perspective refers to schools of thought present in other time periods and since it also repeats some ideas regarding Pauline interpretation found in the early church period or the Middle Ages it needs first to be viewed within the overall context of Christian interpretation of Paul throughout the ages.

It used to be the case, state New Perspective scholars, that Protestants assumed that Paul was to Judaism as Luther was to Medieval Catholicism. Both men supposedly reacted against legalistic religions and championed grace-based faiths. However, now that E. P. Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, has demonstrated that Judaism is not a legalistic but a grace-based faith, New Perspectivists claim that Paul's and Luther's theologies and experiences were thus not parallel. Hence, supposedly Luther misunderstood Paul.

Additionally, building on the work of Schweitzer, Wrede and others New Perspectivists challenge Protestant understandings of "justification." In New Perspective thought, Paul uses the term "justification" primarily to describe how people, particularly Gentiles, join the church Christians without following Jewish ritual laws. "Justification," then, does not describe how people "stay in" the covenant and receive salvation, as Protestants think.

However, this study maintains that while New Perspectivists have some knowledge of Paul and Judaism, they have much less knowledge regarding Luther, Medieval Catholicism, and Luther's reaction to it. Greater scrutiny of these latter areas reveals large difficulties with New Perspective arguments. In addition, a review of relevant passages from Paul's letters demonstrates that Protestants have not misunderstood Paul's use of the term "justification." Many Pauline passages show that when Paul discusses justification he is also thinking about "staying in," not just "getting in" the covenant.

Furthermore, many scholars have now challenged Sanders' interpretations of first-century Judaism. While Sanders has no doubt done a tremendous service to New Testament scholarship by demonstrating that there is more grace in Judaism than F. Weber, Bultmann,



F. C. Baur and others had presumed, some scholars now state that Sanders has overstated the elements of grace in some facets of first-century Judaism. In addition, many scholars now agree that first-century Judaism was a diverse movement and cannot be accurately depicted by general descriptions. Sanders' understanding of a "common Judaism," present up until 70 AD have now been challenged.

All of this, however, effects our interpretation of Paul. If first-century Judaism was diverse, then one would expect that Paul, in responding to Judaism would respond to both legalistic and grace-based interpretations of the Torah covenant. When examining Paul's letters one sees that this is exactly what Paul does. His critique of Judaism is more multi-faceted than many people have understood.

Although the New Perspective critique of Luther is not accurate and although most of its other key ideas can be challenged, the New Perspective has not been a wasted effort.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

For the last five hundred years, many Protestants believed that Luther correctly understood Paul's viewpoints. Furthermore, many Protestants also assumed that the Jewish covenant was in some ways similar to Medieval Catholicism. Both Judaism and Medieval Catholicism, it was presumed, were covenants based on legalism, where the adherents believed that one had to earn one's way into heaven by the performance of good works. In contrast, in the Protestant view, Paul taught that Jesus came to institute a new covenant; a covenant based on grace and faith in his atoning sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

A break with the Reformation camp (or at least the way that the Reformation theology had come to be understood by nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestantism) began with the work of Wrede and Schweitzer. Davies, Stendahl, Montefiore, Schoeps and others made contributions which also added to this break.

However, the real launch of this challenge to the Reformation approach to Paul took place in 1977, when E.P. Sanders wrote *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. This book had such an impact in the scholarly community that within a few short years N.T. Wright used the expression: "The New Perspective on Paul," to give name to those who were influenced by Sanders to challenge the traditional Protestant approaches to justification in Paul.

Building on the work of other scholars, Sanders asserted that Judaism is not nearly as legalistic and works oriented as many scholars had previously assumed. He describes Judaism as being a "covenantal nomist" faith, meaning that in Judaism one enters the covenant through grace (birth as a Jew and therefore a grace-based election into the covenant). Once one is in the covenant, one only needs to maintain one's status as part of the covenant by doing works. Also, the whole purpose of the temple was in order to provide a means to atone for sins, offering forgiveness to those who needed it. Hence Judaism is much more grace-based than Protestant scholars had supposed.<sup>1</sup>

Since this is the case, Sanders asserted, Paul might not have been reacting against legalistic tendencies in Judaism after all. In Sanders' view, this covenantal nomist Judaism

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<sup>1</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 422.

was more grace-centered than Medieval Catholicism. Also, given Sanders' understandings, it would only follow that since Judaism is grace-based, we can no longer say that Paul is to Judaism what Luther was to Catholicism. Following from this, Reformation interpretations of Paul's soteriology and expectations of Christian behaviour need to be revised.<sup>2</sup> In short, Paul must be saying something different than what Luther and other Protestants had assumed that he was saying.

Other scholars have seized upon Sanders' insights and begun an exploration of Paul's writings from the starting point of a grace-based Judaism. Among these, James Dunn and N.T. Wright are the best known.

Since New Perspective scholars are breaking with what has come to be accepted Protestant approaches to Pauline scholarship, they are also often critical of what they presume to be Luther's Pauline interpretations. They first fault Luther for believing that justification was chiefly about sin, guilt and ethics and not about eliminating ethnic boundaries. In addition, New Perspective scholars have also often suggested that Luther was in effect an antinomian; someone who minimized Paul's expectation for high standards in Christian ethical behavior. In this study, it is argued that a closer reading of Luther reveals that this is not the case and that New Perspective thinkers have misunderstood or are ignorant of Luther's teachings on this and many other issues.

This study's central thesis is that while certain aspects of the New Perspective critique of the Protestant paradigm have value, both Luther and Medieval Catholicism have been seriously misunderstood by New Perspective scholars. As a result, the New Perspective's critique of Luther needs to be revised. This study claims that New Perspective scholars are reacting to a caricature of Luther, rather than Luther as he actually was. One might even say that although New Perspectivists have improved the scholarly community's understanding of Judaism, they have replaced the previous ignorance about Judaism with a corresponding ignorance about Luther and the Reformation traditions in which many of these scholars have their own heritage.

In the second chapter, this study first looks at the history of the interpretation of justification within the church. Since some of the New Perspective ideas revive older pre-

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<sup>2</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 431-523.

Reformation understandings of Paul, the study briefly reviews the history of Pauline interpretation prior to the Reformation.

The study then continues by looking at the history of the development of New Perspective thinking. We examine some of the views of Biblical scholars in the last one hundred and fifty years. To some extent, the roots of the New Perspective stem from responses to the Biblical scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more so even than to Luther. Sometimes New Perspective scholars assume that the views of “Lutheran” scholars from this period are identical to those of Luther himself although this may not be the case. Thus, in Chapter 3, we explore some of the scholars with whom the New Perspectivists disagree. Bultmann is the chief of these. We also touch on some of the views of Judaism in German Pauline scholarship in the early twentieth century, as well as the understandings in that era of Paul’s motivations for reacting against Judaism.

In the next chapter we examine in greater detail some of the forerunners to New Perspective thought, namely: Wrede, Schweitzer, Davies and Stendahl, as well as Montefiore, Schoeps and Segal, three Jewish scholars. We next move on to discuss the New Perspective proper. In Chapter 5 we make a brief review of four New Perspective scholars, Sanders, Dunn, Wright and Donaldson.

Not all modern Pauline scholars agree with New Perspective approaches, however. Several have countered New Perspective claims and champion more traditional Protestant understandings. In the sixth chapter we hear some of the arguments that have been made from the “Old Perspective” camp in response to the New Perspective.

In Chapter 7 we pay closer attention to the claims of New Perspective scholars regarding Luther. In their analysis of the issues, New Perspective scholars have often looked at Luther’s response to Medieval Catholicism and compared it with Paul’s response to Judaism. We assert that New Perspective scholars, while having some knowledge of Paul and Judaism, have less knowledge of Luther and Medieval Catholicism. Therefore, they are prone to misunderstand: Luther, Medieval Catholicism and Luther’s reaction to it. When one takes a closer look at Medieval Catholic thought it is intriguing to discover that Medieval Catholicism is actually, to use Sander’s terms, a covenantal nomist faith. Its “pattern of religion” (again using Sander’s terminology) involves entry into the covenant through grace, but maintenance of one’s position within the covenant through works. In this regard it is

more similar to Sanders' understanding of "common Judaism" than many New Perspective scholars have realized. In addition, Luther has often been accused by New Perspective scholars that he advocated a Christianity devoid of a focus on obedience. In this chapter then we demonstrate the contrary opinion showing from several places in Luther's writings that the opposite situation is really the case.

In Chapter 8 we examine some of the issues involved in interpreting and understanding Luther's thought in the modern era, including: the harsh polemical style involved in most sixteenth century discussions of religion, Luther's approaches to Judaism, and the various misinterpretations of Luther made since the Reformation.

In explaining the basis for New Perspective thought, James Dunn, following Sanders, posits a four-part comparison, which he then critiques. Dunn says that traditional Protestant scholars have assumed that Paul was to first-century Judaism as Luther was to Medieval Catholicism. Both men, supposedly, were reacting against legalistic faiths and in response advancing more grace-based interpretations of faith. However, says Dunn, now that Sanders has demonstrated that Judaism is much more grace-based than had been perceived to be the case, we can no longer say that Paul is advocating grace in response to legalism. If Paul is not reacting to legalism, then we need to revise our understandings of Paul's true message. In Chapter 8 we examine in greater depth certain aspects of this four-fold comparison. In particular, we look at Luther's reaction to late Medieval nominalism.

If one takes a closer look at the late Medieval Catholic nominalism that Luther was chiefly reacting against, one discovers that it too is "covenantal nomist" in the way that Sanders' defines the term. Medieval Catholics believed that one entered God's covenant through grace in baptism, yet one was supposed to maintain one's place in that covenant through works. This discovery opens up a potential hole in the New Perspective approach. Quite possibly, Sanders' depiction of a covenantal nomist first century Judaism would be less grace-based than what he believes it to be.

We also look at Luther's understanding of Judaism. When taking a closer look at Luther's attitude towards Judaism we discover that Luther understands that Judaism is more grace-based than either New Perspective or Old Perspective scholars have often realized. Luther understands that the Jews knew that they entered their own covenant through grace, and Luther sees the entry point, circumcision, as functioning for the Jews in the same way

that baptism functions for Christians – an indication of God’s election. Luther also knew then that the Jews believed that they maintained their covenant status before God through works. In this regard then, Luther views Judaism as a “covenantal nomist” faith.

In the ninth chapter we examine Paul’s approach to Judaism. We argue that Sanders’ attempts to claim that there was a “common Judaism” that existed in the first century are faulty. Instead a scholarly consensus has arisen that Judaism in the first century was a very diverse movement. Given that this is the case, it only makes sense that the diversity present in Judaism needs to be taken into account when evaluating Paul’s response to Judaism. Hence, Paul’s reaction to Judaism is more complex than many have understood it to be. Before he critiques it, Paul has to first define the notion of Judaism that he is critiquing. In this regard Paul understands proper Judaism to be an extremely rigorous covenant. Second, Paul has to offer an alternative to the Judaism that he has just defined. He does this when he talks about salvation by grace through faith. Third, Paul then goes on to define who it is who belongs to “Israel” given the new covenant that has been created through Jesus Christ.

In Chapter 10 we take a closer look at the biggest challenge that the New Perspective offers to Luther and Protestantism: In Paul’s thought, does Jesus’ work on the cross atone for sins committed by Christians after baptism or are some human works or human sufferings required to supplement Jesus’ atoning work? We look at some passages in Paul’s letters on this topic.

In the eleventh chapter we summarize our findings and briefly discuss some other issues that the New Perspective has raised. In this chapter we talk about some of the positive effects that the New Perspective has had upon modern scholarship including improved interpretations of at least one passage from Romans and an increase in interest in rhetorical criticism.

The ramifications of the New Perspective are potentially far-reaching and widespread. A variety of scholars claim that the New Perspective represents a dramatic paradigm shift in New Testament scholarship on Paul. If this claim is correct, then the job of the scholarly community is to evaluate such shifts, either to build upon their strengths or correct their weaknesses. In this study we attempt to examine this newer understanding of Paul and the reactions to it, and also point out areas where there may be gaps in its approaches.

Although this study offers a critique of the New Perspective, it is also our contention that not all the contributions of the New Perspective are wasted. New Perspective scholars have contributed to better relationship between Jews and Christians. They have also rehabilitated the discussion of ethical thought within Paul's work. Furthermore, New Perspective scholars have contributed to the possibility of examining Paul's theology apart from the interpretation that Luther and the Reformers have given it and certainly apart from recent Enlightenment influenced interpretations. Although Luther's understandings of Paul can be defended, shedding fresh light on these topics can help bring very necessary clarity both to Paul and to the views of the Reformers.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BACKGROUND TO THE NEW PERSPECTIVE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF PAULINE INTERPRETATION IN THE WESTERN CHURCH

An evaluation of the New Perspective must begin with a review of historical approaches towards the doctrine of justification and the interpretation of Paul. This is because, on occasion, New Perspective scholars make reference to Medieval theology and to the early Church period when making their arguments. Later on we mention how N. T. Wright speculates that the Medieval Catholics perhaps were not as legalistic as Protestant polemic has suggested. In addition, as mentioned in the introduction, the New Perspective scholar James Dunn has to a large extent built his argument by first articulating a four-fold comparison, and then critiquing this same comparison.<sup>3</sup> Protestants used to believe, states Dunn, that Paul was to Judaism what Luther was to Medieval Catholicism. Both men were championing grace-based theologies in reaction to legalistic faiths. Protestants also believed, says Dunn, that both men had had similar conversion experiences where each was in need of finding a gracious God.<sup>4</sup> However, says Dunn, now that Sanders has demonstrated that Judaism was not a legalistic faith, the whole comparison falls apart. Paul, it turns out, was not reacting against a legalistic faith,<sup>5</sup> and, since that is the case, he must have had a much different message than what we had previously believed. Luther and the Reformers then, have at least in part, misunderstood Paul.<sup>6</sup> If one is to evaluate the truthfulness of Dunn's and Wright's arguments then one needs to know something about approaches to justification within Medieval Catholicism as well as within the early Church period preceding it.

There are two additional reasons for doing a brief review of perspectives on justification through the history of the church. The first is to trace the origin and similarity of

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<sup>3</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective" (Unpublished essay for ThM. Program, University of Toronto, 2003), 19.

<sup>4</sup> James Dunn, & Alain Suggate., *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 13, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 16.



various ideas on Pauline interpretation from then to now. One of the claims this study makes is that some aspects of what has been considered the “Old Perspective on Paul” are not really that old, in that some of these supposed “Old Perspective ideas” originate with Enlightenment influenced scholars and not with Luther and Calvin. At the same time only certain aspects of the New Perspective on Paul are really new. As Krister Stendahl has claimed, some of the issues raised by the New Perspective in the last few decades were already raised by other Christian thinkers in previous centuries. In order to fully understand and evaluate the New Perspective critique of Reformation Pauline interpretations, it is important to identify other places in Christian history where biblical interpreters have had similar viewpoints to New Perspective thinkers.

The second reason is that it is worth pointing out that the advent of the New Perspective has altered approaches to many areas of Christian thought and life, including Jewish–Christian relationships, various aspects of biblical interpretation, Protestant theology, and an evaluation of the early Church period. Let us look, though, at the history of Pauline interpretation and the understandings of justification within the church.

## **2.1. THE EARLY CHURCH PERIOD**

Debates about the proper way to interpret Paul’s soteriology, approaches to the law, and his understandings of Judaism began right from the time when he first wrote his letters. As J. Christiaan Beker says, “controversy about Paul throughout the centuries continues in our own time, evident in the diversity of new perspectives on his person and his thought.”<sup>7</sup>

Some of the echoes of these earliest debates on Pauline interpretation appear in the text of the New Testament itself. 2 Peter 3 contains a clear reference to a presumed misinterpretation of Paul. After warning against antinomian behaviour, the author of 2 Peter says:

Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15–16 NIV).

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<sup>7</sup> Beker, J. Christiaan, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul’s Thought* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990), x.

This passage implies that even during his own lifetime or shortly after his death, Christians were using Paul's claim that the Torah was no longer valid as an excuse for the kind of unethical behaviour that 2 Peter warned people against. It also seems likely that the warning in James 2:14–26 against a life of faith without deeds is also a response to a potential misinterpretation of Paul. The fact that there seem to be at least two Scripture references to Paul's work in the non-Pauline New Testament letters tells us that Paul must have clearly been influential in the Christian community of the first century AD.

At the same time, there has been debate among scholars about the extent of Paul's influence in the early Church and afterwards. Many scholars have said that the early Church Fathers appear to forget about Paul's theology and that his thought was not a central focus during the Church's first four centuries.<sup>8</sup> The truthfulness of this statement, of course, depends somewhat on what we understand as the proper interpretation of Pauline theology.

For an example of those who claim that Paul's influence in the early Church was limited, one needs to go no further than Adolf von Harnack. In a conversation with Von Harnack, Franz Overbeck, talking about the early church period, quipped: "Paul, 'only had one pupil who understood him, Marcion, and he misunderstood him.'"<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Bruce Corley says:

The earliest Christian sources from the patristic period give little hint of the disputes that were simmering about Paul. The first two centuries after the writing of the New Testament provide information about Paul mainly from two sources—either his misguided admirers or his virulent opponents.<sup>10</sup>

Alister McGrath has done a comprehensive review of the understandings of justification throughout Western Christian history. In summarizing the pre-Augustinian era of Pauline interpretation, McGrath says that the earliest Patristics were not chiefly concerned about justification; instead they were more concerned about the Trinity and Christology.<sup>11</sup> McGrath

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<sup>8</sup> Beker, *The Triumph of God*, 8, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, (trans. W. Montgomery; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. 1998), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now." in *The Road From Damascus. The impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (ed. Longenecker, Richard N.: Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 3–4.

<sup>11</sup> McGrath, Alister, *Iustia Dei: A History Of The Christian Doctrine of Justification*. Third Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32–33.

thus claims that Paul's theology of justification by grace was generally neglected during the Church's first three hundred and fifty years. McGrath speculates that part of the reason for the lack of attention to Paul may have had to do with uncertainty as to what was truly part of the canon.<sup>12</sup> It was only gradually that Paul's letters were accorded authority by the early church.<sup>13</sup> McGrath and others state that until the time of Augustine, early Christian theology for the most part was closer in its theological orientation to the books of James and Hebrews than it was to Paul's letters. Perhaps this is the case, since several of the earliest formations of the New Testament place these "Catholic" letters ahead of the Pauline letters.

An additional reason for the absence of a Pauline influence, McGrath speculates, was perhaps because of the struggles with Gnosticism. Many Gnostics asserted a fatalistic approach towards human nature and sinfulness, believing that humanity was responsible neither for its own sins nor for the evil of the world. In contrast, the theological tradition prior to Augustine almost unanimously asserts the idea of free will.<sup>14</sup> In fact, when Augustine first proposed his ideas of predestination, some of his opponents charged that he was advocating Gnosticism.

Robert Kelly states that from the time of Paul until that of Augustine, one of the chief paradigms describing the work of Jesus was that of the new Moses, the new law-giver. In the New Testament one finds this kind of emphasis when Jesus gives the "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew's gospel. Jesus, like Moses, stands on a mountain and dictates the law of God.<sup>15</sup> The *Letter of Barnabas*, which some scholars speculate originated in Alexandria in the early second century, maintains the same theme, also depicting Jesus as the new Moses, giving his new law.

It is also interesting to note that the *Letter of Barnabas* contains ideas which have been later echoed by Erasmus in his defense of Medieval Catholicism,<sup>16</sup> as well as—as we see later—the modern New Perspective scholar James Dunn.<sup>17</sup> Barnabas, Erasmus and Dunn all maintain a distinction between the ceremonial aspects of the law and the ethical aspects of

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<sup>12</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 34.

<sup>13</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 34.

<sup>14</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Kelly 1996 lectures, "Justification and Sanctification."

<sup>16</sup> Lohse, Bernhard, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 64.

<sup>17</sup> Dunn, James, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 346–360.

the Jewish law; although perhaps in different ways. In the *Letter of Barnabas*' case, the author seems to think that the law's ceremonial aspects have an allegorical interpretation.

One of the factors that might confuse those thinking to find Pauline influence in the early Church was the rigorous moral conduct of the early Christian community. Very little grace seemed to be offered to Christians who committed sins. Perhaps by necessity, and in response to the often hostile climate of the pagan Roman Empire, the early Christians had strict standards of Christian behaviour. For instance, while attitudes and practices of baptism shifted throughout time during the early Church period, a common view was that while the act of baptism, by joining us to the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3–10), forgave all the sins committed previous to baptism. However, many early Christians also thought that there were limited opportunities for repentance and forgiveness by Christians afterwards. This viewpoint is perhaps in keeping with the perspective we see in Hebrews 10:26–31.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (NIV).

Regardless of the source, Jonathan Hill, in his *History of Christian Thought*, states that the notion of atonement for post-baptismal sin through penance dominated the early Church period. Since opportunities for post-baptismal repentance were seen as limited, naturally then, many Christians postponed baptism until as late in life as possible.<sup>18</sup> The Emperor Constantine, for instance, was baptized on his deathbed, a common practice at this time.

One can find many examples in the Church's first few centuries of writers expounding that Christ's work on the cross did not atone for post-baptismal sin. For instance, Irenaeus, bishop in Lyons in the late second century, also believed that while baptism washed away all sins committed prior to its enactment, sins committed after baptism (if they were not mortal sins) had to be atoned for by doing works of penance.<sup>19</sup> Although

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<sup>18</sup> Hill, Jonathan, *The History of Christian Thought* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 69.

<sup>19</sup> Hazlett, Ian ed., *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600* (London: SPCK, 1991), 222.

with respect to justification Irenaeus states that: “The powerful Word, and true man, redeeming us by his own blood in a reasonable way, gave himself as a ransom for those who have been led into captivity,”<sup>20</sup> still, in addition to this, he viewed Jesus as a new Moses who provided us with a stricter moral law than the first Moses did, although with a greater dose of grace to accomplish this law.

Some Christians believed that a person would have one chance for repentance and forgiveness after baptism, others believed possibly in two. Some Christians believed in none. However, for those who did not wait for a deathbed baptism there was very little leniency allowed when it came to atonement for post-baptismal sin. The *Shepherd of Hermas*, a book often included in early Christian collections of Scripture, tells its listeners to take heart, because they have been given by God *one* additional chance for repentance. Yet from that point on, no more clemency would be allowed them.<sup>21</sup>

Many Christians in the first few centuries talked about martyrdom as a “second baptism” which like the first, would also cleanse the recipient from all sins. The first North-African Christian document that we have, likely written around 180 AD, entitled *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, speaks in thankful terms about the death of martyrdom since martyrdom allows for the recipient to go to paradise.<sup>22</sup> This belief again did not allow for much laxity for those who stumbled into sin. Still, it partly explains the composure, and in some cases eagerness, with which many Christians greeted their martyrdom. If they thought that this act would finally mean the forgiveness of their sins, not easily obtainable through other means, then one can well imagine why they could be eager to seek it out.

One such martyr, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was sentenced to die in Rome under the emperor Trajan. While on the way to Rome, he actually wrote a letter to the Roman church asking those with prestige and social clout in the congregation not to use their influence to secure his release. He writes:

The truth is, I am afraid it is your love that will do me wrong. For you, of course, it is easy to achieve your object; but for me it is difficult to win my way to God, should you be wanting in consideration of me.... Grant me no more than that you let my

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<sup>20</sup> Bettenson, Henry, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 30.

<sup>21</sup> Schopp, Ludwig, ed., *The Fathers of The Church*, Volm 1 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 240.

<sup>22</sup> Frend, W.H.C, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 79.

blood be spilled in sacrifice to God.... I am writing to all the Churches and state emphatically to all that I die willingly for God, provided that you do not interfere. I beg you, do not show me unseasonable kindness. Suffer me to be the food of wild beasts, which are the means of making my way to God. God's wheat I am, and by the teeth of wild beasts I am to be ground that I may prove Christ's pure bread.<sup>23</sup>

Clement of Alexandria was a theologian who preceded Origen by a generation. He emphasized obedience to Christ like the other theologians of this period. According to Clement, Christ's chief task again was to teach the moral law. Faith for Clement was daily assent to obey Christ's commands.<sup>24</sup> He believed that spiritual perfection was attainable by an elite group within the church.<sup>25</sup> In keeping with the message of the "Shepherd of Hermas," Clement also believed that only one post-baptism repentance was possible.<sup>26</sup> "Clement said that if allowed continual and successive repentings for sins, Christians would not differ from the non-Christians."<sup>27</sup>

The well-known North African theologian of the early third century, Tertullian, approached the pursuit of truth and the ideals of pure living with a passion that if possible even exceeded that of his contemporaries in Alexandria.<sup>28</sup> McGrath writes:

Similar ideas have often been detected in the writings of Tertullian, leading some commentators to suggest that his theology is merely a republication of that of Judaism, and others charging him with uniting Old Testament legalism with Roman moralism and jurisprudence. His most debatable contribution to the developing western tradition on justification, his introduction of the term *liberum arbitrium* aside, is his theology of merit. For Tertullian, those who perform good works can be said to make God their debtor. The understanding of the "righteousness of God" as *reddens unicuique quod suum est* underlies this teaching. A similar tendency can be detected in his teaching that humans can "satisfy" their obligation to God on account of their sin through penance.<sup>29</sup>

For Christians who had committed sins after baptism and had already used up their chances for repentance, a series of penances were devised. Thus, one of the ways that the early Christians dealt with the problem of repentance was to make distinctions between the various

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<sup>23</sup> Stark, Rodney, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 181.

<sup>24</sup> Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Latourette, Kenneth Scott *A History of Christianity*. Vol. I (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 215.

<sup>27</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 1:215.

<sup>28</sup> McGonigle, Thomas and Quigley, James, *A History of the Christian Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 90-91.

<sup>29</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 37.

kinds of sins that could be committed. By the early third century three classifications of sins had developed. First, there were the minor sins or venial sins. These could be forgiven through the practice of good works and prayer. Secondly, there were the mortal sins. These were more serious and could be forgiven only by a second repentance. Finally there were the third kind of sins—deadly sins—which meant permanent exclusion from a church. These included the worship of idols or apostasy, murder, fornication, and adultery.<sup>30</sup> Tertullian, however, was the first person to enumerate seven deadly sins: idolatry, blasphemy, murder, fornication, adultery, false-witness and fraud.<sup>31</sup>

Some Christians asserted that there could be no earthly reconciliation after committing one of these sins. According to some, the best that could be done in the case of a sin like apostasy was to have the person perform a life-long penance in the hope that God would be able to forgive what the church could not.<sup>32</sup> Tertullian's thoughts ran along these lines. Though initially he allowed for one repentance after baptism, eventually he stated that he did not believe that repentance was possible for a deadly sinner.<sup>33</sup> Tertullian held that humans continued in the grace that came from baptism if they did not sin after that point, but if they sinned it was necessary for the sinner, in addition to expressing sorrow, to satisfy God, reconciling God to himself or herself. Tertullian also believed that martyrdom resulted in the forgiveness of sins. He coined the phrase "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."<sup>34</sup>

Given the intellectual climate of early Christianity, many Protestant scholars have in essence agreed with Von Harnack in claiming that Paul's letters had little influence in the early church period. Even though Paul's thought perhaps exercised less authority in the early Church period than it has in the centuries since, there were early church writers who did pay attention to Paul. The first Latin commentary on Paul's letters that we know of is by Ambrosiaster. It is interesting to see, however, that he interpreted Paul's doctrine of

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<sup>30</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 1:215.

<sup>31</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 1:215.

<sup>32</sup> Hazlett, *Early Christianity, Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, 222.

<sup>33</sup> Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 81.

justification as freeing us from the Jewish ceremonial law, not from other good works.<sup>35</sup>

Concerning Ambrosiaster's commentary on Paul, McGrath writes:

Most modern commentators on this important work recognize that its exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith is grounded in the contrast between Christianity and Judaism; there is no trace of a more universal interpretation of justification by faith meaning freedom from a law of works—merely freedom from the Jewish ceremonial law. The Pauline doctrine of freedom from the works of the law is given a specific historical context by Ambrosiaster, in the Jewish background to Christianity. In other respects, Ambrosiaster is more akin to Pelagius than to Augustine.<sup>36</sup>

How does all of this have relevance for the current debate about the New Perspective on Paul? First, as mentioned before, it is worth noting that the distinction between Jewish ceremonial laws and ethical laws that Ambrosiaster and some of the other early Christian writers made is in some ways similar to the one that the New Perspective scholar Dunn makes. Dunn claims that Paul's phrase "the works of the law," chiefly focuses on Jewish ceremonial laws (laws that kept the Jewish community distinct from the nearby Gentiles), as opposed to ethical laws.<sup>37</sup> Krister Stendahl too, a pioneer in New Perspective thinking, looks to early Christian thinkers like Ambrosiaster when he claims that the early Christians truly understood what Paul was actually talking about; a reaction against Jewish ceremonial laws, not a quest for a gracious God.<sup>38</sup> In this sense one can see that the views of the New Perspectivists are not necessarily all that new.

Also, the general approach to Paul within the early church seems rather distant from Luther's interpretation of Paul. What is more, one can see that some of the legalistic positions that Protestants have criticized within Medieval Catholicism were not necessarily innovations and distortions of early Christian thought—as many Protestants have often claimed—but often straight evolutions from early Christian thought and practices. Thus in many ways the Medieval Catholics better resembled the majority of our early Christian forebears than did Luther.<sup>39</sup> Luther himself acknowledges this, complaining that aside from

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<sup>35</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 37.

<sup>36</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 347–359.

<sup>38</sup> Stendahl, K., *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 16.

<sup>39</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of The Christian Doctrine of Justification*. First Edition, Volumes I & II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1:17, 185.



perhaps Augustine and a few other lonely voices, his own position receives little support from the church theologians who came before him.<sup>40</sup>

Schweitzer's opinion on Paul's influence on the Patristics is more nuanced. Schweitzer at times repeats what others say in stating that the early Christians misunderstood or ignored Paul. After all, says Schweitzer, just as in the world of music, J. S. Bach's music was relatively unknown for several decades after his death, Luther's thought was not always accurately caught by the Lutheran Orthodox school some decades after Luther. Hence scholars cannot naively assume that the second generation in any movement always automatically builds on its predecessors. In the same way, it is not possible, says Schweitzer, to assume that Paul's insights were automatically passed down to those who immediately came after him.<sup>41</sup>

However, at other times, Schweitzer states that some of the early Church Fathers do carry Pauline conceptions over into a new framework,<sup>42</sup> and that Paul's theological influence was not wholly ignored but merely reinterpreted.<sup>43</sup> For instance, he states:

As in Paul's teaching, so also in Ignatius, Justin, and the Gospel of John, the resurrection is effected by the mystical union with Christ which is brought about by the sacraments. The only difference is that the mystical partaking in the Logos-Spirit of Christ has taken the place of the mystical dying and rising again with Christ. Baptism consequently no longer brings about a state of having already risen again, but as in the Greek Mysteries a new birth. Ignatius, Justin, and the Fourth Evangelist do not therefore, in their conception of the sacraments, create anything essentially new, however surprisingly new their formulae may sound in some respects, but simply develop further, in accordance with the needs of time, something which began with Paul.<sup>44</sup>

Like McGrath, Schweitzer also speculates that the struggles with Gnosticism can account for the reduced role that Paul's theology had in the early Church period compared with later centuries.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, AE 33:72.

<sup>41</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, *Paul and His Interpreters*, (trans. W. Montgomery; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), 50.

<sup>42</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 341, 371.

<sup>43</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 334–375.

<sup>44</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 287.

<sup>45</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 375.

Yet with some of his ideas Schweitzer is even closer to the Patristics and even farther from the Old Perspective paradigm than many New Perspective scholars. In his *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, he claims that for Paul, Jesus' death on the cross does not accomplish ongoing forgiveness of sins but merely a one-time forgiveness. He writes:

Fellowship with Christ in suffering and death is the solution of post-baptismal sin. According to the view of Paul, as of primitive Christianity in general, the atoning death of Christ does not procure continuous forgiveness of sins, but only the release obtained in baptism from previously committed sins. For subsequent transgressions atonement is secured by suffering with Christ.<sup>46</sup>

Schweitzer also writes:

And moreover, they overlooked the fact that, however it may suit our taste to represent the results of Jesus' death as appropriated by the mind, there still clings to it something alien to our thought. The continuously renewed forgiveness of sins, which the religious have sought to find in it, both in the Reformation period and in modern times, is unknown to it and impossible to it. In it Christ's atoning death has reference only to sins committed in the old condition of existence, that is to say, before baptism (Rom 3:25). Paul's doctrine of righteousness by faith is nothing else than a particular formulation of the Early Christian conception of the possibility of repentance secured by the death of Jesus. To derive the quasi-physical redemption-doctrine of the being-in-Christ mysticism from the doctrine of righteousness by faith is from many points of view impossible.<sup>47</sup>

The difficulty with Schweitzer's claim above is that, unlike most of his other viewpoints, he produces no quotations from Paul's letters to support the claim that Jesus' death only atones for pre-baptismal sin. Since Luther and Augustine claim that Christ's death on the cross do procure continual forgiveness of sins for a Christian after baptism as well as at the moment of baptism, Schweitzer's interpretation (at least on this front) represents a significant break with Reformation understandings on this topic and a shift back towards Patristic understandings.

All of this demonstrates the relevance of the current New Perspective debate for our understandings of the early Church period and Christian thought generally. If Dunn is correct in thinking that Paul distinguishes between ceremonial and ethical aspects of the law, and if Schweitzer is correct in assuming that Paul thinks that Jesus' atoning work only applies to pre-baptismal sin, then it may be that Paul's influence was not as lacking among the early

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<sup>46</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 146–147.

<sup>47</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 220.

Church Fathers as many scholars have assumed. However, even if Schweitzer and Dunn's interpretations of Paul are not accurate, but merely understandable misunderstandings, then this could explain the absence of Paul's thought within Patristic writings. The early Church Fathers did not set out to deliberately sideline Paul's thought; they merely misunderstood what he was trying to say. In either case, the New Perspective sheds light on this era of Pauline interpretation within the church.

In this study we maintain that the situation was more complex. Rarely in history can one come up with a simple rationale (including only one or two factors) for explaining intellectual and cultural trends. After all, in certain of the earliest early Church writings one can see echoes of Paul's letters. This is especially apparent in the first or second generation of writers after Paul. In Clement and Polycarp's own writings, as well as *Mathetes*, we see both frequent quotes from Paul as well as references to salvation by faith as opposed to works. Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*, Chapter 1 says: "In whom, though now you see Him not, ye believe, and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," into which joy many desire to enter, knowing that, "by grace ye are saved not by works," but by the will of God through Jesus Christ."<sup>48</sup> *Mathetes* Chapter 9, states: "He, Himself took on the burden of our iniquities, He gave his own son as a ransom for us, the Holy One for transgressors, the blameless one for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that are mortal."<sup>49</sup> Chapter 47 of Clement's *First Letter to the Corinthians* contains a reference to Paul,<sup>50</sup> and Chapter 32 of Clement's *First Letter to the Corinthians* says the following:

And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>51</sup>

In the martyrdom of Polycarp, which was obviously not written by Polycarp himself, and which was yet one more generation away from the lives of the Apostles, there is a tendency

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<sup>48</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325 (eds. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, revised A. Cleveland Coxe: Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc. 2004), 33.

<sup>49</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:28.

<sup>50</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:18.

<sup>51</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:13.

towards legalism. However, it is obvious that the authors of: Clement, Mathetes and Polycarp had read Paul's letters, and they did know about salvation by grace through faith.

So how does one explain what appears to many as the absence of Paul's teaching on justification within the early Church Fathers? First, one needs to state that at least with Luther's approaches, which will be examined later, moral teaching is not seen as necessarily opposed to the teaching of salvation by grace through faith. Another explanation could be the following: it may be the case that while Clement and Polycarp understood and believed Paul's views on salvation by grace through faith, the priority of these church leaders in their teaching of others was not justification, but holy-living; borrowing later terminology, not justification, but sanctification. After all, McGrath states that, prior to the Reformation, justification and sanctification were not viewed in separate categories but seen as part of the same process.

The early-Christian focus on sanctification might have arisen in part because of the surrounding cultural environment. In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark has written about how, by Jewish and early Christian standards, the moral standards of the nearby pagans were highly lax. Given the challenging environment that the early Christians lived in, the Church leaders may have felt that they could not afford to have members who were less than highly committed.

One perhaps can find an analogous situation to the early Christians with the preaching of the Lutheran pietists in Scandinavia two centuries ago. Scandinavian pietism arose in part as a reaction to moral chaos and vast social breakdown. According to Alf Åberg's *A Concise History of Sweden*, the rates of alcohol abuse by the Swedish population in the early 1800's were astronomically high. According to the statistics he offers, most adults would likely have been drunk on most days of the year!<sup>52</sup>

It's no wonder then that the nineteenth century Scandinavian pietistic revivals that arose in part in response to this situation were characterized by preaching whose messages

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<sup>52</sup> In 1829 there were 173,000 aquavit (highly potent Scandinavian vodka) stills in existence (Åberg pp. 81–82). Given that the Swedish population was only just over 2.5 million at the time, (Åberg p. 72) that worked out to roughly one still for every fifteen or sixteen Swedish inhabitants. Supposedly, in Sweden in the 1820's, the per-capita consumption of strong spirits like aquavit was forty–six litres per person per year (Åberg p. 82). Since families had many children in those days, and if one assumes that the children were not drinking the aquavit, then the adults would have drunk their forty–six litres as well as their children's forty-six litres! leaving most of them drunk on most days.

were highly moralistic compared to the preaching in Sweden today. These revivals were led for the most part by Lutheran pastors who would have been well-schooled in the doctrines of salvation by grace through faith. And yet, in the opinions of some, grace was not the prime focus of preaching in this period. In fact, the Lutheran descendants of these revivalists today commonly accuse the pietists as being excessively legalistic or even non-Lutheran.

This study argues that it was not so much the case that the pietistic revivalists were unaware of God's grace, rather their sermons contained the moralistic themes that they did because of their perceptions of the needs of the communities that they were addressing. The preaching of the law, it was felt, was a necessary response to the social chaos and societal breakdown prompted by widespread alcoholism. One can encounter a similar focus on holy-living in the Ingrian Lutheran church in Russia in response to the high levels of alcohol consumption and corruption in the Russian society today. To people who have grown up in that kind of society, strict moral preaching and a community that attempts to live by high moral standards is seen as a refreshing alternative to the surrounding culture.

For the Protestants of Luther's generation, who had grown up confronted by the moral rigours of Medieval Catholicism, the preaching of justification by grace through faith was appealing in part because its message was seen to be liberating. However, for people who have grown up in severe moral chaos, such as the Swedish pietists of the mid-1800's, or the Russian Lutherans today or quite possibly the early Christians, the preaching of ethics and holy living is welcomed because it is seen as liberating.

A good teacher emphasizes the messages that they think their audience needs to hear. We have seen how in recent times church leaders, who are very aware of the doctrines of salvation by grace through faith, choose not to focus on them in their teaching because of their perception of the needs of the community that they are addressing. It may have been then that in the first few generations after Paul, the early church leaders were also well aware of the doctrines of salvation by grace through faith, but that these doctrines did not receive a high degree of emphasis in their teaching because the messages were not perceived to be especially relevant to their audience.

There of course is the danger, when focusing on holiness in one's teaching, that one slides into legalism. This perhaps happened in the latter part of the early Church period. After all, although Polycarp talks about salvation by grace through faith in his own writings, the

*Martyrdom of Polycarp* (written by someone else) claims that Polycarp earned salvation through the merit he personally achieved by undergoing a martyr's death. In his eagerness to state that the manner of Polycarp's death had counted for something, the author did not pass on the message of salvation by grace and not through works that Polycarp himself had talked about. A similar process might have taken place throughout the rest of the early Christian community. Gradually, through lack of emphasis, Paul's influence on early Church theology was lost.

We will likely never know precisely why the early Church interpretations of Paul and his approach to justification took the form that they did. However, the advent of the New Perspective has opened up new possibilities for scholarly debate and examination of these areas. In addition, the New Perspective has raised the possibility that the opinions of the early church Fathers on Paul and justification might no longer be dismissed as being merely legalistic, but could possibly speak to the modern church with fresh authority. If they ever do, it would be helpful to be able to trace the origin of their ideas.

Schweitzer also has a different approach than some other scholars on the subject of the enduring influence of Paul's thought throughout the early church period. Since he does not see justification as the central point of Paul's doctrine, it would make sense for Schweitzer to be more open to the idea that the early Church Fathers prior to Augustine did not merely ignore Paul. Schweitzer thus claims that Paul's theological influence was not wholly ignored, but reinterpreted by the earliest early Church Fathers.<sup>53</sup>

Although a few scholars, such as Stendahl, claim that early Christian writers interpreted Paul better than later scholars have believed,<sup>54</sup> in general, Schweitzer's views stand in sharp contrast to the views of many others, who affirm that there has seemingly been little influence of Paul's theology in early Christian thinking.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 334–375.

<sup>54</sup> Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Beker, *The Triumph of God*, 8, 10.

## 2.2 JAMES DUNN AND APPROACHES TO THE LAW: ETHICAL VERSUS CEREMONIAL

Krister Stendahl argued that when talking about the law, Paul made a distinction between the ethical components of the Jewish law and the ceremonial components. Stendahl claims that while Paul encouraged Christians to follow the ethical parts, Paul discouraged them from following the law's ceremonial aspects.<sup>56</sup>

Stendahl is not alone in making this claim. Following Stendahl, several New Perspective scholars maintain that Paul distinguishes between various parts of the law's ceremonial versus ethical aspects. And as we have seen, this view has its historical roots as well. Many of the early Church Fathers, and some medieval Catholics, including Desiderius Erasmus, said much the same thing, namely that Paul distinguished between ethical and ceremonial laws.<sup>57</sup> According to Heiko Oberman, Gabriel Biel's views on ceremonial versus ethical laws in Paul were representative of the rest of the Medieval Catholics tradition:

[Biel's] main conclusion in accordance with the medieval tradition is indeed that the ceremonial and judicial laws – such as “an eye for an eye” – of the Old Testament have been abrogated; the moral law, with its core, the Decalogue, however, remains and stands approved by Christ.<sup>58</sup>

While many Protestants have argued that the early Christians misunderstood Paul, Stendahl argues that the early Church Fathers understood Paul better than Augustine did. The question about how to assimilate Gentiles into an initially Jewish church was the key issue of Paul's day, says Stendahl. By the time, however, that Augustine was alive, this issue had very much faded into the background. Since the Christian church had become largely Gentile by then, Stendahl states that Augustine misunderstood Paul's statements about the possibilities for Gentile inclusion into the Christian covenant without the use of the Torah. Instead, Augustine read Paul's comments about the obsolescence of the ceremonial Torah and he interpreted these as speaking to the theological conflicts of his own day, particularly the one with Pelagianism.<sup>59</sup> Augustine read Paul's discussion regarding the removal of Jewish ethnic

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<sup>56</sup> Segal, Alan, *Paul the Convert* (New Haven: Yale, 1990), 123.

<sup>57</sup> Oberman, Heiko Augustinus, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*. 3rd Edition (Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1983), 112.

<sup>58</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 113.

<sup>59</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 32-33.

boundaries for Gentiles, and mistakenly applied those statements to the notion of salvation by works versus salvation by grace and faith. Stendahl writes:

It was not until Augustine, more than 300 years after Paul, that a man was found who seemed to see, so to say, what made Paul “tick”, and who discerned the centre of gravity in Pauline theology: justification. Now the reason for this strange state of affairs is that the early church seems to have felt that Paul spoke about what he actually spoke about, i.e. the relationship between Jews and Gentiles – and that was no problem during those centuries.<sup>60</sup>

Dunn largely agrees with Stendahl’s insights. Paul, according to Dunn, essentially differentiated between the law’s ceremonial and ethical aspects. Dunn also maintains that we have misunderstood the New Testament definition of the word “Judaism.” When we encounter the word “Judaism” in Paul’s letters, such as the time when Paul refers to previous manner of life in Judaism (Gal. 1:13), we make the mistake of assuming that Paul has a similar understanding of the word Judaism that we would today, when in fact this is not the case. Nowadays, when we hear the word “Judaism” we are usually talking about the religious beliefs of Jewish people. We thus usually compare Judaism to the other major world religions, such as Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. Yet we forget that Paul would have used the term differently.

According to Dunn, the word “Judaism” arose during the Maccabean challenge to Syrian authority.<sup>61</sup> During the Syrian oppression of the Jewish people prior to the Maccabean revolt, there was great pressure upon the Jews to adopt the customs and culture of the surrounding Greek gentiles. Aside from the political pressure applied by the Syrian king, many Jews on their own decided to adopt Greek customs both before and after the Maccabean revolt. It was in this context that the term “Judaism” arose. “Judaism” was not a word used to describe the religious beliefs of Jewish people, as opposed to the beliefs of those adhering to other major religions. Rather, “Judaism” was the way of life that was contrasted with “Hellenism,” including the typical behaviour of Jews who wished to adopt Greek customs and practices.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Dunn claims that the issues that came into chief focus during the period of the Maccabean kings were the Jewish ceremonies, the law’s

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<sup>60</sup> Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Eriksson, “Modern Interpretations of Luther,” (Unpublished essay for ThM. Program, University of Toronto, 2003), 34-35.

<sup>62</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 346–350.



outward observance. These would have included activities such as styles of dress, festivals, circumcision, the food laws, hand washing, and others. Jews who wanted to resist the encroachment of Greek culture into their community insisted that these traditional Jewish ceremonial laws be followed. It is in this movement, Dunn claims, that one finds the origin of the phrase “Judaism.” In Paul’s era, Dunn argues, the people who practiced “Judaism” were those who wanted to resist the pressures to assimilate into Greek culture.

Following from this, Dunn also claims that Paul meant different things than what the Reformers thought he did when he uses the terms “works of the law” and “good works.”<sup>63</sup> Dunn’s approach to this term is not to focus on sin and salvation, but to focus on the role that the Jewish law would have played in keeping Jews and Gentiles apart. Dunn writes: “It is fairly obvious from Galatians 2:16 that the attitude against which Paul was protesting is summed up in the phrase ‘works of the law’. It was the attitude which maintained the separation of Jew from Gentile as a matter of principle.”<sup>64</sup> According to Dunn, the term “works of the law” does not mean “the presumption that by one’s own effort salvation could be achieved or earned.”<sup>65</sup>

Unlike, what Luther believed, claims Dunn, “works of the law” and “good works” are not synonymous. Dunn has written extensively about his notion that when Paul uses the phrase “works of the law,” he is talking about the parts of the Torah which the Jews of Paul’s own day argued about amongst themselves. These arguments revolved largely around the ceremonies and boundary marking rules, such as the timing for feasts and the laws surrounding meals.<sup>66</sup> It was these rules that for all intents and purposes separated Jews and Gentiles as well as the various Jewish sects from one another.<sup>67</sup> Dunn uses his explanation for the term “Judaism,” to support his argument that for Paul the phrase “works of the law” most of the time means the ceremonial and not the ethical dimensions of the Torah. All Jews, claims Dunn, agreed that the Ten Commandments needed to be followed. The main point of

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<sup>63</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Dunn, James D.G., *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 75.

<sup>65</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, 75.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, 77–79

<sup>67</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 347–350, 354–359.

contention between the Hellenizing Jews and those resisting Hellenistic cultural assimilation were the Jewish ceremonies and the proper enactment of them, not the ethical laws.

In the book *Justification: Five Views*, Dunn defends this reading of Paul with the following statement:

Again, it is too little noted that Paul could say, ‘Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; what matters is keeping the commandments of God.’ (1 Cor 7:19). Of course, Paul would have been well aware that circumcision is one of the commandments (Gen 17:9-14). The point is that only someone who differentiated between commandments (works of the law) could make such an assertion. This obviously provides an explanation of how Paul could set aside or devalue commandments like circumcision and the laws of clean and unclean, while, at the same time strongly reasserting the commandments against idolatry and sexual license.<sup>68</sup>

To further support his arguments, Dunn holds up the Qumran community as an example. This community, claims Dunn, was not interested in recruiting Gentile members, nor did they engage in disputes with Gentiles about theological matters. Yet this community did entertain many disputes with other Jewish groups.<sup>69</sup> In the writings found at Qumran one can find at least one circumstance where the statement “some of the works of the law” clearly refers to a ceremonial, as opposed to an ethical approach to the law.<sup>70</sup> Similar to the Qumranites, asserts Dunn, Paul must have used the phrase the “works of the law” in this fashion. Hence, it would only make sense that when Paul contrasts “good works” with “works of the law”, by “good works” he is merely focusing on ethical deeds which were advisable to live in accordance with. Paul, of course, would be appreciative of these.

Dunn’s approach to “works of the law” has served to highlight one of his other concerns, what he considers to be a lax approach within much of modern Protestantism towards ethical behaviour. In a recent essay, Dunn complains about the “old perspective” approach in Protestantism by saying the following:

In setting up such a sharp antithesis between gospel and law, too little attention was given to the way in which Paul affirmed the law, emphasizing both its continuing validity and the importance that believers should obey it. I need only refer to passages like Rom 3:27–31; 8:1–4; 13:8–10 and 1 Cor 7:19 for the point to be clear. Faith and

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<sup>68</sup> Dunn, “New Perspective View,” Pages 176-201 in *Justification Five Views* (eds. James K. Beilby, Paul Rhodes Eddy & Steven E. Enderlein; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2011), 199-200.

<sup>69</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 357–358.

<sup>70</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 357.

obedience were not diametrically opposed for Paul (Rom 1:5). The rather glib assertions that good works are not the root of justification but its fruit, and that it is not believers who fulfill the law but Christ in them or his Spirit, ignore such warnings as Rom 8:13 and Gal 6:8, which clearly lay some responsibility on believers themselves. A further result is the confusion of how on earth Paul reconciled his gospel of justification by faith and *not works* with his clear conviction that judgment will be *according to works* (as in Rom 2:6–13 and 2 Cor 5:10). One of the values of the debate engendered by the new perspective has been to bring this issue to center stage.<sup>71</sup>

Although Dunn asserts that most of the time the phrase “works of the law” means the ceremonial parts of the law, he at least in one place makes it clear that in his opinion “works of the law” does not always exclusively mean the ceremonies.<sup>72</sup> Dunn writes:

The phrase “the works of the law,” does, of course, refer to all or whatever the law requires, covenantal nomism as a whole. But in a context where the relationship of Israel with other nations is at issue, certain laws would naturally come more into focus than others. We have instanced circumcision and food laws in particular.<sup>73</sup>

N.T. Wright supports Dunn’s approach to the law in Paul. He writes.

Paul never spells out as precisely as we would like him to the difference between the ‘works of Torah’ which cannot bring justification and the ‘work of Torah’ which, written on the heart, produces even among gentiles the lifestyle which Torah wanted to produce but, because of unredeemed Adamic “flesh”, could not. (This is the distinction which older theology tried to capture in the imprecise, and potentially misleading, distinction of the “moral” and “ceremonial” law.) Generations of quasi–Marcionite post–Reformation readings, eager to label the Jewish law as a “bad” thing now happily “abolished” in the gospel, have produced a climate of thought where Paul’s key sayings, have not been taken seriously.... This is where the so–called ‘new perspective’, and the contribution of James Dunn in particular, have been especially helpful.<sup>74</sup>

As discussed later, Dunn thinks that the New Perspective on Paul does not aim to undermine Luther’s claim that God is gracious and that the entry point for Christian belief is grace. According to Dunn, the New Perspective merely claims that Luther paradoxically made the

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<sup>71</sup> James Dunn, “What’s Right About The Old Perspective on Paul,” in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles, Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo* (eds. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014), 228.

<sup>72</sup> Eriksson, “Martin Luther and the New Perspective on St. Paul,” (Leipzig: VDM Verlag, 2009), 38.

<sup>73</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 358.

<sup>74</sup> Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1109.

correct discovery from the wrong Pauline materials.<sup>75</sup> However, as we have already noted, some the New Perspective scholars such as Dunn, as well as some of the early Church Fathers and Medieval Catholics scholars all have similar approaches to the law—in essence maintaining that Paul differentiated between the law’s ceremonial and ethical parts. This similarity of opinions indicates that the New Perspective and the Medieval Catholics likely have more in common than Dunn realizes and that there is perhaps a larger gulf between the New Perspective and traditional Protestant than Dunn claims.

### **2.3 BACKGROUND TO THE NEW PERSPECTIVE: AUGUSTINE TO LUTHER**

Some modern writers have claimed that the New Perspective has challenged or even overthrown the Lutheran–Augustinian paradigm of Pauline interpretation.<sup>76</sup> Wright (despite admitting that he has not researched Medieval Catholicism) still speculates that perhaps the Medieval Catholic theologians might not have been as legalistic as we had presumed them to be, and that modern scholars should perhaps give them a second look.<sup>77</sup> To fully understand the New Perspective then, one needs to know something about Augustine’s views on Paul, as well as the approaches of the Medieval Catholic theologians.

Whatever one’s assessment is of the accuracy of Pauline interpretation within the church’s first three hundred and fifty years, interpretation of Paul shifted markedly with the writings of Augustine (AD 354–430). In the view of many later scholars, Augustine rediscovered Paul.

Augustine’s views on salvation were developed or at least articulated out of the controversy with Pelagius and his followers. We know relatively little about Pelagius’ actual writings. Most of what we know concerning him is from the writings of his opponents. We do know that Pelagius was a monk from Britain who came to Rome around the year 400 AD, and was dismayed at the low state of moral conduct among the Christians there. He thought that there was a need for moral reform.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Corley, “Interpreting Paul’s Conversion - Then and Now,” 1.

<sup>77</sup> Wright, N. T., *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 76.

<sup>78</sup> Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 52.

Pelagius denied original sin; instead he asserted that humans have free will to choose between good and evil. He writes:

Everything good and everything evil, in respect of which we are either worthy of praise or of blame, is done by us, not born with us. We are not born in our full development, but with a capacity for good and evil; we are begotten as well without virtue as without vice, and before the activity of our own personal will there is nothing in a man but what God has stored in him.<sup>79</sup>

Because of this freedom, Pelagius also held that God gave humanity the potential to reach a state of moral perfection. Pelagius did believe that God gave grace, but grace for him was the gift of God that allows us to fulfil God's commands more easily. Salvation, then, was a result of personal effort and holy achievement, not from grace in and of itself.<sup>80</sup>

In response to Pelagius, Augustine formulated an approach to Paul's understanding of grace and free will which later formed the basis for Protestant thought. Augustine had originally endorsed similar theology as the other Church Fathers, asserting human free will, but by 395 AD his thinking had begun to change.<sup>81</sup> McGrath comments:

1. Humanity's election is now understood to be based upon God's eternal decree of predestination. Augustine had earlier taught that man's election by God is prior to God's eternal election of humanity.
2. Humanity's response of faith to God's offer of grace is now understood to be in itself a gift of God. Augustine abandons his earlier teaching that humanity's response to God depends solely upon the human's unaided free will.
3. While conceding that human free will is capable of many things, Augustine now insists that it is compromised by sin, and incapable of leading to justification unless it is first liberated by grace.<sup>82</sup>

In response to Pelagius, Augustine argued that humanity had inherited the sin of Adam and the only way to be saved was through the reception of God's grace. Augustine believed that fallen humanity did not inherently have the freedom to do good but only through God's gift via the Holy Spirit's action could we do good.

Various aspects of Augustine's thought contributed to the controversies which were to be of central focus during the Reformation period and afterwards. For instance, although

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<sup>79</sup> Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 53.

<sup>80</sup> Price, B.B., *Medieval Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 37.

<sup>81</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 39.

<sup>82</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 40.

Augustine believed in predestination, he appears to ascribe some role in the justification process to human response. McGrath explains:

According to Augustine, the act of faith is itself a divine gift, in which God acts upon the rational soul in such a way that it comes to believe. Whether this action on the will leads to its subsequent assent to justification is a matter for man, rather than God. *Qui fecit te sine te, non te iustificat sine te.* Although God is the origin of the gift which man is able to receive and possess, the acts of receiving and possessing themselves can be said to be man's.<sup>83</sup>

And although Augustine did not make a distinction between justification and sanctification but saw it all as part of the same process, it is clear also that he believed that humans had some freedom in the regenerative or sanctifying part of the justification process.

Once justified by divine action, the sinner does not at once become a perfect example of holiness. The man needs to pray to God continually for growth in holiness and the spiritual life, thereby acknowledging that God is the author of both. God operates upon mankind in the act of justification, and cooperates with him in the process of sanctification.<sup>84</sup>

Augustine also believed that while God's grace came upon people at baptism, and while salvation was not possible without the grace that baptism represents, not all the baptized will automatically be saved. This is because while baptism prepares people for justification, God's grace is again necessary for them to continue in their salvation. Consequently Augustine could envision certain situations where God may supply enough grace to "give the regenerate faith, hope and love, and yet decline to give them perseverance."<sup>85</sup>

Finally, Augustine appears to endorse the idea of justification by faith. But he distinguishes between the mere intellectual faith held by demons (James 2:19), and true justifying faith. True justifying faith, says Augustine, is always attended by works of love. In asserting this Augustine focuses on Galatians 5:6 ("For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value, the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" NIV). Augustine says that this kind of faith, however, is a gift from God.

Augustine is also credited for first working out the doctrine of predestination. In fact, Augustine often sounds double predestinarian. Many of his peers challenged this doctrine,

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<sup>83</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, First Edition, 1:27.

<sup>84</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, First Edition, 1:28.

<sup>85</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, First Edition, 1:29.

even the non–Pelagians. This is not surprising, since predestination, described in Augustinian terms, could potentially erode the usefulness of the sacraments in the church.<sup>86</sup>

Although some scholars like Beker claim that Paul’s influence disappeared again during the Middle Ages until the time of the Reformation,<sup>87</sup> other scholars demonstrate the continuing influence of both Paul and Augustine during the Medieval period. McGrath, for instance, states that all Medieval theologians are Augustinian.<sup>88</sup> A theological renaissance took place during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. McGrath writes:

The Medieval period was characterized by its attempts to accumulate biblical and patristic material considered to be relevant to particular issues of theological interpretation, and by its attempt to develop hermeneutical methods to resolve the apparent contradictions encountered in this process.... An examination of such collections of patristic ‘sentences’ suggests that they were largely drawn from the works of Augustine. The most famous such collection the *Sententiarum libri quattuor* of Peter Lombard, has been styled an “Augustinian breviary”, in that roughly 80% of its text is taken up by a thousand citations from Augustine. The high regard in which Augustine was held during the theological renaissance of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries ensured that the framework of the medieval discussion of justification was essentially Augustinian.<sup>89</sup>

Although it is debatable whether the medieval theologians interpreted Augustine correctly, his thought was to remain dominant in the Catholic Church for the next thousand years until 1400. From roughly 1400 until the present, however, Thomas Aquinas’ thought has dominated Catholic theology.<sup>90</sup>

Aquinas lived in the mid thirteenth century. While Augustine’s thinking had been greatly influenced by Plato, Aquinas relied heavily on the works of Aristotle, at that time recently reintroduced to Western Europe.<sup>91</sup> Aquinas set about to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with the Christian faith. Philosophic thought, he claimed, came from data accessible to all of humanity. Thomas, like Aristotle, held that all *human* knowledge came

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<sup>86</sup> Price, *Medieval Thought*, 37–38.

<sup>87</sup> Beker, *The Triumph of God*, 8,10.

<sup>88</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 54.

<sup>89</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 56.

<sup>90</sup> McGonigle, *A History of the Christian Tradition*, 163.

<sup>91</sup> Hill, *The History of Christian Thought*, 149–161.

from the five senses. Theological knowledge, however, came only from revelation and the logical deductions from revelation.<sup>92</sup>

While Aquinas believed that salvation was dispensed through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, there were several aspects of his thought which paved the way for the controversies of the Reformation. First, Thomas Aquinas' thinking was influential on the theologian Gabriel Biel, against whose theology Luther chiefly reacted.<sup>93</sup> Both Biel and Aquinas thought of God's grace differently than Augustine. While Augustine's reading of Paul led him to believe that humans were totally fallen and in need of God's grace to have any possibility of justification before God, Aquinas and Biel had a more optimistic view of human nature.

Original sin did not reflect a total corruption in human nature, but incompleteness; an incompleteness that could be repaired through a restored relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>94</sup> Thus, there was more responsibility placed on the individual human for their salvation under Aquinas' and Biel's thinking than under Augustine's or Luther's. As a consequence, according to Biel and Aquinas, humans were able to achieve some merit of their own. One might say then that as opposed to Augustine, but like Aquinas, Biel's view also was that God's grace acted in some ways like a divine aid or booster shot, helping humans to achieve merit before God.<sup>95</sup>

Some of Aquinas' optimistic thinking shows its influence today in various Catholic liberation theologies. If humans are capable of being healed from the corruption of original sin, then the building of a new society is possible on this Earth.<sup>96</sup>

Luther felt himself to be deeply indebted to Augustine's approaches to Paul, even going so far as to claim Augustine as a theological ancestor, such as Luther does in his "Tower Experience." Building on Augustine's approaches, Luther claimed that Paul's thought centred around the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, apart from works

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<sup>92</sup> Robert G. Clouse, "Thomas Aquinas," in *Eerdmans's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (eds. Tim Dowley, John Briggs, Robert Linder, David Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 288.

<sup>93</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 194–195.

<sup>94</sup> McGonigle, *A History of the Christian Tradition*, 167.

<sup>95</sup> Cannon, William, *The History of Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 259.

<sup>96</sup> Brackley, Dean, *Divine Revolution* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), 40–44.



of the law. Often, in order to convince them of the correctness of his own approach to Paul, Luther would ask his friends to read Augustine's works.<sup>97</sup>

In his *Bondage of the Will*, Luther claims that he has the backing of Augustine. "On my side, however, there is only Wycliffe and one other, Laurentius Valla (though Augustine, whom you overlook, is entirely with me)."<sup>98</sup> However, where Augustine and other Church Fathers speak in a way which Luther thinks is contrary to God's word, then Luther sees Scripture as being more authoritative than their opinions.<sup>99</sup>

McGrath notes that Luther's 1525 treatise *De servo arbitrio* derives its title from a phrase used in passing by Augustine in the course of his controversy with the Pelagian bishop Julian of Eclanum. In selecting this phrase, Luther appears to claim the support of Augustine for his radical doctrine of the *servum arbitrium*.<sup>100</sup>

One of the major contributions that the Reformation made to the topic of salvation was the separation of justification from sanctification. Catholic theologians, from Augustine until the time of Luther, did not make a clear distinction between the two operations; they rather understood the process of justification and sanctification to be a unified whole. McGrath comments: "[T]he medieval theological tradition was unanimous in its understanding of justification as both an act and a process, by which both man's status *coram Deo* and his essential nature underwent an alteration."<sup>101</sup>

Luther himself did not distinguish between justification and sanctification, but his work allowed others to do so. Specifically it was his ideas of forensic justification and *simul justus et peccator* which proved to be the decisive break with medieval tradition, and which allowed for the separation of justification from sanctification.<sup>102</sup> If we can be justified and yet be sinners, then it must be that the process of sanctification happens independently from the process of being declared righteous in God's sight.

Not all people of Luther's day, of course, were convinced that he was correct. His writings created much controversy. As Ambrosiaster had done before him, Erasmus claimed

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<sup>97</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 47.

<sup>98</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, AE 33:72.

<sup>99</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:317.

<sup>100</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*. Third Edition, 40.

<sup>101</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, First Edition, 182.

<sup>102</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, First Edition, 182–183.

that Paul's statements against the law were only directed to the Jewish law's ceremonial and not its ethical aspects.<sup>103</sup>

Overall, McGrath's overview of the history of approaches to justification is quite helpful. It is, however, worth stating that there has been a shift in McGrath's approach to Reformation theology from when he published his first edition of *Iustitia Dei* in 1986 to the most recent third edition of the same book. He spoke much more favourably about Protestantism, Luther, Melancthon and Calvin in the earlier edition than in the more recent one. He is now stating in his most recent work that 1) the Medieval theologians were not semi-Pelagians or Pelagians like everyone had thought; 2) the true definition of heresy is to introduce a theological *novum* into the tradition; and 3) this is precisely what the Reformers did by separating justification from sanctification.<sup>104</sup>

However, some scholars claim that McGrath's portrayal of Medieval Catholicism is too simplistic to the point of being inaccurate. When interviewed in November of 2017, Dr. Robert Kelly, Professor Emeritus of Christian Doctrine at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary challenged some of McGrath's statements. The problem, said Kelly, is that although Medieval theology is rarely described as being diverse, Medieval theology is extremely diverse. Every time that someone attempts to describe Medieval theology in general terms as having definite characteristics or attributes in one fashion or another, it is possible for others to find many counter examples proving the exact opposite set of views. One's assessment of Medieval theology also varies depending on which Medieval school of thought one follows. As one example of this, some of the late Medieval Thomists do not appear to be even close to what Thomas Aquinas states on various topics. One in fact wonders if they have even read Thomas.<sup>105</sup>

Kelly also qualified McGrath's assertion that all medieval theologians are Augustinian. The real situation, he stated, again is more complicated. Yes, in a sense all Western theologians are Augustinian after Augustine, but it is arguable that not every Western theologian understood what Augustine was saying. Kelly goes on to say that

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<sup>103</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 64.

<sup>104</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 100, 141, 156, 170, 175, 200, 209, 211, 213, 213–214, 215, 216, 217, 224.

<sup>105</sup> Dr. Robert Kelly, Prof. Emeritus Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Waterloo. ON. Canada. Discussion, November 17, 2017.

Aquinas tries to be as Augustinian as he can possibly be. His tractates on grace sound Augustinian, but the tractates on the sacraments, especially on penance, do not bear much resemblance to Augustine's positions. Kelly also argues that Duns Scotus definitely falls within the semi-Pelagian camp. Furthermore, many of the Medieval theologians, said Kelly, tried to incorporate Pelagian and semi-Pelagian concepts into Augustinian terminology. That was the tension within Medieval theology and that is why it ultimately collapsed.<sup>106</sup> Also, some of McGrath's evaluation of Medieval Catholicism as being non-Pelagian hinge around his definition of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism. If one defines these terms the way the Protestants define them, then yes, some of the Medieval Catholics do appear to fall into the above categories. However, if one defines the concepts of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism according to the standards used by the Medieval Catholics themselves, then their writings by their own standards are not Pelagian or semi-Pelagian.<sup>107</sup>

This study maintains that other scholars will find much to contest with McGrath's approaches. Luther's viewpoints were not completely new. For instance, in his book, *Luther and the Mystics*, Bengt Hoffman states that Luther was deeply influenced by several Medieval mystics.<sup>108</sup> Hoffman states that Luther was not uncritical of mystics and mysticism. There were several Medieval mystics with whom he was less impressed. Luther evaluated a mystic on the basis of whether or not those particular mystic's views aligned with justification by grace through faith.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, Hoffman argues that the terminology that Luther used for his theology of the cross was deeply influenced by Medieval mysticism.<sup>110</sup> In his very influential book, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Walther von Loewenich agrees on this front. Von Loewenich writes: "We were reminded step by step of ideas from German mysticism. Humility, resignation, following the cross, conformity with Christ, all these are concepts familiar to late medieval mysticism."<sup>111</sup> Hence, while Luther did not agree with all the mystics, the fact that he could agree with at least a few, means that there were other

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<sup>106</sup> Dr. Robert Kelly, Prof. Emeritus Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Waterloo, ON, Canada. Discussion, November 17, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 155–157.

<sup>108</sup> Hoffman, Bengt R., *Luther and the Mystics: A Re-examination of Luther's Spiritual Experience and his Relationship to the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 40, 42, 44, 46, 54, 117, 160.

<sup>109</sup> Hoffman, Bengt R., *Luther and the Mystics*, 112, 222.

<sup>110</sup> Hoffman, Bengt R., *Luther and the Mystics*, 128.

<sup>111</sup> Von Loewenich, Walther, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (trans. H. Bouman; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 148.

voices besides his own that gave credence to the notion of justification by grace through faith.

Oberman also points out that Luther was not the first nor the only Medieval theologian to accuse the dominant thrust of Medieval theology as being Pelagian. Wycliffe and Hus are the two obvious figures that one thinks of in this regard, but there were others. The Englishman, Thomas Bradwardine, briefly Archbishop of Canterbury before succumbing to the plague in 1349, wrote his treatise *The Cause of God Against the Pelagians*, in which he complains about the Pelagian direction of Medieval theology.<sup>112</sup> The writings of the Italian, Gregory of Rimini, were used extensively by Luther in preparing for his debate with Eck.<sup>113</sup> Bruce Demarest states that Luther relied heavily on the work of Nicholas of Lyra.<sup>114</sup> And of course, as Oberman states:

Luther's mentor Johann von Staupitz "emphasized these three themes of provenience of grace, the bondage of the will, and predestination, and welded them all together in a vivid mystical spirituality. Luther acknowledges his deep indebtedness to Staupitz time and again, and states once, "I received everything from Dr. Staupitz."<sup>115</sup>

If other Medieval thinkers, in addition to Luther, described the general direction of Medieval Catholicism as being semi-Pelagian, one doubts whether McGrath's thesis can be easily sustained without serious contention. Indeed, the following quotes from a sermon of Gabriel Biel demonstrate certainly what most would describe as being semi-Pelagian tendencies.

But grace elevates human power beyond itself, so that acts had been turned by sin toward evil or inward towards one's self now can be meritoriously redirected against the law of the flesh and towards God. Grace leads, assists, and directs in order that man may be prompted in a way which corresponds with divine charity. And thus grace weakens the remaining power of sin, not—as many doctors say—because it forgives or wipes out sins, but because it strengthens human power.<sup>116</sup> The preceding has made clear how much the grace given to us by Christ excels the original righteousness we lost in Adam. Because, although original righteousness completely subdued the tincture of sin and ordered the lower powers of man in perfect obedience to the higher powers, it did not give to human power the capacity to perform meritorious works. Nor could Adam have been saved by original righteousness alone

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<sup>112</sup> Oberman, Heiko Augustinus, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought. Illustrated by Key Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 151–165.

<sup>113</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, 124.

<sup>114</sup> Bruce A. Demarest, "Interpreting the Bible," in *Eerdmans's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (eds. Tim Dowley, John Briggs, Robert Linder, David Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 284–286.

<sup>115</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, 125.

<sup>116</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation. The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, 171.

without grace.<sup>117</sup> Thus, as Lombard has said, meritorious acts depend on two factors, our free will and grace. There is no human merit that does not depend partly upon free will. The principle cause of meritorious moral action, however, is attributed to grace. But grace does not determine the will. The will can ignore the prompting of grace and lose it by its own default. The prompting of grace is towards meritorious acts for the sake of God.<sup>118</sup> Thus God established the rule [covenant] that whoever turns to Him and does what he can will receive forgiveness of sins from God. God infuses assisting grace into such a man, who is thus taken back into friendship. As it is written in John: “Grace and truth came through Christ.”<sup>119</sup>

While it may be that McGrath is correct in saying that Biel is not a semi–Pelagian by the conventions of Medieval Catholicism, still one might argue that the conventions of Medieval Catholicism would not excuse him from the charge. If a standard definition of semi–Pelagianism is adopted, this study would argue that Biel falls into that category. In Biel’s statements above, clearly salvation is something to be achieved, and although grace plays the largest role in making this happen, human effort is a very necessary part for salvation. Furthermore, if grace is given to those who do what they can, how does one ever know that one has done all that one can?

McGrath also debates whether Luther and the Protestants understood Augustine correctly. He states that Augustine did not emphasize faith alone, as later Protestants did; rather Augustine emphasized that saving faith was faith acting through love. McGrath writes:

In *De Trinitate*, Augustine considers the difficulties arising from 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, which stipulates that faith without love is useless. He therefore draws a distinction between a purely intellectual faith (such as that “by which even the devils believe and tremble” (James 2:19)) and true justifying faith, by arguing that the latter is *faith accompanied by love*. Augustine finds this concept conveniently expressed within the Pauline corpus at Galatians 5:6: “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but faith that works through love.” Although this could be considered as being open to a Pelagian interpretation, this possibility would seem to be excluded by Augustine’s insistence that both the faith and the love in question are gifts of God to humanity rather than natural human faculties—in other words they are *dona* rather than *data*, given over and above the natural endowment of creation (emphasis in the original).<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, 172.

<sup>118</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, 170.

<sup>119</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, 173.

<sup>120</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 46.

McGrath may be mistaken in claiming that an emphasis on faith without love is truly present in Luther's thought. In his 1535 lectures on Galatians, Luther also states that for faith to be genuine it has to be accompanied by acts of love. Luther writes:

[One] does not truly believe if works of love do not follow [one's] faith. Thus [Paul] excludes hypocrites on both sides ... from the kingdom of Christ. On the left he excludes the Jews and the works-righteous; for he says: "In Christ no circumcision, that is, no works or worship or kind of life are of any avail, but faith alone, without any trust in works." On the right he excludes the lazy, the idle, and the sluggish, because they say; "If faith without works justifies, then let us not do any works; but let us merely believe and do whatever we please!" "Not so you wicked [people]," says Paul. "It is true that faith alone justifies, without works; but I am speaking about genuine faith, which, after it has justified will not go to sleep but is active through love." As I have said before, therefore, Paul is describing the whole of the Christian life in this passage; inwardly it is faith toward God, and outwardly it is love or works toward one's neighbour. Thus a [person] is a Christian in a total sense: inwardly through faith in the sight of God, who does not need our good works; outwardly in the sight of people, who do not derive any benefit from faith but do derive benefit from works or from our love.<sup>121</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this study to respond or evaluate McGrath's most recent statements, other than to state that other scholars do not agree, and there are solid grounds for disputing his claims. Yet as Oberman states: "There are few fields of historical inquiry where the impact of vested religious interests lingers on so persistently as in the area of late Medieval thought."<sup>122</sup>

It is important to understand that some aspects of Sanders' approaches to Paul are similar to Medieval understandings of Paul. Sanders has this in common with the Medieval Catholics: neither understand justification to consist only of the imputation of righteousness. Both Sanders and the Medieval Catholics think that a real change must occur within the life of the person being justified.<sup>123</sup> Concerning the Medieval interpretation of Paul, McGrath says this: "The medieval theological tradition was unanimous in its understanding of justification as both an act and a process, by which both [the human's] status *coram Deo* and its essential nature underwent an alteration."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 5-6*, AE 27:30.

<sup>122</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, 34.

<sup>123</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 23.

<sup>124</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, First Edition, 182.

## 2.4 BACKGROUND TO THE NEW PERSPECTIVE. THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS QUEST TO FIND “RATIONAL” MOTIVES FOR PAUL’S CONVERSION

Since the Reformation, at least three developments took place among theologians and biblical scholars which have some bearing on our topic. The Enlightenment, as a philosophical movement, had a huge influence upon many biblical scholars. Enlightenment thinkers generally disavowed the existence and influence of supernatural forces in everyday life. As an example of this, the American, Thomas Jefferson, who was himself very taken by Enlightenment ideals, went so far as to take a scissors to the gospels, cutting out all references to the miraculous.<sup>125</sup> The resultant shrunken book has been published as the “Jefferson Bible.” While other Enlightenment thinkers and Bible scholars might not have gone as far as Jefferson did in taking a scissors to the Bible, nonetheless the same attitudes of scepticism towards the supernatural prevailed, affecting a number of Bible scholars, including Bultmann.

Second, as Lohse has pointed out, until the mid–nineteenth century, it was difficult to obtain comprehensive collections of Luther’s writings in German. Comprehensive translations in English of Luther’s works did not begin to appear until the mid–twentieth century. As a result of the lack of good Luther resources prior to this point, some distortions had begun to arise regarding the interpretations of Luther. Lohse in fact claims that,<sup>126</sup> although, since the Reformation most Protestants have seen justification as central to Paul’s thinking, Luther himself was often badly misunderstood by the scholars writing in the Protestant–Orthodox period, but even more so by Enlightenment scholars after his death.

Third, one area where Luther’s ideas were misunderstood is the matter of motives for Paul’s conversion. Many scholars took links between Luther and Paul far beyond where Luther himself had taken them, even equating Paul’s motives for converting to Christianity from Judaism with Luther’s motives for converting from Medieval Catholicism to Protestantism. Both men, it was thought, were reacting against legalistic, harsh and

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<sup>125</sup> Jefferson, Thomas, *Jefferson’s “Bible” The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. [Reprint]. [Originally Published Washington, D.C. U.S.G.P.O, 1904]. (Grove City, PA. American Book Distributors, 1996).

<sup>126</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 200–227.

judgemental religious systems and instead were searching for a gracious God.<sup>127</sup> New Perspective scholars tend to attack this notion, although they fault Luther, and not those who have come after him, for making the comparison between his conversion and Paul's.<sup>128</sup>

Wright states:

Sanders accused protestant exegesis of retrojecting a view of 'catholic' priestcraft, works-righteousness and so forth, onto the second-Temple period, in order that Protestantism could play the part of Luther to the faux-medieval soteriology of 'Judaism'. That is where the debate ("new perspective" versus "old perspective") still sits.<sup>129</sup>

Yet the idea of a link between Luther's conversion and Paul's has spread far and wide.<sup>130</sup>

One even sees this notion in the preaching commentaries of the widely-read Scottish New Testament scholar William Barclay.<sup>131</sup> Bultmann certainly endorses this idea also. In true modernist fashion, Bultmann is suspicious of all supernatural happenings. He views stories of these or of any of Paul's visions such as in 1 Corinthians 15 as being later mythical additions to the Christian story.<sup>132</sup> In Bultmann's view, Paul's conversion is purely

ideologically driven.<sup>133</sup> Bultmann believes that Judaism is a legalistic faith based on works righteousness, which Paul, after initially devoting himself to, later discards.<sup>134</sup> Bultmann writes: "[Paul] was won to the Christian faith by the kerygma of the Hellenistic Church."<sup>135</sup>

Bultmann explains that kerygma in this sense means "obedient submission to the judgment of God, made known in the cross of Christ, upon all human accomplishment and boasting."<sup>136</sup>

Hence for Bultmann, it was the contrast between a grace-filled Gentile Christian gospel and the difficulties caused by a legalistic Judaism, that played the chief part in making Paul want to convert.

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<sup>127</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 7.

<sup>128</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 13.

<sup>129</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 130-131.

<sup>130</sup> Eriksson, Bart, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism" (Unpublished Essay submitted for ThM Program, University of Toronto, 2003), 5.

<sup>131</sup> Barclay, William, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, Revised Edition* (Toronto: G. R. Welch Co. Ltd., 1976), 23.

<sup>132</sup> Bultmann, R. *Theology of the New Testament, Vols. I & II* (trans. K. Grobel; New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1950 & 1955), 1:45.

<sup>133</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 10.

<sup>134</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:270.

<sup>135</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:187.

<sup>136</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:188.



It is worth asking, however, where and why this view that equates Paul's conversion to Luther's originated. Bruce Corely has attempted to come up with an answer. Corley sidesteps the debate as to whether Paul did in fact have a troubled conscience or not, and he instead focuses on whether Christians really did make comparisons between Luther's experiences and Paul's. What Corley finds is that the tendency to link Luther and Paul's motives for their conversions does not originate with Luther. It is a relatively recent phenomenon.

In his essay "Interpreting Paul's Conversion—Then and Now," Corley examines in depth how Paul's conversion has been perceived by Christians throughout the ages. He claims that for most of history, Christians have not perceived Paul's conversion as having arisen from an introspective conscience. Corley has this to say about Augustine's approaches to the subject after his own conversion:

The famous story of the garden conversion in the company of his friend Alypius in Milan, which happened in the summer of 386, was preceded by a long period of self-doubt and frustration compelled by a troubled conscience. But Augustine did not take the step we might have expected, namely, to connect his preparatory searching with a similar disposition often found in Paul.... For the text favored by so many interpreters for such a link—that is, Romans 7—was understood by Augustine to be about the struggles of Paul the Christian, not Saul the persecutor. What Augustine found in common with Paul was not a burdened conscience but a vanquished will. Paul's conversion taught him the power of grace and the inability of human striving. The Augustinian theme of "the violent capture of a rebel will" dominated all subsequent portrayals of Paul's conversion in the medieval period.<sup>137</sup>

Corley also writes concerning a play on Paul's conversion written shortly before the Reformation: "The Damascus exemplar in the Middle Ages recalled the vanquished will of a proud sinner, not the introspective conscience of a troubled persecutor."<sup>138</sup>

Corley has also researched Luther's views on the subject of Paul's conversion. He demonstrates that despite what Dunn and some other New Perspective scholars have claimed, Luther himself does not equate his own motivations with Paul's. In earlier centuries Christians had naturally accepted the miraculous explanation for Paul's conversion given in Acts.<sup>139</sup> Luther lived before the Enlightenment, and so, like other Christians of that era, he

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<sup>137</sup> Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now," 6–7.

<sup>138</sup> Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now," 9.

<sup>139</sup> Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now," 14–16.

did not question the supernatural or miraculous stories in the Bible. Luther himself does not claim that Paul was searching for a gracious God. Corley writes:

What surprises us about Luther is his relative lack of interest in Paul's conversion as a topic of reflection and preaching. When he did preach on the event, later in his life in 1546 ... Luther avoided the word "conversion," although he delivered the sermon for the feast day celebrating St. Paul's conversion. Rather, as Karl Morrison notes, he "dwelt on external aspects of Paul's mission—call, ordination, and mission—rather than on inward change of heart" ... which is, of course, a line of direction that would have pleased the architects of "the new perspective" on Paul. He abstained from drawing any analogy between his own pilgrimage with a "troubled conscience" and Paul's experience. Luther's view of Romans 7 hardly permitted him to do otherwise, for he followed Augustine in reading that chapter as referring to Paul's Christian experience.<sup>140</sup>

Instead, Luther believed that the motivation for Paul's conversion to Christianity was simply the supernatural vision that Paul had of Jesus on the road to Damascus, as recounted in Acts 9.

So if Luther did not compare his own experience with Paul's, why then did other scholars? Corley mentions two factors. First, in their analysis of conversion, the Puritans tended to look for ways in which God would prepare people in advance for the experience of conversion. The natural tendency then was to do the same with the Apostle Paul.<sup>141</sup>

However, a more significant change in the manner in which people understood Paul's conversion took place as a result of the Enlightenment. Again, biblical stories with references to supernatural experiences were embarrassing to Enlightenment scholars.<sup>142</sup> Paul's Damascus road experience is one such story. Therefore, for an Enlightenment thinker, another reason for Paul's conversion would need to be found. It is no wonder then, that scholars embarrassed by the idea that Paul could have a vision of the risen Jesus, began to look for more natural or rational explanations for Paul's shift in religious allegiance. Since the thinking of Martin Luther is so closely associated with that of Paul, equating Paul's motivations for conversion with Luther's would be a natural explanation to fall back on. Corley concludes his examination of Paul's conversion with this statement:

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<sup>140</sup> Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now," 10.

<sup>141</sup> Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now," 11–12.

<sup>142</sup> Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now," 13.

Second, the role of Paul's conversion in the history of the Western Church is more complicated than Stendahl's analysis suggests. One cannot draw a straight line from Luther back to Augustine—and then back to Paul—associating them all with an “introspective conscience.” Both Augustine and Luther give us narrative descriptions of such spiritual introspection. But neither of them suggests Paul as the archetype of their anguish. On the contrary, they find in him the promise of sudden grace. The law–gospel paradigm that stands prominently in Paul's thinking contributed to two movements that more nearly provide evidence for Stendahl's case—that is, the Puritan preparationists, who established a theological necessity for a plagued conscience to precede a true conversion, and the Enlightenment rationalists, who established a psychological necessity for a plagued conscience to induce a questionable conversion. Having seen these alternatives, we must dissent from the judgment of “the new perspective.” Augustine and Luther are still better guides to Paul's thoughts than either of these two movements.<sup>143</sup>

Hence, it was later scholars from the Enlightenment period who first began to assume that not only Luther, but Paul too, had been reacting against a legalistic faith and driven to find a gracious God. The association of Luther and Paul were so close for many scholars, that this became an accepted notion.<sup>144</sup>

As a result, the idea arose which New Perspective scholars are so eager to contest, that Paul's reactions to Judaism must have been similar to Luther's issues with Catholicism, and that Paul, like Luther, was impelled towards a new faith understanding primarily as a search for a gracious God. Consequently, if Paul was reacting against a legalistic Judaism, then Judaism had to be a legalistic faith also, where one earned entry *into* the Jewish covenant. At certain points in his writing even Schweitzer followed this line of thinking.<sup>145</sup>

This brings us to the present day and the ideas that New Perspective scholars are reacting against. Following the dominant line of thinking in the last couple centuries, both Krister Stendahl and James Dunn have claimed that Luther himself equated his experience with Paul's, but as we have seen, Corley has pointed out that this view is incorrect.

In his essay, “The Justice of God,” Dunn claims that Luther equated Paul's conversion with his, but he does not give a reference citing Luther to prove this in fact is what Luther said.<sup>146</sup> In recent times too, despite Corley's and others' research demonstrating

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<sup>143</sup> Corley, “Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now,” 15–16.

<sup>144</sup> Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, Revised Edition*, 5–6, 23.

<sup>145</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 213.

<sup>146</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 14.

that Luther did not equate his own conversion experience with Paul's, almost twenty years after Corely's paper, Dunn still states the following:

The one point of weakness with the old perspective here is its assumption that the Judaism of Paul's day, in its insistence on the importance of faithfulness, had forgotten that Israel's faithfulness began from its acceptance of and as a response to the covenant promise of Israel. *This was partly due to Luther assuming that his story was a repeat of Paul's* (emphasis added.)<sup>147</sup>

Dunn still maintains this position, although when doing so, he is once again not able to give a single reference to Luther's writings to demonstrate that this in fact is what Luther himself thought! In defence of his opinion Dunn is only able to quote William Wrede who says: "The soul strivings of Luther have stood as [a] model for the portrait of Paul."<sup>148</sup> Wrede, however, is also not referring to Luther's own writings. All that Dunn can cite to back up his point is a claim by Wrede that *other scholars* viewed Luther and Paul's experiences as equivalent. He cannot show that Luther actually had this opinion.

According to Corley's research, it seems that the New Perspectivists have not overthrown the Reformation or the Augustinian viewpoint on Paul's conversion, rather they have merely challenged the Enlightenment viewpoint of Paul's conversion. Without any real evidence for making the assumption, New Perspective scholars have just assumed that the views of the Enlightenment also applied to Luther and those in the Reformation era.

Still, even though Dunn's information is not accurate when it comes to Luther, his basic point is still sound when it comes to challenging modern Protestantism, which has been influenced by Enlightenment approaches. E. P. Sanders and the New Perspective have done a valuable service to New Testament scholarship by challenging the view that Judaism in its essence was a legalistic religion where one had to earn one's way into the covenant.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have made a brief overview of approaches to justification and Pauline interpretation within Christianity during the last two thousand years and how these currents of thought have some bearing on the New Perspective. We have seen that not all of the ideas of the New Perspective scholars and their forebearers are new. Krister Stendahl claims

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<sup>147</sup> Dunn, "What's Right About The Old Perspective on Paul," 222.

<sup>148</sup> Dunn, "What's Right About The Old Perspective on Paul," 222, note 25.

affinity with some of the early church interpretations of Paul, which see Paul's doctrine of justification chiefly in terms of its effect in eliminating ethnic barriers between Jews and Gentiles in the church. N. T. Wright suggests that Medieval Catholicism might not be as legalistic as many Protestant scholars have assumed. James Dunn has attempted to revive the Medieval and early Christian distinction between ceremonial and ethical aspects of the law within Paul's thought. Albert Schweitzer has even attempted to revive the early Christian notion that Jesus' death on the cross does not atone for sins committed by Christians after baptism. All of these ideas represent a significant departure from mainstream Protestant thought and a revival of interpretations of justification found in earlier eras.

Also, in order to evaluate the New Perspective's overall approach to Luther and Protestantism understandings of justification, it necessary to have some sense of what Luther was reacting to and his own approaches to various ideas. We have made a very brief attempt to evaluate Luther's contributions in this chapter. We will look again at Luther in chapters seven and eight, and briefly in chapter eleven.

In this chapter as well we have also reviewed Luther's understanding of the motives for Paul's conversion. Bruce Corley has made note of the Enlightenment attempt to claim that Paul reacted to Judaism and was driven to Christianity for the same reasons that Luther reacted to Medieval Catholicism. James Dunn has mistakenly assumed that Luther himself made this comparison between his own conversion experience and Paul's. Yet we have seen that it was not Luther, but the Enlightenment influenced scholars following Luther who made this comparison.

This chapter has provided an overview of historical antecedents for the New Perspective. However, the New Perspective is a recent movement and as such the scholars involved in it are reacting to more recent developments in the field of New Testament studies. It is these recent trends that we will examine in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 3

## FORMATIONAL ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

The New Perspective on Paul did not emerge in isolation. There were several intellectual currents in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century New Testament scholarship that New Perspective scholars react against. In an effort then to better understand New Perspective scholars, it is important to explore some of the views that they disagree with. In particular, this Chapter will briefly explore three of these intellectual currents: The history of Religions School, the theology of Bultmann, and the perspective that Judaism is fundamentally legalistic. Each of these, in turn, has played some role in forming the New Perspective and shaping its approaches towards New Testament scholarship.

### 3.1. THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS SCHOOL

The History of Religions school, or as it was known in German, the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, is one of the scholarly movements that New Perspective scholars often take issue with. The History of Religions School was a movement of primarily German scholars which presumed that the religious ideas of one group of people were influenced by the culture and religious viewpoints of their neighbours. The effect of this thinking upon New Testament scholarship was to search for source materials for its ideas within nearby pagan religions. For instance, if in the New Testament it describes the act of joining the Christian faith, as one of “new birth,” this idea, according to the proponents of the History of Religions school, would likely have had its origins within the nearby Greek pagan religions that also talked about “new birth.”

Concerning the History of Religions school and its influence on modern scholarship, New Perspective scholar Wright says this:

The central motif of the history of religions movement as it affected Pauline studies at least was the urgent importance of keeping Paul’s ideas well clear of two categories ... (a) Jewish beliefs, and “Jewish Christianity” of the sort that (it was supposed) had flourished before Paul’s conversion and was opposing his views ... and (b) “early Catholicism”, that figment of F. C. Baur’s imagination which proved so convenient a

way of labelling, and then pushing off the Pauline stage, any material which seemed to offer a more than merely functional view of the church, and a more than merely incidental view of God's action in history. The implicit evaluative story of early Christianity thus ran like this: Jesus (good—not that we can know much about him, but his death and resurrection, whatever the latter means, are foundational); early Jewish Christianity (dangerous, and dogging the footsteps of Paul once he appeared); Paul (the real hero); early Catholicism (degenerate, a failure of nerve). About this whole scheme, the two most important things to say are that it has been massively influential and massively misleading. It was never the result of genuine open-ended historical enquiry. It was always an attempt—a successful attempt!—to force the evidence of the first generation of Jesus followers into a straitjacket, to compel certain readings of key texts and to prohibit others. Even where neither its presuppositions nor its conclusions are held any longer, it continues to wield considerable influence in Pauline studies through the “consensus” (in most cases now an unexamined prejudice) about which letters are genuine and which not ... and about the implicit interpretation of a great many passages and themes.<sup>149</sup>

There are several aspects of the History of Religions movement which trouble New Perspective scholars. Among these, as Wright mentions above, are the tendencies to describe Judaism as negative and its foundations as legalistic. Another is the attempt to disparage Paul's Jewish influences and to describe him as basically a Greek and Gentile thinker.<sup>150</sup>

Albert Schweitzer, one of the forerunners of the New Perspective, found much to disagree with in the approach taken by many Biblical scholars of his day towards Paul, particularly with the presuppositions and ideas of the History of Religions school and with other scholars influenced by their approaches. Furthermore, although he did not entirely dismiss their contributions, he was particularly unfavourable toward those of the Tubingen school.<sup>151</sup> He characterized their views as excessively subjective,<sup>152</sup> claiming that they include “much assertion and little proof regarding the development within Paulinism.”<sup>153</sup>

There were two schools of thought within Tubingen who both assumed that Hellenistic influences were dominant in Paul's thought; one which assumed an early date for Paul's writings and the corresponding Hellenistic influences the other which assumed a later

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<sup>149</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 51.

<sup>150</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 51.

<sup>151</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 55.

<sup>152</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 148.

<sup>153</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 32.

date for both, assuming gradual growth of Pauline theological concepts. However, Schweitzer points out difficulties with both these approaches.<sup>154</sup> He writes:

The legitimate school place it in primitive Christian times, but cannot show how it was possible at that period, and how it could break off so suddenly that in the post–Pauline literature there is not an echo of it, and it seems as though it had never been. The illegitimate school represents the struggle as having occurred in the course of the second century, but can cite no evidence for this from the remaining literature, can point to no traces of the gradual growth of the opposition, or show how a struggle of that kind could break out at that time. Both explanations labour in vain at the problem of the inexplicable neglect of Paulinism in the post–Apostolic literature. Both parties assume as a datum that the doctrine of the letters is to be considered as a Hellenized Christianity. The one party represents the process which leads to this result as taking place in primitive Christian times, without being able to show how such a thing is possible, or how the Greek and Jewish–eschatological elements mutually tolerated and united with one another. *According to the other party, the Hellenization came about in the course of a long development. But they cannot explain why Paulinism shows an entirely different character from that of the Greek Christianity which appears elsewhere in the literature of the second century* (emphasis in the original).<sup>155</sup>

One of the ways in which Schweitzer differed from many Pauline scholars of his day, particularly those from Tübingen, was that he claimed that Paul’s writings could be understood best through the lens of Jewish thinking, not Greek. It appears, that prior to Schweitzer and Bousset, Jewish roots were almost virtually ignored altogether by nineteenth century German New Testament scholars as a source for Paul’s thought.<sup>156</sup> Schweitzer writes:

One very weighty theoretic objection to the admission of Greek elements in Paulinism is passed over by its defenders in complete silence. If the thoughts developed by the Apostle to the Gentiles had grown up upon the soil of Hellenism, the original apostles and those closely associated with them would certainly have been aware of this and attacked them on the ground. From the records, however, as we have them in the letters, it appears certain that they only reproached him with his attitude towards the law, and found no other point to object to in his teaching. The primitive Christian community at Jerusalem accused him of keeping back something from his churches; it did not discover anything new and essentially foreign in his thought. In spite of the keenness of the struggle, it was never made a charge against him that he had “heathenized” the Gospel. That shows how completely out of the question the assumption of Greek influences was for his opponents. But the fact that

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<sup>154</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 136–137.

<sup>155</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 139.

<sup>156</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 55.



his contemporaries discovered nothing of the kind in him forms a strong presumption against any such theory when brought forward in his letters.”<sup>157</sup>

Along the same lines, the fact that Jewish–eschatological thinking is the source for Paul's thought resolves other problems which the Tübingen scholars had raised, such as a low Christology. In his *Paul and His Interpreters*, Schweitzer talked about the contributions of Martin Brückner:

It is interesting to notice how Wrede and Brückner, without themselves remarking it, have refuted one of the weightiest objections of the Ultra–Tübingen critics. The latter had asserted that it was impossible that the process of deification of the Person of Jesus could have reached its completion within a few years, and had claimed for it, at least two generations. Now, however, it is shown that it is not this process at all, but another, which could take place in a moment, which has to be considered, since it is only a question of the taking up of the episode of the incarnation, death, and resurrection into the already present and living conception of the Messiah.”<sup>158</sup>

Schweitzer was equally critical of another school of opinion held by some Pauline scholars of his own day, the notion that primitive–Christianity was influenced by Hellenistic mystery religions. This critique of Schweitzer's still has relevance, since as was mentioned earlier, the History of Religions School and R. Bultmann, who both have a lasting influence on New Testament scholarship today, maintain some aspects of these viewpoints.

One reason why Schweitzer did not think that Paul was influenced by the Greek mystery religions is that all the source material that we have for the mystery religions dates from one hundred and fifty to two hundred years after the life of Paul. Given the dates we have for these source manuscripts, one could almost say that if anybody influenced anyone, the mystery religions were perhaps influenced by Paul, (who was writing at least one hundred and fifty years earlier), not the other way around.<sup>159</sup>

A second reason why Schweitzer does not think that Hellenistic mystery religions influenced Christianity was because of where the two different groups see the supernatural forces in the universe stepping into human history. Schweitzer contended that the Greek mystery religions are backwards–looking in terms of when they think the gods intervened. To explain, virtually all religions believe that at some point the deity or deities needed to

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<sup>157</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 79–80.

<sup>158</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 171.

<sup>159</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 28.

intervene in Earth's affairs. Mystery religions look backwards to a mysterious point in the past where supernatural forces interfaced with the world and humanity. Those who adhere to a mystery religion undergo rituals, which, in their minds, unite them in some fashion with the divine figure who was involved at that past time.

Christian sacraments, by way of contrast, are forward-looking, claimed Schweitzer. The Last Supper anticipates Jesus' future return and baptism anticipates the future resurrection. This is one key difference between Christianity and paganism.<sup>160</sup>

One can see then how, by his criticism of the scholars involved with the History of Religions School and their presuppositions, Schweitzer laid the foundations for the New Perspective. By understanding that the roots of Paul's thought lay in Judaism rather than in Greek thought, Schweitzer paved the way for greater respect for Judaism among Christian scholars. No longer is Judaism merely seen as a booster rocket that helps launch a superior Christianity. Judaism is seen as having contributions of its own and a life of its own. In fact, Paul can only be understood when seen against his Jewish background, claimed Schweitzer. In holding to these viewpoints, Schweitzer allowed for the greater respect which other Christian scholars have given to Judaism including W. D. Davies and E. P. Sanders.

### **3.2 THE ROOTS OF THE LEGALISTIC CONCEPTION OF JUDAISM**

One of the issues that New Perspective scholars react against is what they perceive to be a set of biases against Judaism within the Christian scholarly community. Down through the centuries the attitudes among Christians towards Judaism have ranged from simply asserting that Jesus was the Messiah and that Christians are right to follow him, to outright hostility and anti-Semitism. Some of the antipathy between Christianity and the Jewish community stretches back to the days of the early church. Initially, of course, the Church was persecuted by the Jews, but long after the church grew powerful enough to withstand such persecution antipathy towards Judaism continued. In attempting to defend Christianity from the accusation of being an innovation, early Christians, such as Justin Martyr, tried to prove both Christianity's continuity with and superiority to Judaism.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 22–23.

<sup>161</sup> Andrew Louth, "Introduction" to *The History of the Church From Christ to Constantine*, by Eusebius (trans. G. A. Williamson; London: Penguin Books, 1989), xv.

The early Church historian Eusebius also defends Christianity by attacking Judaism. Louth writes concerning Eusebius' work *Proof of the Gospel*, directed against the Jews, in which he explains away the Jewish religion as a temporary concession to human sin which served to prepare the way for the coming of Christ."<sup>162</sup> In his writing *On Cain and Abel*, Ambrose uses the analogy of the "Church of Abel" and the "Church of Cain," to describe the false church and the true church. In this regard, Ambrose speaks about Cain as being the archetype of the synagogue and the Jews, while Abel is the archetype of the church and the Christians.<sup>163</sup> There have been some thinkers, like the heretic Marcion, who have even claimed that since Easter God's promises to Israel are utterly revoked. Israel is no different in God's sight than any of the other nations. Marcion even thought that the Jews were the children of the devil.<sup>164</sup> John Chrysostom wrote a series of homilies entitled: *Against the Jews*. One can find many other examples of harsh statements made about Judaism within early Christianity.

Some Christian thinkers have held that the new Christian covenant so entirely replaced the Torah covenant that the Jews no longer have any claim to the title "people of God."<sup>165</sup> Those with this opinion think that since in Paul's eyes the Jews have rejected their Messiah Jesus, Paul then thinks that God in turn has rejected them and they are now just like any other ethnic group. The church, meanwhile, has moved in to take their place. Down through the centuries many have made this claim.<sup>166</sup>

In recent decades there has been a reversal of these negative attitudes to Judaism. Some Christian scholars today, such as Lloyd Gaston, even assert that Paul thought that Jesus' chief or even sole purpose was to institute a covenant for the Gentiles,<sup>167</sup> and thus

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<sup>162</sup> Louth, "Introduction," xv.

<sup>163</sup> Oberman, *The Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought. Illustrated by Key Documents*, 25.

<sup>164</sup> Schoeps, Hans Joachim, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), 131.

<sup>165</sup> F. Sherman, introduction to "On the Jews and Their Lies," by Martin Luther in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 47 (trans. Martin Bertram; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 132.

<sup>166</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 32.

<sup>167</sup> Eriksson, "The 'Israel of God' in Galatians," (Unpublished Essay submitted for ThM Program, University of Toronto, 2003), 12.

there are two divine covenants now.<sup>168</sup> Still, the vast majority of Christian scholarship through the centuries has not generally seen Judaism in a favourable light.

Negative portrayals of Judaism within Christian scholarship are an important issue, and for more reasons than just accuracy in scholarship. Although the church was not the chief agent responsible for the anti-Semitism in Europe during WWII, holocaust scholars have argued that the long tradition of anti-Judaism within Christian scholarship was one of several factors which desensitized the European population to the problems of anti-Semitism. New Perspective scholar Terry Donaldson agrees:

As it became apparent that the seeds that bore such bitter fruit in the Holocaust were first sown in the “New Israel” displacement ecclesiology of the second century apologists, it became increasingly difficult to hold with equanimity the opinion that this was Paul’s own view. And it became apparent that the “New Israel” patterns of thought were shaped by a configuration of factors quite distinct from those that were obtained in the first century, it was obvious that Paul’s Israel-Church discourse needed to be approached afresh and on its own terms.<sup>169</sup>

In his MA thesis Rabbi David Levy compares the problem of anti-Semitism to the following situation: “Consider the example of a city that fails to properly salt [an icy] street; a driver driving too fast slides through a red light hitting another driver who is then taken to a hospital. There the hospital offers a misdiagnosis and the person dies.”<sup>170</sup> Just as all the mistakes in the situation above contributed to the death, in the same way, argues Levy, anti-Judaism within Christian scholarship was one of the contributing factors to the holocaust.

Levy is no doubt correct. However, it is only accurate to point out that there were other sources for anti-Semitic feeling beyond religious ones. Some scholars have mentioned the economic roots of anti-Semitism. Since in feudal Europe, in order to own land one needed to swear a Christian oath, the Jews in certain places were not able to be farmers. By necessity, this forced a segment of the Jewish population to live in towns and cities where they took up occupations available there: business, medicine, banking, services and manufacturing. At the same time, the Christian population, because of religious restrictions against banking and feudal obligations tying them to the land, were many times not legally

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<sup>168</sup> Gaston, Lloyd, *Paul and the Torah*, (UBC Press: Vancouver, 1987), 8.

<sup>169</sup> Donaldson, Terry, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 18.

<sup>170</sup> Levy, “The Holocaust: A Catalyst for Theological Evolution as Exemplified by the Writings of Dr. John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M.,” 18-19.

able to engage in these kinds of urban professions themselves. Not understanding the economics of the situation they often grew to resent the Jewish population who were able to do this work.<sup>171</sup>

The particular views of Judaism which New Perspective scholars have taken issue with are ones which have manifested themselves in the last two hundred years among European scholars. Goppelt claims that “Neoprotestantism from Schleiermacher to Adolf Von Harnack had ... found neither a relationship to the Old Testament nor an understanding for the mystery of Israel.”<sup>172</sup> Schleiermacher even went so far as to diminish Christianity’s historical connection to Judaism:

For Judaism is long since dead. [Those who yet wear its livery are only sitting lamenting beside the imperishable mummy, bewailing its departure and its sad legacy.] Yet I could still wish to say a word on this type of religion. My reason is not that it was the forerunner of Christianity. I hate that kind of historical reference. Each religion has in itself its own eternal necessity, and its beginning is original.<sup>173</sup>

Von Harnack says that Paul’s lingering feelings for Judaism in Romans 9-11 are just carryovers from his Jewish upbringing. “When Paul in Romans concedes to Israel a continuing special religious status, Harnack only sees here a ‘Jewish obtrusion’ conditioned by the apostle’s background.”<sup>174</sup> In the early twentieth century, Rosenstock-Huessy claimed that “the Jews are making the same mistake as Lucifer, trying to cling on to their old power and privilege.”<sup>175</sup>

In response to these kinds of attitudes, New Perspective scholars have argued that the Christian approach to Judaism needs to be re-evaluated. For instance, New Perspective scholars have taken a second look at “the place of Romans 11, with its insistence on the eventual salvation of ‘all Israel,’ in the argument of the epistle as a whole.”<sup>176</sup> The New Perspective has also advanced the notion that the Jewish people still have a role and function as God’s chosen people. Donaldson explains:

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<sup>171</sup> This insight comes from conversations with V.E. Eriksson, Prof. Emeritus of History, Univ. of Alberta.

<sup>172</sup> Goppelt, “Israel and the Church in Today’s Discussion and in Paul” in *Christians, Jews, and the Mission of the Church*, Pages 8-28, (Reprinted from *Lutheran World*, Publication of the Lutheran World Federation, Vol. X, No. 4 October 1963 & Vol. XI, No. 3 July 1964), 11-12.

<sup>173</sup> Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher on Religion, Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, (translation of *Über Die Religion*. trans. J. Oman; New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 238.

<sup>174</sup> Goppelt, “Israel and the Church in Today’s Discussion and in Paul,” 12.

<sup>175</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 133-34.

<sup>176</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 3.

On the one hand, [Paul] wants to argue that righteousness and salvation are available in Christ to believing Gentiles simply on the basis on their faith; Gentiles do not have to conform to the Torah to be considered righteous. But on the other, he wants to insist that such a gospel of righteousness apart from the Torah represents a fulfillment, rather than a repudiation, of God’s covenant promises to Israel. In the rhetorical context of Romans, the two elements stand in a certain degree of tension: acceptance of the one (law-free mission to the Gentiles) does not entail (Paul is at pains to argue) the abandonment of the other (God’s faithfulness to Israel).<sup>177</sup>

As well, one aspect of the previous bias against Judaism, claim New Perspective scholars, is manifested in the Christian understandings of the ways that Judaism approaches salvation, or entering the covenant. Judaism, Sanders argues, was unfairly portrayed by many New Testament scholars as an overly legalistic faith, where grace, redemption and forgiveness are almost absent. As Westerholm says in describing this viewpoint:

Scholars interested in highlighting the contrast between “salvation” in Judaism and Paul’s understanding of salvation by grace had long made things easy for themselves by caricaturing the former as based exclusively on works—as though humans were deemed capable of “earning” a place in the age to come.<sup>178</sup>

Furthermore, this legalistic understanding of Judaism was adopted by many scholars without proper examination, automatically supposing it to be accurate. In contrast to this, Sanders maintains that the Jews kept the Torah, not to earn salvation, but out of gratitude to God who had chosen them by grace. Sanders has advanced a new conception of Judaism, called “covenantal nomism,”<sup>179</sup> which Donaldson summarizes as follows:

In this religious system, the law is understood as functioning within a covenantal relationship between God and Israel, a relationship established and maintained by God’s grace; the law provides the means by which, on the human side, this relationship can be affirmed and maintained; all members of the covenant people, except those who, by willful disregard of the law’s provisions for repentance, atonement and forgiveness, repudiate their membership, belong to the company who in the end will experience divine salvation. In covenantal nomism, then, “election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God’s mercy rather than human achievement.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 99.

<sup>178</sup> Westerholm, Stephen, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 29.

<sup>179</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 18-19.

<sup>180</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 9.

Sanders chiefly blames the scholar F. Weber, writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, for promoting the view that Judaism was legalistic.<sup>181</sup> Supposedly, according to Weber, Jewish theologians claimed that two falls from grace had taken place; first, the fall of Adam shared by all humanity,<sup>182</sup> and second, the idolatry committed by the Israelites with the golden calf near Mount Sinai.<sup>183</sup> The second fall of course, affected only the Israelites and not the rest of humanity.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, this second fall from grace was significant, because it meant that the Israelites were no longer automatically part of God's covenant; instead, they had to earn their way back in. In discussing Weber's views Sanders writes:

Judaism is a religion in which one must *earn* salvation by compiling more good works ("merits"), whether on his own or from the excess of someone else, than he has transgressions. The theory that individuals must *earn* salvation rests on the view that Israel "fell" from the relationship with God established on Mt. Sinai; thus the covenant itself is viewed as not retaining its efficacy: the promises of God are made void (emphasis in the original).<sup>185</sup>

It is curious, unless Weber arrived at his ideas independently, it appears as if Weber has taken this idea from the apocryphal *Letter of Barnabas*, which states that the Jewish people lost the covenant forever when Moses broke the tablets of stone (*Barn.* 4:6-7).<sup>186</sup>

Weber's understandings of Judaism have become highly influential among many other scholars, even to the point of influencing Bousset, a teacher of Bultmann.<sup>187</sup> Sanders states that Bousset thought that Judaism was faulty because of the absence of sacraments, and therefore its inability to transfer "its store of works of supererogation to individuals."<sup>188</sup> Luther, however, did believe that the Jewish faith had sacraments,<sup>189</sup> circumcision in

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<sup>181</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 11-13.

<sup>182</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 36.

<sup>183</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 11-13.

<sup>184</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 37-38.

<sup>185</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 38.

<sup>186</sup> Staniforth (trans.), *Penguin Classics, Early Christian Writings*, Andrew Louth (editor) (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1987), 161-164.

<sup>187</sup> Although Sanders views Bousset's contributions in a negative light, Schweitzer was appreciative of Bousset. This was in part because Bousset at least demonstrated that the roots for Paul's thoughts lay in Late Judaism, as opposed to Hellenism, which many in the Tubingen school of Schweitzer's own day maintained.

<sup>188</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 39.

<sup>189</sup> Discussions of Luther's Large Catechism. St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Cochrane, AB. 2016. Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 87.

particular,<sup>190</sup> and that these operated similarly to Christian sacraments as being channels of God's grace.<sup>191</sup>

While Sanders credits Weber and Bousset for advancing conceptions of a legalistic Judaism in the modern era, N.T. Wright sees the whole train of thought going back to F.C. Baur. Wright claims that Baur had an “agenda to separate Paul off from ‘Jewish Christianity’ on the one hand and ‘early Catholicism’ on the other.”<sup>192</sup> Bultmann, F. Weber and others merely carry on in the same school of thinking which F.C. Baur pioneered in the early 1800s. And while Wright argues that most of the components of this enlightenment approach to Pauline scholarship have been thoroughly rebutted, still Baur's approach and that of his disciples continues to exercise influence. Wright continues: “The picture drawn by Baur has now been discredited on historical grounds, though like a not quite exorcised ghost it still haunts the libraries and lecture-halls of New Testament scholarship.”<sup>193</sup> Wright sees Käsemann, although not an anti-Semite like Bultmann and many other earlier German scholars, still embracing a fundamentally works-righteousness view of Judaism.<sup>194</sup>

Whatever the sources for a legalistic view of Judaism, one of the major contributions that Sanders and other New Perspective scholars have made is in challenging this negative view of Judaism and Paul's reaction to it. New Testament scholarship has been significantly advanced because of the clearer understanding of these issues that New Perspective scholars have brought. Even Stephen Westerholm, one of the chief critics of the New Perspective, applauds Sanders and the New Perspective scholars for asserting this claim.

### **3.3 RUDOLF BULTMANN**

One of the most prominent advocates of the notion that Judaism is a fundamentally legalistic faith<sup>195</sup> was Rudolf Bultmann, a student of Bousset's.<sup>196</sup> Bultmann's work makes for a fascinating study on its own. His influence towers over that of other scholars. Nevertheless,

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<sup>190</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:85, 92.

<sup>191</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, AE 1:248-250.

<sup>192</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 15.

<sup>193</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 15.

<sup>194</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 146.

<sup>195</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 38, 40-41, 183.

<sup>196</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 9.



he has generated and still generates a great deal of controversy. Modern scholars can speak of him with appreciation, caution or occasionally even disdain for his ideas.

For instance, although he expresses grave reservations about the effect that demythologizing has had on Protestant preaching later in his book,<sup>197</sup> in other places Braaten can speak about Bultmann's approaches with guarded respect. Braaten writes:

The Bible's thought world and its symbols and myths are felt to be utterly different from the modern ways of thinking. Therefore, Bultmann's call to demythologize the biblical concepts is an attempt to interpret the biblical message in terms that people today can understand without taking offense at the alien modes of thought one encounters in the Bible.<sup>198</sup>

Later he adds:

Contemporary theology gives alternative accounts of biblical authority. But this is not merely something to be deplored. We are actually richer for all the pluralism in theology. For Barth the Bible is authoritative because it is the record of God's history of salvation. For Bultmann the Bible is authoritative because its kerygma announces the Christ event and generates the new self-understanding of faith.<sup>199</sup>

Geza Vermes, however, is less appreciative of Bultmann. While Vermes at times can express scepticism of his own when it comes to traditional Protestant interpretations of Scripture, in his book, *Jesus the Jew*, Vermes calls Bultmann a radical for disputing the notion that the disciples called Jesus by the title "Lord." Bultmann apparently saw this title creeping into Christian circles as an influence from the Greek mystery religions or earlier pagan traditions.<sup>200</sup> Vermes then goes on at length to demonstrate that the word "lord" (or *mar* in Aramaic) was a relatively common and polite title for people of importance in the Middle East during this period, (especially for higher ranking rabbis)<sup>201</sup> and on this basis, he states it as very likely that the disciples did call Jesus "Lord."<sup>202</sup> Vermes and Braaten are merely two examples of diverse perspectives on Bultmann.

Despite the controversy that he has generated, Bultmann's work has had widespread appeal perhaps, in part, because he communicates well. Given this, his work without a doubt

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<sup>197</sup> Braaten, Carl, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 112.

<sup>198</sup> Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 20.

<sup>199</sup> Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 21.

<sup>200</sup> Vermes, *Jesus the Jew, A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 106.

<sup>201</sup> Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 119.

<sup>202</sup> Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 111-122.

has played a large role in popularizing the idea that Judaism was chiefly a legalistic covenant. Yet in this regard, it is important to note that Bultmann's views on Judaism are similar to those of his contemporaries. For instance, in his book *Ancient Judaism*, Max Weber also has a legalistic understanding of the Jewish covenant.<sup>203</sup>

The presuppositions underlying Bultmann's work are also interesting. For Bultmann, neither the biblical text itself, nor even the outside scholarly or archaeological evidence for the Bible's historical truthfulness, determine his approach to the Scriptures; rather it is the philosophical decisions prior to opening the Bible which are the chief determining factors.

Instead of relying on the Christ of history, Bultmann works from Enlightenment a-priori conventions that supernatural forces do not intervene in human affairs.<sup>204</sup> As a result he has decided that much of what is in Scripture cannot be trusted, since, according to modernist conventions, there cannot be any such things as miracles. Ladd writes this about Bultmann's view of reality and the supernatural: "History is a closed system of natural, historical causes and effects. There is no room for intrusions by God. An incarnation of a pre-existent divine being simply cannot occur."<sup>205</sup> However, as mentioned earlier, Bultmann is not alone among biblical scholars in assuming that supernatural interference in earthly affairs should be doubted.

It is easy, in a postmodern age, to be critical of the underlying assumptions of modernism. But given the character of medieval European superstitions it is somewhat understandable that the sceptical approach of the Enlightenment, and modernist thought afterwards, would arise. In an academic treatment of Norwegian folklore, Tor Bringsvaerd describes in detail the vast numbers of spirits, fairies, sprites, gnomes, trolls, nisse, and underground people that the average Norwegian peasant felt he had to appease with gifts of porridge to somehow remain on good terms with.<sup>206</sup> Since other nations likely had folklore with similar groupings of quasi-supernatural creatures, it is no wonder then that among

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<sup>203</sup> Weber, Max, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 405.

<sup>204</sup> Ladd, George Eldon., *Rudolf Bultmann*, IVP Series in Contemporary Christian Thought (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 3-4.

<sup>205</sup> Ladd, *Rudolf Bultmann*, 5.

<sup>206</sup> Bringsvaerd, Tor Age, *Phantoms and Fairies, From Norwegian Folklore. Second Edition* (trans. Pat Shaw; Oslo: Tanum-Norli, 1979).

European academics a reaction developed towards the notion of supernatural intervention in daily life.

This, however, puts the study of the Bible in a curious position. The Bible is essentially an attempt to document one people's experiences of supernatural intervention in their history, together with the implications and moral laws arising as a result of that interaction. Given the conventions of the Enlightenment, how then does one study a book which is a record of supernatural intervention in human affairs, from the perspective that humanity does not experience supernatural intervention?

One then has to at least give Bultmann credit for being logically consistent. He ruthlessly casts into question all references to the supernatural within the biblical texts to the point where Jesus, in the end, becomes in his eyes merely a martyred apocalyptic prophet.<sup>207</sup> Bultmann calls this approach to the Bible "de-mythologizing."

Certainly, in this respect Bultmann and Luther are very far apart. As opposed to Enlightenment influenced thinkers, Luther strongly believed that the supernatural intervention of God could and does take place in modern life. For instance, while Bultmann believed that Paul's record of a mystical vision in 2 Corinthians 12 was a later addition of legendary material by the early Christian community, Luther had no difficulty in believing that this vision of Paul's was authentic. After all, when pressed by a friend once, Luther quietly admitted that he had once had a similar vision himself.<sup>208</sup> Luther also believed in prophetic utterances and advocated practices such as healing prayer.<sup>209</sup>

Not just with respect to his attitudes towards Judaism, but in many other ways also Bultmann appears to have borrowed ideas and themes already found among other scholars of his day, incorporating them into his own system. He combines Enlightenment suspicion of the supernatural, together with some of the perspectives of the comparative religions school and existentialist philosophers, and out of these he creates a single comprehensive theology, while all along attempting to discern and communicate the "true message of Christianity for the modern day." As for the message of the New Testament itself, his thinking in this regard is greatly influenced by the existentialist philosopher Heidegger. In addition to the

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<sup>207</sup> Ladd, *Rudolf Bultmann*, 43-44.

<sup>208</sup> Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 153-154, 190.

<sup>209</sup> Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 195-201.

aforementioned ideas, Bultmann also sees Paul as representing Hellenistic Judaism, as opposed to Palestinian Judaism.<sup>210</sup>

At the same time, he differs from many other theologians and scholars of his era in stating that faith must be independent of history. In Bultmann's opinion, a quest for a historical Jesus was neither useful nor possible.

In some ways one might say that Bultmann attempts to have his feet in two camps. He accepts what Enlightenment-influenced scholars of the nineteenth century had to say in questioning the historicity of the gospel accounts. But then he attempts to maintain the faith and piety of traditional Christianity by claiming that regardless of the Bible's historicity, it is important for Christians to know that the real God meets us through the act of preaching. We thus have faith in the Word of God as proclaimed through the text. As Ladd says: "For stating this, Bultmann has been critiqued for proclaiming "faith in faith itself, without any objective focus. It is difficult to see how this charge can be successfully refuted."<sup>211</sup> In some ways one might say that while dismissing the mythological, at the same time Bultmann almost creates a second level of reality or mythology of his own—events in the *kerygma*, whose importance trumps that of events of mere history.

In the opinion of Brevard Childs, both Von Rad and Bultmann, attempted to "combine a rigorous historical-critical approach together with a deep existential concern for Christian theology."<sup>212</sup> According to Childs, this effort ultimately failed, beginning to unravel in the late 1960s.

Bultmann has interesting perspectives of his own. For instance, earlier mention was made of Ambrosiaster's and Erasmus' notion that Paul has a dichotomy between the moral laws and the ceremonial laws in his thought. Interestingly enough, Bultmann locates this kind of dichotomy not in the writings of Paul, but in the words of Jesus.

Most important of all, no distinction was drawn between the moral and ritual law in respect of their divine authority. Jesus must have had good reason for saying what he did about straining at the gnat and swallowing the camel (Matt.23-24). Since the ritual

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<sup>210</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 189.

<sup>211</sup> Ladd, *Rudolf Bultmann*, 44.

<sup>212</sup> Brevard Childs, "On Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology," in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church* (eds. Braaten, Carl. and Robert Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3.

commandments have lost their original meaning, therefore man's relation to God was inevitably conceived in legalistic terms.<sup>213</sup>

Although, as Wright has said, Bultmann has been thoroughly critiqued in recent times, he still wields tremendous sway over the realm of modern day biblical scholarship. His program of de-mythologizing Scripture, his views on Judaism, as well as his deist-influenced approach to the view of the presence and intervention of the supernatural in everyday life, still influence scholars today. In addition, some of his more prominent disciples launched what has been called the second search for the historical Jesus. Bultmann also changed other New Testament scholars' approaches to Judaism. Dunn comments on one of the influences he had in inaugurating a shift in interpretation:

For sixty years previously, the usual assumption was that Paul's pre-conversion experience had been of the weakness of the flesh and consequent inability to keep the law. But sixty years ago the idea that Romans 7 testifies to Paul's pre-conversion sense of moral failure began to be abandoned... The result was a reversal of emphasis: that the root of Paul's failure, as of the failure of his fellow Jews generally, was not the weakness of the flesh, but rather their "confidence in the flesh".<sup>214</sup>

N.T. Wright describes Bultmann as being a key figure against which New Perspective scholars are reacting. For him, Bultmann really is the most prominent representative of a school of thought with which New Perspective scholars have strong disagreements. Wright has this to say about Bultmann:

First, many of the roots of contemporary discussions of Paul go back to one such movement in the nineteenth century, which was offering a new would-be historical reading of Paul through which he would appear differently from how people had seen him before. Second, the main movements of Pauline scholarship in our own day have launched a similar, supposedly historically based protest, against that dominant nineteenth-century construct. The middle term in all this is Bultmann: it is only a slight oversimplification to say that he sums up in the middle of the twentieth century the movement that began in the nineteenth, thereby raising questions for the twenty-first. Certainly the three main movements I shall chronicle ... are all reacting to him, albeit in strikingly different ways.<sup>215</sup>

Wright also critiques Bultmann's scholarly technique. While it is far better, says Wright, to

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<sup>213</sup> Bultmann, R., *Primitive Christianity, in its Contemporary Setting* (trans. R. H. Fuller; New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1956), 67-68.

<sup>214</sup> Dunn, James D.G., *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 68.

<sup>215</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 6.

use whole passages of Paul rather than isolated sayings, Bultmann very often focuses chiefly on individual sayings.<sup>216</sup>

Bultmann was also a proponent of the belief that the Jewish covenant was one that the Jews believed that they needed to enter through the performance of good works. Bultmann has this to say this about the Jewish covenant:

By those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness”, Mt. 5:6 ... [means] those who long to have God pronounce the verdict “righteous” as his decision over them in the judgment. What the pious Jew endeavours to do, however, is to fulfill the conditions which are the pre-suppositions for this verdict of God; these conditions are, of course, keeping the commandments of the Law and doing good works.<sup>217</sup>

Bultmann’s perspective on Judaism resembles the grievances that the Reformation leaders held towards Medieval Catholicism.<sup>218</sup> According to Bultmann, in Judaism, one either does not know whether one is saved, or one suffers from the problem about boasting concerning one’s good deeds. Bultmann thinks that the potential problem of boasting brought on by attempts to fulfill the Jewish covenant is the sinful attitude of the Jew.<sup>219</sup>

Who could be sure he had done enough in this life to be saved? Would his observance of the Law and his good works be sufficient? For in the day of judgement all his good works would be counted up and weighed, and woe to him if the scales fell on the side of his evil deeds! When his friends visited Johanan ben Zaccai on his sick-bed, they found him weeping because he was so uncertain of his prospects before the judgement seat of God. The prospect of meeting God as their Judge awakened in the conscientious a scrupulous anxiety and morbid sense of guilt.... Thus repentance itself became a good work which secured merit and grace in the sight of God. In the end the whole range of man’s relation with God came to be thought of in terms of merit, including faith itself.<sup>220</sup>

Apparently also, according to Bultmann, within Judaism there also existed the notion that one could atone for past sins by earning merit of various kinds.<sup>221</sup>

Bultmann does not use the same “getting in” and “staying in” terminology that Sanders does. Yet he in effect agrees with Weber and Bousset by stating two things about Judaism. First, that for the Jew, being justified is a matter of future hope, whereas for Paul it

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<sup>216</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 965.

<sup>217</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1: 273.

<sup>218</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 9-10.

<sup>219</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1: 281.

<sup>220</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity, in its Contemporary Setting*, 70-71.

<sup>221</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity, in its Contemporary Setting*, 69, 71.

can be a present reality as well.<sup>222</sup> Second, according to Paul, for the Jew being justified is from works of the law and not from grace.<sup>223</sup> In other words, Bultmann thinks that Jewish people believe that one enters the community of salvation, one “gets in” by works. As opposed to this, Sanders claims that one “gets in” to the covenant by being born as a Jew, and one merely needs to maintain one’s status within this covenant by works of the law. Furthermore, accomplishing the latter is not exceptionally difficult.

In his writings Bultmann also pushes the grace versus works dichotomy further than Luther had taken it. This is something that the New Perspective scholars react against as well. In response to Bultmann, New Perspective scholar Terrance Donaldson is eager to point out Paul’s strong stand on Christian ethics. Donaldson states that Paul seems to talk about the danger of works only in the situations where Gentiles are tempted to Judaize. But in other places where Paul gives ethical commands such as at the end of Galatians, he does not then immediately warn us about the dangers of works righteousness. Donaldson writes:

Why, then, if Bultmann is right, does Paul not balance these commands with a warning about the danger of works? When he urges the Corinthians to contribute to the collection project or to forgo marriage, why does he not add a cautionary statement warning them not to suppose that by so doing they were earning a meritorious standing with God? Paul’s silence here suggests strongly that his works/faith contrast plays a much more limited role than Bultmann assumed.<sup>224</sup>

Following from Bultmann’s warnings of the dangers of human pride from doing good works, New Perspective scholars complain that the “old perspective” thinkers have sometimes talked as if the doing of good works itself was the problem. N.T. Wright jokes about this, commenting that Paul’s statement that those who do the law will be justified (Rom 2:13) “strikes fear into the heart of unsuspecting Protestants.”<sup>225</sup> Donaldson critiques Bultmann’s approach to doing good deeds, stating that he not only claims that salvation is by faith and not by works of the law, but that he strengthens this even more to the point of saying that even the attempt to keep the law is sinful, and that instead one needs to recognize one’s complete dependence upon God.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:274, 278-279.

<sup>223</sup> Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1: 279.

<sup>224</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 112.

<sup>225</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 937-938.

<sup>226</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 108-109.

Bultmann not only criticizes Judaism for being legalistic, he criticizes it for not living up to the principles of his own Heidegger-influenced philosophy. He says this about Judaism:

But there is a curious inner contradiction here. By binding herself to her past history, Israel loosened her ties with the present and her responsibility for it. Loyalty to the past became loyalty to a book which was all about the past. God was no longer really the God of history, and therefore always the God who was about to come. He was no longer a vital factor in the present: his revelations lay in the past. History was likewise brought to a standstill. The nation lived outside history. God no longer raised up prophets and kings as he had done in the past; he no longer poured forth his Spirit. He would not do so until the last times. The national leaders were not men of political or social action, but teachers who expounded the scriptures. There was no possibility there of science or art, nor could there be any cultural intercourse with other nations. Israel (apart from Hellenistic Judaism) cut herself off from the outside world and lived in extraordinary isolation. As a result she cut herself off from history. The redemption she hoped for in the future was not a real historical event, but a fantastic affair in which all history had been brought to an end for good and all.<sup>227</sup>

As Wright has stated, other scholars besides Bultmann had similar ideas. However, Bultmann is the most prominent and influential proponent of a set of ideas that New Perspective scholars take issue with. These ideas have included a legalistic understanding of Judaism, a sceptical approach to Scripture, an understanding that justification lies at the centre of Paul's thought, and a reduction of emphasis on Paul's ethical expectations. As we shall see later, Wright also reacts against Bultmann's approach to salvation history<sup>228</sup> as well as the influence of the history of religions in Bultmann's thought.<sup>229</sup> For instance, Bultmann says that the resurrection of the dead was a doctrine initially foreign to Judaism but taken over from Iranian sources.<sup>230</sup> The same is true with the idea of hell.

Before we finish this Chapter two more matters deserve mention. First, while New Perspective scholars for the most part contest Bultmann's views, on occasion they do appear to borrow from him. For instance, the notion that the Jewish ceremonies were ethnic identity markers and served to differentiate the Jews from other nations is a common theme in New Perspective writings. Yet, this same idea appears in Bultmann's *Primitive Christianity*.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 60-61.

<sup>228</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 20-21, 79.

<sup>229</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 83.

<sup>230</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 86.

<sup>231</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 51.



Second, it is obvious that New Perspective scholars are quite familiar with Bultmann's writings, but they appear to be less familiar with Luther. Nevertheless, New Perspective scholars are on the whole, rather critical of Luther. One suspects, however, that in New Perspective writings, at times Bultmann's views have been superimposed back onto Luther. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent Luther and Bultmann are aligned.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

The New Perspective arose to a large extent in opposition to the ideas commonly held by biblical scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to fully understand the New Perspective and its concerns, one has to have some grasp of the intellectual environment to which the New Perspective is reacting.

There are several areas of thought to which New Perspective scholars respond. They challenge the various misunderstandings of Judaism and the occasional anti-Semitic idea expressed by recent New Testament scholars. In particular, New Perspective scholars take issue with the notion that Judaism is a legalistic faith. They also clearly take aim at the History of Religions School. Scholars within this camp often overlooked Hebrew sources for Paul's ideas and instead sought out Greek influences. Also, not understanding that much of Paul's theology and Christology had immediate Hebrew roots, their search for Greek sources in Paul frequently led these scholars to propose several historically hypothetical schemes outlining gradual developments of Pauline theology and Christology. Finally, Bultmann, who had tremendous influence for those a generation or two before the New Perspective, is someone whom New Perspective scholars challenge.

When one sees the shape of the thought of those whom the New Perspectivists contest, one can also better understand the shape and particular emphases in New Perspective thought. One can also better evaluate to what extent Luther's own thought is challenged or not challenged by the New Perspective.

Wright states that the New Perspective amounts to a retrieval of Schweitzer's thinking and a departure from Bultmann's.<sup>232</sup> In the next chapter, then, we examine some of

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<sup>232</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 43.

the thinkers, including Schweitzer, that New Perspective scholars “retrieve,” in order to arrive at their ideas.

# CHAPTER 4

## THE FORERUNNERS OF THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

While E.P. Sanders is usually credited with starting the New Perspective proper, Sanders and other New Perspective writers built upon the work of others before them. In particular, they are indebted to the works of William Wrede and Albert Schweitzer concerning their understanding of the place of justification in Paul's writings. Sanders has also been influenced by his instructor, W.D. Davies. As well, New Perspectivists have learned from Jewish Pauline scholars: Schoeps and Montefiore, and recently from Alan Segal. Some of their thinking also aligns with that of Krister Stendahl. This Chapter aims to provide a brief overview of the contributions of these scholars.

### 4.1 WILLIAM WREDE

William Wrede was a late nineteenth century German New Testament scholar. For much of his working life he was professor in Breslau, Germany. Wrede was respected by Albert Schweitzer and had some ideas in common with modern day New Perspective scholars. One might say he began the move towards New Perspective thinking, especially when it came to his approach to justification.

New Perspective scholars generally argue that Paul's main interest behind his doctrine of justification is not so much about allowing sinners a chance to repent, but about finding a basis for including Gentiles into a previously Jewish covenant. Wrede would have agreed with this.<sup>233</sup> He claims that when discussing justification, Paul's chief concern is with race and not an individual person's salvation.<sup>234</sup> Wrede thinks that justification was a polemical doctrine which arose from the need by the missionary Paul to welcome Gentiles into the covenant.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 20.

<sup>234</sup> Wrede, William, *Paul* (trans. E. Lummis; London: Philip-Green, 1907), 114.

<sup>235</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 160, 172–173.

Wrede can thus be seen as a forerunner of the New Perspective in that he says that justification is not the central doctrine in Paul's thought.<sup>236</sup> In discussing how the early Christian church after Paul often neglected the doctrine of justification, Wrede writes:

The fate of the Pauline doctrine of justification has often excited astonishment. Echoes of it are to be found, but it can clearly be seen that these are only formulas which have been conservatively retained, and are but half understood. The dominating view, everywhere quite frankly expressed, is that the way to salvation is to keep the commandments of God, and of course also the commandment to believe. In reality it is not so strange that this doctrine practically disappears, especially as it was, we found, a polemical doctrine. It disappears because the situation for which it was devised disappeared. The question which at one time exercised every mind was how the converted heathen must stand towards the Jewish Law.<sup>237</sup>

Wrede is also somewhat aligned with New Perspective thought on other issues. For instance, unlike many German biblical scholars of his day who primarily tried to find Greek sources for Paul's thinking, Wrede argued that the roots of Paul's thought were primarily Jewish.<sup>238</sup> However, unlike many modern New Perspective scholars, Wrede argued that Paul ultimately moved the Christian faith away from its Jewish roots. He says: "It is no more the Jewish nation that forms the frame for all [Paul's] ideas, but the world, humanity. Christ is no more the Jewish Messiah, but the saviour of the world; faith in him is therefore no more a form of the Jewish faith, but a new faith."<sup>239</sup>

In keeping with New Perspective scholars, Wrede also saw a large role for grace in Jewish thought. He acknowledges that Judaism talks about grace.<sup>240</sup> Still, he believed that overall Judaism held that salvation is accomplished via human effort, good works.<sup>241</sup> Hence, like Max Weber, Bultmann, F. Weber, and most other nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars, he too thinks also that Judaism was legalistic.

Wrede also says that Paul's doctrine of redemption is very different from that which is within Judaism.<sup>242</sup> This stands in contrast to E.P. Sanders who says that Paul's approach to

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<sup>236</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 123.

<sup>237</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 172–173.

<sup>238</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 139–141.

<sup>239</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 167–168.

<sup>240</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 127.

<sup>241</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 126.

<sup>242</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 84.

redemption is quite similar to what one finds in Judaism, in that both Paul and the Jews were covenantal nomists.

On the subject of Christ as the Messiah, Wrede has very nineteenth century views. For Wrede, Paul sees Christ's function chiefly to be humanity's redeemer and not so much the Jewish Messiah. Wrede says:

The ordinary conception of a Messiah does not suffice to characterize the Christ of Paul. For the significance of the Pauline Christ is valid not for Judaism, but for mankind. On the other hand he is, in essence, something quite different from a man raised up to be Messiah.<sup>243</sup>

Instead of a Jewish Messiah, Wrede understands Paul's Jesus to be a "metaphysically conceived" Son of God, a superhuman divine figure.<sup>244</sup> This stance puts Wrede in a very different camp than New Perspective scholars and their predecessors who emphasize that Paul's thought shows continuity with the Jewish covenant. Wright especially portrays Paul's conception of Jesus to be functioning not merely as a redeemer, but also as the Messiah. Schweitzer does the same.

In Wrede's opinion Paul talks about a redemption, which, for Paul, is a release from the misery of this whole present world. With Wrede's Paul, salvation comes by baptism and acceptance of the doctrine of redemption.<sup>245</sup> "Faith is simply an obedient acceptance of and assent to the preaching of redemption." Furthermore, according to Wrede, mere forgiveness of sin is too narrow an explanation for the redemption that Paul has in mind.<sup>246</sup> Again, this approach stands in contrast to those of the New Perspective scholars who are quick to point out that Paul has ethical expectations of his followers also, and that Paul may threaten them with the loss of their salvation if they do not live up to these expectations.<sup>247</sup>

In many ways Wrede's ideas, therefore, anticipate the New Perspective. Concerning justification Wrede states that "a redemption which means merely the forgiveness of sins and acceptance by God is too narrowly conceived."<sup>248</sup> He also believed that Paul's doctrine of

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<sup>243</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 85.

<sup>244</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 86.

<sup>245</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 113.

<sup>246</sup> Wrede, *Paul*, 92, 95.

<sup>247</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 127–128, 168.

<sup>248</sup> Westerholm, S., *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 18.

justification was chiefly brought into existence as a reaction to Jewish Christianity. Paul saw justification by grace through faith as a means by which Gentiles could enter the covenant without having to follow Jewish ritual laws. Ultimately, though, Wrede is not a New Perspective scholar. Some of his viewpoints are characteristic of the kind of nineteenth and early twentieth century German Biblical scholarship that New Perspective scholars take issue with.

## 4.2 ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Albert Schweitzer made tremendous contributions to the field of biblical scholarship. In addition to authoring two books on Paul, Schweitzer also wrote his *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, where he critiqued the First Quest for the historical Jesus. Schweitzer's ideas also had tremendous influence upon New Perspective scholars.

While Schweitzer's critiques are several decades old, Wright maintains that many of his observations are still valuable. Wright complains that in Schweitzer's own day, his contributions were for the most part ignored. Wright states: "In terms of further scholarship, Schweitzer's view of Paul had little apparent impact. For the next generation, the landscape was dominated by the man whose influence is still felt in many quarters: Rudolf Bultmann."<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, since Schweitzer was largely ignored, Wright states that the opinions he criticized still continue to have some form of existence also. Hence, Schweitzer is still relevant.<sup>250</sup>

As mentioned before, in contrast to many scholars of his day, Schweitzer thought that Paul's thought was particularly influenced by the eschatological ideas found in first century Judaism. Schweitzer maintains that the Jewish eschatological viewpoint held that there were three stages to life: the present age, then the Messianic age, and then the blessed eternal age to come. Schweitzer claims that these viewpoints are incorporated in Paul's Christian eschatology, where the ideas commonly found in first century Judaism are modified by the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>251</sup> Concerning the relative importance of the Jewish—eschatological roots for Paul's thought, Schweitzer says:

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<sup>249</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 38.

<sup>250</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, x-xi.

<sup>251</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 90.

The explanation from the eschatological point of view has the advantage at every point over that from Hellenism. It is able to show that Pauline Mysticism is demanded by eschatological problems, and is therefore necessary; it shows how the most various tenets are derived from a single fundamental conception; it makes clear the origin of the idea of the Mystical Body of Christ, before which the Hellenistic explanation found itself helpless; from this it is able to derive the view of the “being-in-Christ,” for which no satisfactory parallels have been found in Hellenism; it is able to explain the quasi-physical character of the union with Christ, and the realism of the dying and rising again with Him; it makes intelligible why the concept of rebirth is absent in Paul and the new condition of the believer is thought of always and only as an anticipatory resurrection.<sup>252</sup>

As well as defending the Jewish origins for Paul’s thought, Schweitzer also began to break with Protestant Pauline interpretation as it had come to exist in his own day. He starts his book *Paul and His Interpreters* with this statement:

The Reformation fought and conquered in the name of Paul. Consequently the teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles took a prominent place in Protestant study. Nevertheless, the labour expended upon it did not, to begin with, advance the historical understanding of his system of thought. What men looked for in Paul’s writings was proof-texts for Lutheran or Reformed theology; and that was what they found. Reformation exegesis reads its own ideas into Paul, in order to receive them back again clothed with Apostolic authority.”<sup>253</sup>

In addition to complaining that many scholars of his own day concocted an excessively complex and monotonous rendition of Paul’s thinking,<sup>254</sup> one of the central problems that Schweitzer identified in the scholarship of his time is the organization that many scholars attached to Paul’s thoughts. Instead of letting Paul speak for himself, his letters were often broken into arrangements pre-determined by Reformation doctrines. The arrangement betrayed the fact that in the minds of many of these scholars, the dogma derived from Paul’s thought had become more important than Paul’s thought itself. This is despite the fact that Paul’s writings are ultimately those doctrines’ original sources.<sup>255</sup>

Partly, in response to this problem, Schweitzer is able to provide a more penetrating analysis of the general thrust of Paul’s letters and in some cases the differences in accent between the various letters. For instance, Schweitzer saw large differences between the

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<sup>252</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 138.

<sup>253</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 2.

<sup>254</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 36.

<sup>255</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 32–33.

approaches to justification in Romans versus Galatians. In Galatians Jesus makes war against the angel-powers of this world and frees us from the dominion of the law. In Romans it is the law itself and human nature which is flawed which is the source of the law's inability to save.<sup>256</sup> Because of the differences in these two books, Schweitzer claimed that justification was not central to Paul's thought. Instead, he says, for a believer, the status of being-in-Christ was all important,<sup>257</sup> and for Paul justification was a mere corollary of his larger mystical redemption doctrine. Schweitzer writes:

For long it was assumed by scholars that the doctrine which stood so much in the foreground in the Epistles to the Galatians and Romans must be paramount in Paul's teaching. And this conclusion seemed the more obvious because we ourselves do not think of redemption as something quasi-physical, but as consisting in the intellectual appropriation of what Christ is for us. What makes the quasi-physical redemption-doctrine of Paul's mysticism so foreign to us is that it is a collective, cosmically-conditioned event. The doctrine of righteousness by faith is, on the contrary, individualistic and uncosmic. Redemption is for it something that takes place between God, Christ, and the believer. Consequently theology had understanding only for that redemption-doctrine of Paul which has affinities with our own, and regarded the quasi-physical doctrine, when at length this was brought into its purview, as a curiously subsidiary line of thought. Consequently the attempt is made, down to the present day, to see the being-in-Christ as merely an allotropic form—to borrow a chemical analogy—of belief in Christ, without allowing any doubts to be raised by the singularly unsatisfactory results of this experiment in alchemy.<sup>258</sup>

Together with Wrede, Schweitzer claims that Paul's notions of redemption were larger than merely the forgiveness from sin;<sup>259</sup> Paul also had in mind a grander rescue not just from sin but from angelic powers that had previously ruled humanity.<sup>260</sup> In addition, Schweitzer also thinks that most Protestants misunderstood Paul's main focus.<sup>261</sup> He says: "By taking the doctrine of righteousness by faith as the starting point, the understanding of the Pauline world of thought was made impossible."<sup>262</sup> Again, he says:

There is a series of facts which suggest that the doctrine of the redemption, which is mentally appropriated by faith, is only a fragment from the more comprehensive

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<sup>256</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 211–212.

<sup>257</sup> Pelikan, Jaroslav, "Forward" to *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, by Albert Schweitzer (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), xv.

<sup>258</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 219.

<sup>259</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 20.

<sup>260</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 212.

<sup>261</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 20-21.

<sup>262</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 220.



mystical redemption doctrine, which Paul has broken off and polished to give him the particular refraction which he requires.<sup>263</sup>

Like Wrede, Schweitzer claims that Paul's aims with justification were chiefly to include the Gentiles in God's covenant without making them undergo the Jewish ritual law.<sup>264</sup> As a result, Paul's understanding of justification does not inform his views on ethics.<sup>265</sup> Rather it is Paul's views on Christian participation in the body of Christ that are the sources for his ethical formulations.<sup>266</sup>

In keeping with his claim that justification is not central to Paul's thinking, Schweitzer also downplays the importance of faith for Paul. Not faith but baptism, according to Schweitzer, is what Paul considers to be the covenant's entry point.

That this mystical doctrine is actually derived from the eschatological concept of the Community of God in which the Elect are closely bound up with one another and with the Messiah is quite clearly evident from the fact that inclusion in this favoured corporeity is not effected in the moment of believing, and not by faith as such. It is first by Baptism, that is, by the ceremonial act by which the believer enters the "Community of God" and comes into fellowship, not only with Christ, but also with the rest of the Elect, that this inclusion takes place. The Pauline Mysticism is therefore nothing else than the doctrine of making manifest, in consequence of the death and resurrection of Jesus, of the pre-existent Church (the Community of God). The enigmatic concept, which dominates that mysticism, of the "body of Christ" to which all believers belong, and in which they are already dead and risen again, is thus derived from the pre-existent Church (the "Community of God").<sup>267</sup>

Schweitzer also states the following:

They all come to the same point, that the belief in Christ, growing in depth, is by verbal ingenuity made to figure as a being-in-Christ. That the being-in-Christ arises out of such an enhancement of belief in Christ is nowhere indicated by Paul and is nowhere presupposed by him. The relationship of faith in Christ to union with Christ is for him thus: that belief in Christ being present, union with Christ automatically takes place—under certain circumstances, that is to say, when the believer causes himself to be baptized. Without baptism there is no being-in-Christ! The peculiarity of the Pauline mysticism is precisely that being-in-Christ is not a subjective experience brought about by a special effort of faith on the part of the believer, but something which happens, in him as in others, at baptism.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 220.

<sup>264</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 20-21.

<sup>265</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 21-22.

<sup>266</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 219-221.

<sup>267</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 116.

<sup>268</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 117.

It is worth noting that even though Wright has described himself as a disciple of Schweitzer's, Schweitzer does not openly criticize Luther in the same way Wright does. This could be because Schweitzer is aware of the strong sacramental focus in Luther's thought. Consequently, Schweitzer knows that when he affirms that baptism is the covenant entry point, he is not challenging Luther, as many New Perspective scholars have thought. Luther himself also thought that baptism was the covenant entry point. As will be indicated later, Luther's chief problem with Medieval Catholicism was not the doctrine of baptism, but the doctrine of penance. To use Sanders' terminology, Luther was not in dispute with the Catholics over the "getting in," point, but at what it took to "stay in."

Schweitzer's similarities to New Perspective scholars do not end with his views of justification or the importance of Paul's Jewish roots. Schweitzer's Paul also has a stricter approach to ethics than what sometimes one sees in modern Protestantism. Schweitzer writes:

Once the eschatological character of the Pauline sacramental concept is understood, the parallel drawn between Baptism and the "Lord's Meal" on the one hand, and the baptism in the Red Sea and under the cloud and the eating of manna and drinking the water from the rock on the other, ceases to be an obscurity which has to be excused as a product of Rabbinic ingenuity, and becomes thoroughly sound and natural. Sound, too, is the application which Paul designs to make in thus citing the Old Testament parallels for Baptism and the Lord's Meal. He desires to correct the false confidence which was liable to arise from having been baptized and having partaken of the Lord's Meal. Now although the Israelites who came up out of Egypt were intended by God to take possession of the Promised Land, and were in so many ways consecrated thereto by the saving acts of God, they nevertheless forfeited the good that had been promised to them through idolatry, unchastity, tempting God, and murmuring against Him. As they failed to reach the Promised Land, so now will those who have been baptized and have partaken of the table of the Lord fail to attain the Messianic Kingdom if they sin in a similar way. The great problem of the relation of the ethical to the sacramental which Hellenism cautiously avoids—when it does not rashly decide it in favour of the Sacramental—is here grasped by Paul with a sure hand, and solved by showing that the sacramental good is rendered invalid by unethical conduct. That he should come to such a conclusion is yet another sign that his mind is not moving on the lines of Hellenistic sacramental conceptions.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 260.

Being in the Spirit, it rests with the believer to decide whether he will be in earnest about it, and consistently live in the Spirit. He must resolve to let the Spirit rule completely in all his thought, speech and action. He must not suppose that he can be in the Spirit and at the same time live in the flesh. For those who are in Christ and in the Spirit, their being in the flesh is only a matter of outward appearance, not a real state of existence. This relation the elect man has to preserve by freeing himself from the thoughts and desires of his natural Ego, and submitting in all things to the ethical direction of the Spirit. If by his conduct he allows the being-in-the-flesh again to become a reality, he gives up the being-in-the-Spirit and the resurrection state of existence, of which this is the pledge.<sup>270</sup>

As one can see in the quote above, Schweitzer maintains that in Paul's thinking, it is possible for a believer to be part of the community of faith, to be "saved" in other words, and then lose his salvation at some point later on.<sup>271</sup> Schweitzer's articulation of this position no doubt lays the foundation for other New Perspective scholars, such as Terry Donaldson, to maintain the same viewpoint.

Schweitzer also challenges us. He suggests that Christians should not only take seriously the idea of redemption from our sins, but also the notion of the kingdom of God as a viable vision worth striving for in the present day.<sup>272</sup> He sees it important to strive for the kingdom of God not just as a form of "Protestantism with a tincture of sociology,"<sup>273</sup> as is often done. Rather, it is something brought about by the recognition of the active presence of the Holy Spirit within Christian communities today. While it may be that Schweitzer does not clearly spell out exactly how one would implement these visions of the kingdom of God in a modern Christian community, nonetheless, in expressing these viewpoints he can be seen to be the forerunner of Wright who has similar themes in his books. Schweitzer writes:

Since the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God begins for Paul with the death of Christ, the Primitive-Christian belief which looked to a redemption only to be realized in the future is changed into the belief in a redemption which is already present, even though it is only to be completely realized in the future. A faith of the present arises within the faith of the future. Paul connects the expectation of the Kingdom and of the redemption to be realized in it with the coming of the death of Jesus, in such a way that belief in redemption and in the Coming of the Kingdom

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<sup>270</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 168.

<sup>271</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 127–128, 168.

<sup>272</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters* 381.

<sup>273</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters* 382.

becomes independent of whether the Kingdom comes quickly or is delayed. Without giving up eschatology, he already stands above it.<sup>274</sup>

Although Schweitzer was extremely influential on the development of the New Perspective, he cannot entirely be seen within the New Perspective camp. At times Schweitzer agrees in essence with Westerholm's views regarding the missionary preaching of Paul and its relation to judgement and repentance. Westerholm, for instance, sees Paul's earliest preaching in 1 Thessalonians to be about immanent judgement and the possibility of escape from that judgement through a connection to Jesus. On this basis, Westerholm claims that Paul's Thessalonian preaching was primarily directed at the search for a merciful God; allowing sinners to escape from judgement and receive grace.<sup>275</sup> Schweitzer would have disagreed with Stendahl and agreed with Westerholm in this respect.<sup>276</sup>

On the whole, however, Schweitzer broke ground for the New Perspective in several ways. He, together with Wrede, challenged the notion that justification was central to Paul's thought. Also, by raising the idea that Christ's atonement was not effectively ongoing but only applied to the initial moment of baptism, Schweitzer challenged the notion that a cheap-grace understanding of salvation could be properly Pauline. Schweitzer affirmed the Jewishness and the Jewish-eschatological nature of Paul's thought. He also laid the groundwork for Sanders and Stendahl by critiquing the view that Paul was driven to his conversion by a psychological experience prompted by an ethical crisis with the law. In this way, Schweitzer affirms that the motives for Paul's conversion were not similar to Luther's. If Sanders is the father of New Perspective thinking, Albert Schweitzer is its grandfather. Much of the New Perspective's theological and scholarly DNA comes from him.

### **4.3 W.D. DAVIES**

The Welsh New Testament scholar, W.D. Davies, also had an immense influence on the development of the New Perspective. This happened for two reasons. First, Davies was a teacher of E.P. Sanders. Second, arguably Davies, more than any other scholar, attempted to free Paul from the confines of being analyzed through the lens of Hellenism. Once Davies

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<sup>274</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 380.

<sup>275</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 4–7.

<sup>276</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 54.

had done this, Sanders was able to build upon Davies' work to write *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.

One of the most significant aspects of the work of W.D. Davies was to contribute to the rehabilitation of the views on Judaism among Christian scholars. Like Schweitzer, he emphasized the Jewish as opposed to the Hellenistic foundations for Paul's thought. However, Davies' chief contribution was to challenge the common notions regarding the relationship of the Christian Church with the ethnic Jewish Israel.

Davies strongly critiqued the view that the church has replaced the ethnic Jews in their place in the covenant, and claimed instead that for Paul the church was to a large extent continuous with Judaism. Davies claims that Christianity represents in Paul's mind the true embodiment of the Jewish religion, and that Paul still sees some connection between or continuity with the church and ethnic Israel. According to Davies, Paul did not really leave Judaism. Davies writes: "In accepting the Jew, Jesus, as the Messiah, Paul did not think in terms of moving into a new religion but of having found the final expression and intent of the Jewish tradition within which he himself had been born."<sup>277</sup>

Davies attempted to diminish the separation between New Testament Christianity and Judaism. For instance, Davies argues that Paul was not so much converted to a new faith, but "called" to a new understanding of the faith that he already had.<sup>278</sup> Paul still considered himself as working in the service of the God of Israel; so likely he would not have considered himself to be converting. He was monotheistic, like all the other Jews. The usual religious alternatives in those days were pagan polytheism, or the God of the Greek philosophers—but that God wasn't to be mistaken for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – which was the God that Paul still worshipped. As Davies says:

Like Sabbatai Svi and Nathan of Gaza in the 17th century, he would not have conceived of himself as having ceased to be a Jew (Rom 9:3–11:1) or as having inaugurated a new religion. To make him guilty of anti-Judaism, not to speak of anti-Semitism, is to ascribe to the doctrine and life of first-century Judaism a monolithic character which they did not possess and which Paul himself would not have countenanced, a fact which is quite essential for the true appreciation of his position.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Davies, W.D., *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 136.

<sup>278</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 123.

<sup>279</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 136.

Again, Davies states:

Even though Paul can refer in Galatians to *Ioudaismos* (1:13f.), his criticisms of the symbols of Judaism no more signify that he had forsaken Judaism than did the bitter attacks of the sectarians at Qumran against the authorities in Jerusalem signify that they had forsaken it.<sup>280</sup>

For any Christian Jew at the time of Jesus, Davies argues, Christianity was not a new religion, but the truer understanding and practice of their old religion. They had, after all, been told to anticipate the coming of the Messiah, because of their Jewish roots, and now that Jesus had come they were busy following him. Paul had similar views.

The first Christians were Jewish followers of the covenant with God, just those with a different opinion as to who the Messiah was. Paul's only addition to this was that he thought that Gentiles could join this group without having to keep the Torah of Moses. They could be connected to the covenant and be considered children of Abraham by merely being baptized and having faith in Jesus. Davies says the following:

The separation was after Paul, and must not be read back into his engagement with the religion of his fathers. It was the desperate necessity for Jamnian Judaism to close its own ranks against dissidents, to elevate the Torah as interpreted by the Pharisees still more to be the way of Jewish life, and the reaction to this among Christians and Jews contributed most to the emergence of what we call Christianity as a distinct religion. But Paul predated Jamnia.<sup>281</sup>

Finally, the clearest indications that Paul had not left Judaism are Romans 9–11, where Paul displays an ongoing desire to be connected to his fellow Jews. In regard to this Davies comments:

As we shall see, so far from revealing anti-Judaism, these chapters [Rom 9–11] reveal a Paul conscious of an emerging anti-Judaism among Gentile Christians that could draw on the endemic hostilities of the Greco-Roman pagan world to help it. He is determined to combat this.<sup>282</sup>

Although he contributed to its development, Davies does not entirely fall within the New Perspective camp. He makes several statements that would speak against the idea that the

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<sup>280</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 135.

<sup>281</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 137.

<sup>282</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 138.

gospel was primarily about erasing ethnic boundaries as some New Perspective scholars have suggested.

Philo and the Palestinian sages anticipated that ethnic and linguistic distinctions would continue into the messianic age—a position rooted in the Old Testament. We might expect Paul to have shared this view. His insistence that “in Christ” there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gal 3:28, Col 3:11) would seem at first sight to exclude it. However, it is clear that unity “in Christ” did not undo ethnic differences. In Christ Jews remain Jews and Greeks remain Greeks. Ethnic peculiarities are honoured (1 Cor 9:22, 10:32). If in Rom 11:32 we accept the reading of *ta panta* rather than *tous pantas*, which is usually followed, then Paul makes explicit that in the final reconciliation ethnic distinctions remain. Can we not then simply assert that Jews will remain Jews, as a people, when they are saved, as Paul had himself continued to be an Israelite (11:1)? The apostle thought of the salvation of all Israel at the limit of history not as involving the destruction of its ethnic identity but as its enhancement. What, then, precisely is the salvation of all Israel to which Paul refers?<sup>283</sup>

Again Davies says: “In 1 Cor 9:22, there it is clear, at least, that Paul is not thinking of salvation in terms of the abandonment of ethnic differences: to the Jews he became as a Jew. In 1 Cor 1:24 ‘sensitivities are also honoured.’”<sup>284</sup>

Davies’ approach that Paul did not perceive himself to be leaving Judaism seems logical. His most lengthy discussion of Judaism and the Jewish place in God’s plan comes in Romans 9–11. In those three chapters Paul clearly describes himself as an Israelite. He states: “Has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1; NRSV). As opposed to thinking that he, Paul, has left and converted to a new faith, the way he pictures the situation is that he believes that it is his non-Christian fellow-Jews who have left the true faith, in the same way that the Baal-worshipping Israelites were disobedient to God’s covenant during the time of Elijah (Rom 11:2–4). He speaks about them being “cut off” and having “stumbled,” and “being broken off because of unbelief.” Yet just as they were broken off, he believes that God can graft them in again (Rom. 11:23–24).

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<sup>283</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 139.

<sup>284</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 140.

#### 4.4 KRISTER STENDAHL

As mentioned before, the belief that Paul too, in addition to Luther, sought for a gracious God, was once a widely held view among biblical scholars. Schweitzer gives the following example from Holtzmann in this regard:

Holtzmann is, in fact, still straightly confined to the Reformation and modern point of view, from which the twofold event of the death and resurrection of Christ is considered by itself, in isolation, and an attempt is made to get behind it by psychologizing, and thus to discover how, according to the statements of Paul, it produced a complete change in God and man, and effected justification and reconciliation.... This unfortunate result becomes apparent in regard to the question of the Law. He is unable to make it in any way intelligible how Paul was necessarily led, as a matter of reasoning, to the conviction that it was no longer valid. In the last resort he can only appeal to the unique character of the vision on the Damascus road. He assumes that this 'brought to an issue in the zealous Pharisee not only a theoretic, but also an ethical crisis, terminating that painful condition of inner division which Paul pictures out of his own inmost consciousness when he speaks of the experiences which are associated with subjection to the law.' "Previously," he continues, "the Pharisee had anxiously sought to conceal from himself, or to argue away, the fact that the law was impossible of fulfilment, and was therefore no way of salvation, but rather the contrary. There now rose upon this melancholy scene, strewn with the shattered fragments of attempts to gain righteousness, a new light streaming from the Christ, whom the legalists had delivered to death, whereas His being raised again by God guaranteed the actual presence of another way of salvation. Not only did his former legal service appear to him a life of sin, his Pharisaic rabbinism as foolishness, his attack upon the Messianic community as enmity to God, but even in his inmost being a crisis had taken place in consequence of which a tension, under which he had hitherto groaned, had suddenly been relaxed."<sup>285</sup>

New Perspective scholars, however, challenge the notion that Paul's motives for his conversion to Christianity were in any way similar to Luther's. Krister Stendahl is the most famous proponent of this challenge. The English speaking world largely became aware of his ideas in 1976, when a collection of his previously written works was compiled and published in English under the title of *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*. In these essays Stendahl takes aim at the notion that Paul too, like Luther, struggled with a contorted conscience, and it was these pangs of conscience and the search for a gracious God that drove Paul to seek out Christianity.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 103–104.

<sup>286</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 37.



Stendahl maintains that Paul had different motives for his conversion than Luther did for his. While internal factors moved Luther towards Protestantism, external factors moved Paul towards Christianity.<sup>287</sup> Most especially, Paul as a Jew, says Stendahl, felt rather good about himself and he felt confident about his place in God's community of salvation.<sup>288</sup> Unlike Luther, Paul was not searching to find a gracious God. Stendahl says: "Here is a man with quite a robust conscience. Here is a man not plagued by introspection. The difference between Paul and Luther, and perhaps modern Western man, is precisely at that point."<sup>289</sup>

Furthermore, the different reasons that prompted each man to be converted undoubtedly meant that each man's theology was quite different from the other's.<sup>290</sup> In fact, Stendahl states, the early church fathers correctly understood Paul and what he was actually writing about; the ability of Gentiles to join the Christian church without needing to follow the Jewish ceremonial laws.

#### **4.5 JEWISH PAULINE SCHOLARS: MONTEFIORE, SCHOEPS, AND SEGAL**

One of the positive contributions that the New Perspective has made is to encourage Christians to listen to the views of Jewish scholars. In addition to his own critiques of F. Weber,<sup>291</sup> Sanders looks at the contributions of Jewish scholars and their reactions to the idea that Judaism is legalistic. Sanders pays particular attention to the writings of two Jewish scholars, C.G. Montefiore, and H.J. Schoeps.

##### **4.5.1 Claude G. Montefiore**

One of these scholars, C. Montefiore, inquired about Paul's Jewish background. Since there were several varieties of Judaism within the first century, Montefiore wonders to what strain was Paul chiefly exposed.<sup>292</sup> Montefiore sees Paul as chiefly concerned about breaking down

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<sup>287</sup> Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 12.

<sup>288</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 37.

<sup>289</sup> Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 14.

<sup>290</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 37.

<sup>291</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 53–54.

<sup>292</sup> Montefiore, C.G., *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays* (London: Max Goschen Ltd., 1914) 3, 14.

the barriers of race.<sup>293</sup> Like Bultmann, he thinks that Paul was drawn to Christianity by the preaching of the gospel, not by a supernatural conversion experience.<sup>294</sup>

Montefiore complains about the ignorance of most Christian scholars towards Judaism, and that Judaism is the one area of knowledge where scholars feel free to make assertions without having any evidence or references.<sup>295</sup> Yet he admits that it is difficult to find adequate source materials to describe in detail the Rabbinic Judaism of Paul's day. This is because the chief materials that we have, the Mishnah and Talmud, were written down from one hundred and fifty to four hundred and fifty years later than Paul.<sup>296</sup>

Montefiore claims that the Judaism that Paul shows awareness of is not the Rabbinic Judaism of the year 300 AD or 500 AD.<sup>297</sup> The God described by the Rabbinic Judaism of the year 300 AD or 500 AD was intensely personal, and did not delegate his relations with Israel to an angel or a subordinate as Paul had claimed.<sup>298</sup> God's law was in turn looked upon not as a burden, but as a gift from God and a joy to fulfill.<sup>299</sup> For example, men would thank God because they had more commands to fulfil than women did.<sup>300</sup> Yes, some "bad Jews in every generation" assumed that completing the ceremonial laws would make the moral laws unnecessary, but the average Jew would not have assumed this.<sup>301</sup> Judaism did not regularly produce either proud and self-righteous believers, nor despairing or timid believers, but humble and hopeful believers who recognized that any salvation that came to them was not from their own merits but from God's grace.<sup>302</sup> Forgiveness and repentance play a large role in Rabbinic Judaism<sup>303</sup> and God is viewed as being eager to forgive the transgressions of any person who repents even a little.<sup>304</sup> For all but the most hardened sinners there was the possibility of reaching the life to come.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 114.

<sup>294</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 128.

<sup>295</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 7.

<sup>296</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 16–17.

<sup>297</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 18–23.

<sup>298</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 26.

<sup>299</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 28–32.

<sup>300</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 29.

<sup>301</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 33.

<sup>302</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 34–36.

<sup>303</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 97.

<sup>304</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 13.

<sup>305</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 44.

The one fault of Rabbinic Judaism was its particularity, favouring Jews over Gentiles, and thus Paul's main focus must have been to eliminate the walls between Jews and Gentiles.<sup>306</sup> Montefiore is puzzled why Paul, based on the Rabbinic Judaism which he knows, would have constructed a theory of the Law similar to what one finds in Romans, or would have ignored the Rabbinic notions of repentance.<sup>307</sup> Thus, either the Rabbinic Judaism of 50 AD is different than the Rabbinic Judaism of 500 AD, or Paul was not a Rabbinic Jew.<sup>308</sup>

One of Montefiore's central points is that Paul failed to correctly understand Rabbinic Judaism. He concludes that Paul must not have been aware of or exposed to Palestinian Judaism primarily,<sup>309</sup> rather it must have been a certain variety of Hellenistic Judaism that Paul was exposed to.<sup>310</sup> This is the only way, he claims, that one can account for the gross misunderstandings of Rabbinic Judaism that one finds in Paul as well as the more negative attitude that Paul carries towards the world and human nature.

While he disagrees with Paul, he demonstrates respect for his thought. Although he writes just over a century ago, in his writings Montefiore at times sounds like a modern-day religious pluralist:

Some of us have come to realize that there are varieties of saintliness, different types of righteousness, and that one must not judge any religion by the picture drawn of it by an antagonist or convert .... Some of us have learnt to realize that there are many pathways which lead to God, and they are fain to believe that the Father of all is well pleased to accept the varying degrees of conception about Himself.<sup>311</sup>

#### 4.5.2 H.J. Schoeps

H.J. Schoeps is another Jewish scholar who wrote about Paul and responds to F. Weber's understandings of Judaism. In his book *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, Schoeps starts by providing a brief summary of other scholars' approaches to Paul. Concerning the possibility of Hellenistic influences in Paul's thought, Schoeps thinks that if these existed in Paul they exist not because of the direct influence of

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<sup>306</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 64.

<sup>307</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 66.

<sup>308</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 68.

<sup>309</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 14.

<sup>310</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 93–94.

<sup>311</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 5–6.

Hellenistic philosophies upon Paul, but because diaspora Judaism itself may have gradually been exposed to Hellenistic ideas<sup>312</sup>.

Schoeps agrees with some of Montefiore's critiques of F. Weber,<sup>313</sup> but he also makes what he sees are corrections to some of Montefiore's excessive claims about Paul and Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>314</sup> Schoeps, for example, demonstrates that a number of the ideas that Montefiore thinks are primarily found in Hellenistic Judaism can be also traced to Palestinian Judaism.<sup>315</sup> Nevertheless, Schoeps says that Montefiore is on the right track in asking whether Hellenistic Judaism or Palestinian Judaism influenced Paul's thought,<sup>316</sup> and argues that some of the emphases in Paul's thinking can be traced back to translation differences between the LXX and the Masoretic text.<sup>317</sup> Paul, he claims, favours the LXX translation over the Masoretic text wherever there is a dispute between the Hebrew and the Greek.<sup>318</sup>

Yet, there is strong evidence that Paul had Palestinian Rabbinic influences in his thought. Schoeps says that Paul's writings display influences of Semitic constructions, indicating that his first language could have been Aramaic,<sup>319</sup> and his exegetical method displays evidence that he was schooled within Rabbinic Pharisaism.<sup>320</sup> Schoeps also states that Rabbinic Judaism was not as universally optimistic as Montefiore believes, and there were pessimistic voices within Rabbinic Pharisaism which very much parallel the themes and ideas found in Paul's thought;<sup>321</sup> ideas which Montefiore had claimed could only have come from Hellenistic Jewish sources.<sup>322</sup>

One thing that Schoeps and Montefiore do agree on was that the Jewish people do not have to earn their way into their own covenant through the performance of good works as dictated by the law, but that entrance into the Jewish covenant takes place through God's election, an act of divine grace. Both men also agree that from the Jewish perspective, the

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<sup>312</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 23.

<sup>313</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 25.

<sup>314</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 14.

<sup>315</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 26, 42–43.

<sup>316</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 35.

<sup>317</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 28–32.

<sup>318</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 32.

<sup>319</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 36.

<sup>320</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 37–39.

<sup>321</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 14.

<sup>322</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 186–187.

giving of the law to Israel was not perceived to be a burden.<sup>323</sup> The law rather is seen as a joyful duty which one performs in order to affirm the covenant relationship that God has already established.<sup>324</sup>

Furthermore, if obedience to the law is done in response to God's election and grace,<sup>325</sup> Paul then, claims Schoeps, misunderstood Judaism, and was in error when he suggested that obedience to "works of the law" was, under Judaism, the perceived route by which one tried to attain righteousness with God. Also, Schoeps claims that Jews understand the term "faith" to imply faithfulness, Paul again is in error when he implies that "works of the law" and faith should be held in contrast with each other.<sup>326</sup> Like Montefiore before him Schoeps believes that Paul did not understand essential Jewish theology.<sup>327</sup> Schoeps also casts suspicion upon Luther's approach to Paul:

For this reason too, the Pauline doctrine of justification ... considered from the standpoint of rabbinic understanding of the law, stems from a partial aspect of the law wrongly isolated from the saving significance of the law as a whole. Protestant exegetes do well to distinguish between the place of this doctrine in Paul's thought and its role in the theology of Luther.<sup>328</sup>

Although they differ as to exactly how, both Schoeps and Montefiore claim that Paul misunderstood Judaism. Both also claim that Judaism is much more optimistic and grace-based than F. Weber and his followers had believed.

#### **4.5.3 Alan Segal**

Segal is a practicing Jew who has also written brilliantly about Paul. E.P. Sanders did not rely on Segal's work in order to build his theories in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Segal's work was published thirteen years afterwards. Still his work deserves mention since it is relevant to the New Perspective debate and it also appears that Sanders has reacted to some of what Segal says in his most recent book.

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<sup>323</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 14.

<sup>324</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 197.

<sup>325</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 195.

<sup>326</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 15.

<sup>327</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 196, 198, 200.

<sup>328</sup> Schoeps, *Paul, The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 196.

Segal thinks that the study of Paul is also an important source for information about the history of Judaism itself, since Paul's arguments can date the historicity of Pharisaic influence in the later created Mishna.<sup>329</sup> Segal chose the title of his book, *Paul the Convert*, in response to Stendahl's claim that Paul was called, and not converted,<sup>330</sup> and in response to W.D. Davies' claim that Paul did not convert to a new religion. Segal claims that Paul did convert.<sup>331</sup> While Segal admits that Paul may not have considered himself to be leaving Judaism,<sup>332</sup> he does claim that Paul converted to a new religion. He writes: "In this sense Paul's Christianity is an alternative religion, analytically complete in its own terms, based on Paul's experience within Pharisaism but transformed by his faith in Christ."<sup>333</sup>

As opposed to Schoeps and Montefiore, New Perspective scholars generally do not claim that Paul misunderstood Judaism. Instead they think that it is more likely that modern Protestants have misunderstood Paul.<sup>334</sup> Segal would agree with the New Perspective scholars on this front. Still, Segal is somewhat critical of other Jewish scholars' approach to Paul. He writes: "Scholars of Jewish studies frequently disparage Paul's writings, as if to say, 'Nothing serious can be concluded about Judaism from such a person.' This is a pretext for ignoring writing with disturbing evaluations of Judaism."<sup>335</sup>

Segal thinks that it is a mistake to treat the Mishna and Talmud as sole sources of information on first-century Judaism. He thinks that Paul, writing closer to the actual events, may be a better source of information on Judaism than the later "more Jewish" writings.<sup>336</sup>

He also thinks that Paul works out his faith from his very skilled Pharisaic exegesis of New Testament texts and that one can often find similar themes to Paul's ideas in other Jewish literature of the time. For instance, Paul's identification of the temple with the community of believers, and not with the building in Jerusalem, is similar to what one finds in the Qumran literature.<sup>337</sup> Paul's view that all are sinners and need God's supernatural intervention of grace in order to be saved is also a view similar to what one finds in the

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<sup>329</sup> Segal, Alan, *Paul the Convert*, xv.

<sup>330</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 5–7.

<sup>331</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 182.

<sup>332</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, xiv.

<sup>333</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 182.

<sup>334</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 105.

<sup>335</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, xv.

<sup>336</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, xv.

<sup>337</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 168.

Qumran community.<sup>338</sup> In addition, discussion of justification is not unique to Paul or even to the New Testament.<sup>339</sup> Paul's insistence that Gentiles need not be circumcised in order to be saved was not revolutionary, since some other non-Christian Jews made the same claim. However, Paul's idea that Jews and Gentiles could form the same community was much more radical.<sup>340</sup>

E.P. Sanders, in his most recent book on Paul, throws into doubt the claim that Paul was a Pharisee.<sup>341</sup> Unlike Sanders, Segal claims that Paul was trained as a Pharisee and frequently links Paul's style of argument and exegesis with other Pharisaic writing.<sup>342</sup> For instance, Paul's understanding that converts to Judaism who adopt the law are required to keep the whole of the law is similar, Segal claims, to what one finds in Pharisaic Judaism.<sup>343</sup>

Segal's book, *Paul the Convert*, echoes many of the claims that New Perspective scholars have made. Segal argues God's righteousness includes mercy, especially in Rabbinic Judaism,<sup>344</sup> and that the Rabbis maintained that God's giving of the commandments was an aspect of God's mercy.<sup>345</sup> Segal would agree with Dunn that Paul, for the most part, articulates a difference between ethical and ceremonial aspects of the Torah.<sup>346</sup> Like other New Perspective scholars, Segal also thinks that Paul's essential goal is to try to weld together a single community of believers made up of Jewish and Gentile components, where Torah practice is irrelevant to the community unity and dynamics.<sup>347</sup>

#### **4.5.4 Grace in Judaism, and other sources**

Regarding the grace-based nature of Judaism, Orthodox Rabbi, Dr. Yisroel Miller, agrees with Schoeps and Montefiore.<sup>348</sup> When interviewed on August 15, 2014, Dr. Miller referred to a section of the Mishna which states:

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<sup>338</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 175.

<sup>339</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 175.

<sup>340</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 194.

<sup>341</sup> Sanders, E.P., *Paul, The Apostle's Life Letters and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 37, 40-42.

<sup>342</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 119.

<sup>343</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 119-120.

<sup>344</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 176.

<sup>345</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 175.

<sup>346</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 124.

<sup>347</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 182-183.

<sup>348</sup> Dr. Yisroel Miller, Rabbi of House of Jacob Mikveh Israel, Orthodox Synagogue, Calgary. Discussion, August 15, 2014.

All Israel has a share in the world to come. As it reads [Isaiah 9:21]: “And thy people—they will all be righteous, for ever shall they possess the land, the sprout of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may glorify myself.” The following have no share in the world to come: He who says that there is no allusion in the Torah concerning the resurrection, and he who says that the Torah was not given by Heaven, and a follower of Epicurus R. Aquiba added, him who reads the books of the Hizunim and him who mumbles over a wound, reciting the verse [Ex. Xv.26]: “I will put none of those diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I the Lord am thy physician.” Abba Shaul said: Also he who speaks out the Holy Name with its vocals. Three kings and four commoners have no share in the world to come. The three kings are Jeroboam, Achab, and Menasseh. R. Jehudah, however, said: Menasseh has a share in the world to come (m. Sanhedrin 10:1).

Sanders also mentions the same passage in his most recent book on Paul when he emphasizes the grace-based nature of Judaism.<sup>349</sup> The quote above demonstrates that while the Rabbis believed that yes, it was possible to lose one’s status as a member of the Jewish covenant through sin, still, the default option, is and was acceptance by God based on grace. In other words, all Jews could receive a place in God’s future plans for Israel and be saved. Furthermore, assuming that Jews did not do any of those things which caused them to be excluded, their eventual salvation, their place in the age to come is assured.

Also, if the old adage proves true that, *as one worships so one believes*, then certainly one can demonstrate that Judaism has more of a focus on grace than many Protestant scholars have perceived. One has to look no further than the Passover liturgy to find songs of thanksgiving to God for his gifts to his people, including the giving of the Torah to Moses. The Law then, is not seen as a burden but as a gift.<sup>350</sup>

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who created the fruit of the vine. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who has chosen us for your service from among the nations, exalting us by making us holy through your commandments (Deut. 7:6). In love have you given us, O Lord our God, holidays for joy and festivals for gladness. You did give us this Feast of Unleavened Bread, the season of freedom, in commemoration of our liberation from Egypt. You have chosen us for you from among the nations and have sanctified us by giving us, with love and gladness, your holy festivals as a heritage. Blessed are you, O Lord, who hallowed Israel and the festivals.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life Letters and Thought*, 45.

<sup>350</sup> Bronstein, Herbert. Editor. *A Passover Haggadah*. Revised Edition. General Conference of American Rabbis (Philadelphia. Maurice Jacobs Press. Inc. 1994), 52–53.

<sup>351</sup> Thompson, Barbara, Balzac, *Passover Seder, Ritual and Menu for an Observance by Christians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 7.



Part of the Passover liturgy includes a song called the “Dayenu,” which gives thanks to God for among other things, the giving of the Torah.<sup>352</sup> Keeping the Torah is seen as an activity that one has the joy and privilege of doing; something you get to do, not something you are forced to do.

If the Mishna and Jewish worship services do not provide enough evidence, the Scriptures themselves clearly demonstrate that Jewish beliefs allow for a significant amount of grace. Isaiah 40 begins with: “Comfort, comfort, my people, says the Lord.” Psalm 119 clearly states that the law is a gift and not a burden. Immediately after the incident where the Israelites made the golden calf, God forgives the Israelites at the request of Moses. He clearly re-establishes his people’s status despite their past sins and despite that one can be cynical as to whether they truly repented.

One can add to this list concerning grace in Judaism the sections in the Old Testament where repentance and grace and forgiveness after repentance is the focus. Joseph forgives his brothers and reconciles with them, even though one wonders sometimes whether their repentance is based more on fear than on real desire to change and admit their error. In Deuteronomy 30, God allows for repentance and the re-establishment of his people back into the land of promise.

There are many other Old Testament passages where, even though Israel does not fully repent, God forgives them anyhow. Some of these include Ezekiel 16:1–14, 36, 62–63; Jeremiah 42:10–12; Hosea 1:10–11, 2:14–23, 6:1–3, 14:1–9; Amos 7:1–3; Jonah 1–4; Micah 4, 7:8–20; Zechariah 1:12–17, 2:8, 3:1–10, 14. Deuteronomy 7:7 says that God chose the Israelites not because they were the greatest of nations, but because they were the weakest. Even possibly the darkest book in the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations, has grace and hope placed right in its centre. Furthermore, if Lamentations was written in a chiasmic pattern, as much Hebrew literature was, then the grace and hope in the book’s centre turns out to be a major focus of the text.

The elements of grace in the Old Testament were not lost on Luther. Lohse describes Luther as seeing two chief themes in Scripture, God’s judgement and God’s grace.<sup>353</sup> Luther

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<sup>352</sup> Thompson, *Passover Seder*, 11–12; Bronstein, *A Passover Haggadah*, 105.

<sup>353</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 29, 41.

perceives there to be more judgement in the Old Testament than in the New, and more grace in the New Testament than in the old, but judgement and grace appear in both.<sup>354</sup> This will be discussed further below, but suffice it to say that Luther himself acknowledges that there is grace in the Old Testament covenant, and he actually sees the Old Testament covenant, at least in the way that God intended it (and not as he thinks it was often misunderstood), as being quite similar to the covenant of grace extended to Christians after Easter.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

In many ways the New Perspective is not new. Its roots go deep into the history of the church. In Chapter 2 we saw that some of the positions held by New Perspective scholars were also held by early Christian and Medieval Catholic thinkers. More recently, New Perspective scholars have been influenced by other scholars. Wrede and Schweitzer question the centrality of justification within Paul's thought. Jewish Pauline scholars like Montefiore, Schoeps and Segal uniformly maintain that Judaism is a grace-based faith. Stendahl has challenged the recently held Protestant notions of Paul's conversion, and W.D. Davies makes it clear that Paul's Jewishness cannot be doubted. It is time to see how the New Perspective writers themselves have built upon this heritage.

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<sup>354</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 157.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE NEW PERSPECTIVE SCHOLARS AND THEIR VIEWPOINTS

N. T. Wright is quick to point out that there is no single New Perspective, and the scholars usually included in this group have ideas that greatly diverge from each other.<sup>355</sup> This is no doubt true. New Perspective scholars have different opinions on a variety of matters. For instance, unlike other New Perspective scholars such as Wright, Dunn, and Donaldson, Sanders can, at times express appreciation for certain aspects of Bultmann's interpretation of Paul.<sup>356</sup>

Yet, while Wright's claims of diversity among New Perspective scholars are true, those who are generally considered to be New Perspective scholars do have certain viewpoints in common. This chapter will briefly touch on the work of four major New Perspective scholars, namely Sanders, Wright, Dunn, and Donaldson, and will give some background as to how their work challenges the Old Perspective views on Paul. There could have been other scholars that we might have included. Gaston and Gager, for instance, are sometimes considered to be part of the New Perspective. Their work, however, proposes a two-covenant hypothesis in Paul's thought.<sup>357</sup> Gaston cleaves to this understanding even to the point of claiming that Paul did not think that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.<sup>358</sup> Gager, although he differs with some of Gaston's views, also thinks that the Jewish covenant has not been abrogated and that, according to Paul, the Jews will not have to convert to Christianity in order to be saved.<sup>359</sup> However, most other scholars, New Perspective or not, do not think that Paul proposed that God had set up one covenant for Jews and another for non-Jews.<sup>360</sup> This is especially the case with Wright, who rejects the two-covenant understanding

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<sup>355</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 64.

<sup>356</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 514-515.

<sup>357</sup> Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 116-117.

<sup>358</sup> Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 8.

<sup>359</sup> Gager, John G., *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1983), 209, 260-261.

<sup>360</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 279.

since it would allow for religion based on race, which is what he claims that Paul is fighting against.<sup>361</sup> For brevity's sake then Gaston and Gager are not included here.

## 5.1 E.P. SANDERS

We have already examined some of E. P. Sanders' contributions and the importance of his book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. As mentioned previously, in writing his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Sanders makes use of the contributions of Jewish scholars such as Montefiore and Schoeps to arrive at his conception of Judaism. While Westerholm and other scholars have questioned whether Sanders has sufficiently demonstrated that Judaism is as grace-filled as he claims,<sup>362</sup> Sanders has at least managed to discredit F. Weber's particular understandings of Judaism as a legalistic covenant<sup>363</sup> and has very thoroughly demonstrated the aspects of the Jewish covenant where one sees strong elements of God's grace, love, mercy and forgiveness.<sup>364</sup> As a result, he has succeeded in convincing even his detractors that there is much more grace within the Jewish covenant than many Protestants had believed.<sup>365</sup>

Sanders has made further contributions to the New Perspective debate. First, he has suggested a new way of analyzing Judaism and evaluating the nature of its understandings of grace. Sanders calls this "covenantal nomism."<sup>366</sup> What Sanders means by this term is this: every religious system has what Sanders calls a "pattern of religion," an understanding of how one first enters the religious system or covenant, and how one remains within that covenant or religious system. Sanders calls this "getting in" and "staying in."<sup>367</sup>

Within Judaism, Sanders claims, Schoeps, Montefiore and other Jewish source materials demonstrate that one enters the Jewish covenant through grace, one does not have to work to become a Jew. One is born a Jew, and therefore being part of the Jewish covenant takes place through the gift of God given in election. "Getting in," takes place through grace.

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<sup>361</sup> Wright, N.T., *The Climax of the Covenant, Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 254.

<sup>362</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul: The Lutheran Paul and His Critics*. 341-351.

<sup>363</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 18-19.

<sup>364</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life Letters and Thought*, 42-43, 45-48.

<sup>365</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 29.

<sup>366</sup> Sanders, *Judaism: practice and belief, 63 BCE-66 CE*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 262-263.

<sup>367</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life Letters and Thought*, 480-481.

“Staying in,” however, is another matter. According to Sanders, if Jews want to remain members of their covenant in good standing, they must make at least some attempt to keep the religious laws of the faith.<sup>368</sup> However, Jews are not on their own in their attempts to remain in the covenant. Their obedience to the laws of the faith is an activity supported by God’s grace. Furthermore, there are means of making amends to God and the covenant community if one stumbles into sin. In his 2015 book, *Paul, The Apostle’s Life, Letters and Thought*, Sanders states that there were at least five ways that Jews believed that atonement could be provided for sin.<sup>369</sup> The temple and its rituals, of course, were one of the ways that sin could be atoned for;<sup>370</sup> the festival, Yom Kippur, did the same. In addition, repentance was effective, suffering in this life atoned for sin, and finally death itself atoned for sin.<sup>371</sup>

This, says Sanders, is Judaism’s pattern of religion: Jews “get in” by grace but “stay in” through works. It is this pattern of religion that Sanders calls “covenantal nomism.”

In certain ways, says Sanders, Paul even adopts the Jewish models of means of atonement for sin. For instance, regarding 1 Corinthians 3:14-15, Sanders states:

Here Paul utilizes a standard Jewish view of deeds and the world to come. Good deeds and bad deeds do not save or condemn, but God will nevertheless repay people appropriately (so also 3:8). In this case, Paul envisages the repayment as taking place at the judgement. If what Apollos builds is “wood, hay or straw,” his work will be destroyed and he will be *punished*, though he will still be saved.<sup>372</sup>

In the most recent version of his book *Iustitia Dei*, Alister McGrath has reviewed the contributions of New Perspective scholars like Sanders to the understanding of justification. In this review McGrath mentions the claim first made by Schweitzer and Wrede, and echoed by Sanders and other New Perspective scholars, that justification by grace through faith does not lie at the centre of Paul’s theology. McGrath challenges the usefulness of this claim. After all, he says, the phrase “at the centre of Paul’s thought” is rather vague. What does it really mean?<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75.

<sup>369</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life Letters and Thought*, 46-48.

<sup>370</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 5.

<sup>371</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life Letters and Thought*, 45-48.

<sup>372</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life, Letters and Thought*, 242.

<sup>373</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei, Third Edition*, 24.

Rightly or wrongly, Sanders agrees with Wrede and Schweitzer on this front and this would be the second major component of Sanders' approach. Like Wrede and Schweitzer, Sanders thinks that justification is primarily a polemical doctrine that arose because of tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians.<sup>374</sup> Paul only seems to use the theology of justification when Gentiles are being encouraged to become Jews and adopt Torah ceremonies.<sup>375</sup> Regarding justification, Sanders writes that "a theme cannot be central which does not explain anything else."<sup>376</sup> Both Schweitzer and Sanders also state that Paul's ethical teachings cannot be connected to his teaching on justification.

Third, Sanders applies the term "justification" to a different part of the salvation process than Luther. The area of dispute between Luther and the Medieval Catholics was not over baptism, "getting in" to the covenant, but over the doctrine of penance, "staying in." Medieval Catholics even talked about two phases for justification, first and second justification. First justification was baptism, second justification was what one had to do to remain within the covenant after age seven when one lost one's "age of innocence."<sup>377</sup> It was to "second justification" or "staying in" that the Reformers saw the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith as chiefly applying.<sup>378</sup> Sanders, however, does not. He writes:

In Paul's usage, 'be made righteous' ('be justified') is a term indicating getting in, not staying in the body of the saved. Thus when Paul says that one cannot be made righteous by works of the law, he means that one cannot, by works of the law, 'transfer into the body of the saved'.<sup>379</sup>

This shift in where justification applies, from "staying in" to "getting in," has significant impact on Sanders' understanding of justification and his assessment of Paul's thought. Sanders thus believes that Paul does not use the term "justification" to state that guilty people are now to be considered forgiven and able to attain eternal life. In other words, justification is not so much about salvation, but an earlier step.<sup>380</sup> Paul, says Sanders, uses justification to describe how people can join the church and be moved from the community of the perishing

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<sup>374</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei, Third Edition*, 1.

<sup>375</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters and Thought*, 449.

<sup>376</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 441.

<sup>377</sup> Eriksson, "Modern Interpretations of Luther," 67.

<sup>378</sup> Eriksson, "Modern Interpretations of Luther," 75-76.

<sup>379</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 544; Sanders, E. P., *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 1991, 1992), 58.

<sup>380</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 63.

to the community of the redeemed.<sup>381</sup> Moreover, while both Jews and Gentiles need to experience justification,<sup>382</sup> justification is particularly important for Gentiles, since through this doctrine Paul charts a way for them to join the church without having to undergo circumcision or the Torah's ceremonial and food laws.<sup>383</sup> In this regard Sanders' views are similar to those of Wrede and Schweitzer, who also claimed that Paul's understanding of justification chiefly concerned the entrance of Gentiles into the Christian covenant and did not involve transferring the status of fictional righteousness to otherwise sinful individuals.

A fourth characteristic of Sanders' understanding of Paul also concerns Paul's approach to justification. Sanders claims that Paul works from solution to plight.<sup>384</sup> By this, Sanders means that the Jewish Paul was not driven to Christianity by his own perception of problems within the Jewish covenant or his own need to find a gracious God. Instead, in his own intellectual movement towards Christianity, Paul first came to the understanding that Jesus was the Messiah and Saviour (the solution), and afterwards he figured out what problem Jesus was saving his people from.<sup>385</sup> In this respect, Sanders challenges Bultmann. Bultmann claims that Paul struggled with his sinfulness and then was driven to become Christian by the grace-filled kerygma of the early Christian church. In other words, Bultmann thinks that Paul first struggled with the problem of sin before finding the answer in Jesus.

One more aspect of Sanders' view of justification needs to be stated. When believers are justified and join the body of Christ, Paul, says Sanders, understands that by doing so they will endeavour to live a more ethically disciplined life, believing and acting as if they are dead to this world with its passions and pleasures. In his most recent book, Sanders claims several times that in Paul's thought there is a difference between "works of the law" to which he was opposed, and "good works." Paul had nothing against good works, states Sanders.<sup>386</sup> As Segal and Sanders both point out, Paul speaks about the law negatively when it comes to salvation and justification, but he speaks about the Torah in positive ways when it

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<sup>381</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 547-548; Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters and Thought*, 48-49.

<sup>382</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 547-548.

<sup>383</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters and Thought*, 480.

<sup>384</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 548.

<sup>385</sup> Sanders, E. P., *Paul*, 74.

<sup>386</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life Letters and Thought*, 459, 630.

comes to articulating models for Christian behaviour.<sup>387</sup> Justification, in Sanders' understanding of Paul's thought, does not mean the imputation of fictional righteousness to otherwise sinful people. Rather, justification begins the process of real moral change in the person that will be completed at the end of all things.<sup>388</sup> Finally, Sanders agrees with Schweitzer in saying that Paul's ethical thought arises not from his understanding of justification, but rather from his understanding that believers are part of the body of Christ.<sup>389</sup> It is the fact that Christians are part of the body of Christ that motivates them to behave ethically.

In his earlier writings, Sanders was rather critical of Luther's approaches to Christian behaviour.<sup>390</sup> For instance, in his 1991 book, *Paul*, he faulted Luther promoting the view that minimized Paul's perfectionism regarding Christian ethical standards.<sup>391</sup> Other New Perspective scholars, such as Dunn and Wright, have since adopted these criticisms. However, in Sanders' most recent work, while still critical of Luther, his criticism has become more nuanced.<sup>392</sup> He has since realized that Luther himself encouraged Christians to behave ethically.

Although as Wright has claimed, some of Sanders' points are not really that new,<sup>393</sup> (e.g. seeing as he has built on Schweitzer and Davies, and the contributions of others),<sup>394</sup> Sanders' work has had a powerful influence on the direction of New Testament scholarship in the last four decades. In particular, Sanders' creation of the concept of "covenantal-nomism", and his championing the notion of a grace-based Judaism, has launched the New Perspective.

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<sup>387</sup> Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 169.

<sup>388</sup> Sanders, *Paul*, 79-82.

<sup>389</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters and Thought*, 302-303.

<sup>390</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 38.

<sup>391</sup> Sanders, *Paul*, 101.

<sup>392</sup> Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters and Thought*, 455-458.

<sup>393</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 65.

<sup>394</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 66.



## 5.2 N. T. WRIGHT

On at least one occasion Wright described himself as existing somewhere between the Old and the New Perspectives,<sup>395</sup> but most other times he places himself in the New Perspective camp. Wright differs, however, from some other New Perspective scholars on various topics. He challenges Sanders' interpretations of Paul at certain points. For instance, Sanders sees only seven Pauline epistles as being authentic and Wright together with James Dunn accepts more. Wright is willing to state that possibly all thirteen epistles are written by Paul.<sup>396</sup> In his article, "The New Perspective View," in the book, *Justification: Five Views*, Dunn frequently refers to Ephesians as the place where Paul's thought is most clearly demonstrates the New Perspective viewpoint. In response to Stendahl also, Wright points out that Psalm 51 demonstrates that Augustine did not originate the idea of a troubled conscience, and that troubled consciences are not the exclusive domain of modern humanity.<sup>397</sup>

Wright at times advances bold and creative approaches to biblical interpretation. For example, in his book *The Climax of the Covenant*, Wright has come up with a radical new understanding of the meaning and purpose of the atonement, the work of Jesus on the cross. Wright also defends a high Christology within Paul's writings.<sup>398</sup> Wright is somewhat disdainful of Enlightenment and modernist influences in biblical scholarship.<sup>399</sup> He sees an element of political thought within Paul's writings, and encourages modern-day Christians to not forget the political sphere as a relevant area for their discipleship callings.<sup>400</sup> Following Schweitzer, Wright focuses more on Paul's statements on the Holy Spirit than some other scholars do. Wright states that those who belong to the Messiah are marked out by two things: the Spirit and faith,<sup>401</sup> and that the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be omitted in the process of justification.<sup>402</sup> Wright also states that Paul's doctrine of justification depends as

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<sup>395</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1038.

<sup>396</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 56-57.

<sup>397</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 744.

<sup>398</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 665, 684, 708-709.

<sup>399</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 25, 35, 43, 55 note 156, 72 note 271, 142, 201-202.

<sup>400</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1065.

<sup>401</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 971.

<sup>402</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 956.

much upon the Spirit as upon the Messiah.<sup>403</sup> He states that the Holy Spirit is a vital part of the salvation process since it is the Holy Spirit which allows belief to happen.<sup>404</sup>

One of the more interesting aspects of Wright's interpretation of biblical apocalyptic themes is to suggest that the New Testament does not state that when Jesus returns God will necessarily destroy this world. Instead, he thinks that the Scriptures suggest that God first intends to renew this present world through the second coming.<sup>405</sup> This is a major theme in Wright's thought. Wright in fact claims that the Reformation gave up on the idea of God's rescuing creation and working in history. He writes: "In such a 'solution' the ancient Jewish hope of the creator God rescuing his entire creation, would be set aside, and replaced with the rescue of certain human beings *from* the world of creation."<sup>406</sup>

This makes for one of the more compelling elements in Wright's thought. Whether by design or not, his eschatological focus in effect responds to the modern Western person's need to find meaning in life. Paul Tillich famously has stated that unlike those of the Middle Ages, modern humanity is no longer interested in searching for a gracious God; instead, modern humanity's pressing need is to find meaning and purpose in life.<sup>407</sup> Wright's work speaks to this modern search for meaning. If this world matters, and not just the next, then logically, the ordinary work done by ordinary people in this world also matters. The work involved in some activity like tending one's flower garden, for instance, suddenly becomes more important, because under Wright's approach the garden becomes part of the kingdom which the returning king will one day inherit. Wright's vision of a returning Jesus who does not destroy this world, but renews it, in effect serves to validate and give meaning to the everyday work of those who are currently in this world, waiting and preparing for Jesus' arrival.

In his interpretations of Paul, Wright, along with other New Perspective scholars, emphasize Paul's Jewish roots,<sup>408</sup> and like Albert Schweitzer, he maintains that Paul's Christological and messianic thinking derives from a modified form of what he espoused as a

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<sup>403</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 939-940.

<sup>404</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 916-917.

<sup>405</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 148-149, 550, 742-743.

<sup>406</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 113-115.

<sup>407</sup> Tillich, Paul, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 57-61, 142.

<sup>408</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 665, 762, 820.

Pharisee.<sup>409</sup> At the same time, unlike Schweitzer and Davies who perhaps emphasize Paul's Jewish roots to the exclusion of other influences on his thought, Wright also demonstrates some Greek influences in Paul. He maintains, for instance, that Paul has some similarities to Stoic philosophers. Wright also states that during Paul's lifetime and afterwards there were rumoured connections between Seneca and Paul.<sup>410</sup> These rumours are likely false, but they nonetheless demonstrate that Paul's contemporaries saw similarities between Paul's message and the Stoic philosopher Seneca. Wright also has this to say about similarities between Paul's writing style and that of another Stoic philosopher, Epictetus:

The subject matter is of course different; but nobody who has an ear for Paul's cadences, especially in letters like Romans and 1 Corinthians, can doubt that he and Epictetus were, to this extent, employing a very similar method of argument, which traced its ancestry back to Socrates and was to be located, within the disciplines of ancient philosophy, as part of 'logic'. This was a way of ensuring that one was working steadily towards the truth, and not being deceived by faulty impressions of rhetorical trickery.<sup>411</sup>

Like other New Perspective scholars, Wright also makes many complaints about modern-day Protestantism. For instance, he complains that: "Within some forms of Protestantism, the law itself is part of the opponent category."<sup>412</sup> Or he expresses his frustration that for many Protestants justification by faith has come to mean "justification by believing in the proper doctrine of justification,"<sup>413</sup> in effect reducing faith and salvation to a tautology. He also states that in essence the modern day equivalent of justification by grace through faith amounts to belief in a God who shrugs his shoulders at evil in the world, doing nothing. In his critique of this modern attitude, Wright mentions the New Testament scholar Cranfield, who says that if God did not react to evil with wrath one could question whether God was really good or loving.<sup>414</sup>

Like other New Perspective scholars, Wright claims that Paul's language of justification is chiefly focused on enabling Jewish and Gentile Christians to be part of the

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<sup>409</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 902.

<sup>410</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 220.

<sup>411</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 224.

<sup>412</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 112-113.

<sup>413</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 43.

<sup>414</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1087.

same unified Christian family.<sup>415</sup> Justification, says Wright, serves to eliminate the influence of the Jewish ritual law that maintains divisions between Jews and Christians. In short, justification is really about covenant membership and not about salvation from sin.<sup>416</sup> Wright explains: “It is clear that Paul’s whole argument is about membership in the single family, sharing the same-table fellowship, not primarily about the way in which sins are dealt with and the sinner rescued from them.”<sup>417</sup> In this regard, Wright shows some similarities to Sanders, who, as we noted above, sees justification as applying to the “getting in”, and not the “staying in”, aspects of Christian life. Wright points out that in Galatians, there is almost no mention of sin and none of death.<sup>418</sup>

In his book, *The Crucified God*, Jürgen Moltmann quotes two Jewish scholars, Shalom Ben-Chorin and Gershom Sholem,<sup>419</sup> who claim that while for Christians the notion of divine redemption tends to be seen as an attitude of the interior person, for Jews the notion of divine redemption is broader and includes the whole of creation. If these scholars are correct, then perhaps Wright displays some of the Jewish influence which is typical of New Perspective thinkers. Wright emphasizes the parts of Scripture which focus on salvation and renewal for the whole creation.<sup>420</sup> Wright also claims that the Protestant preoccupation with seeing justification as chiefly concerned with the preparing of people for salvation after they leave this life is reductionist and almost gnostic.<sup>421</sup> Salvation in the Scriptures is much broader than personal rescue from this world. Eschatology also is a large theme in Paul, claims Wright. In his *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Wright states:

We belong to the new Jerusalem, not in the sense of ‘going to heaven when we die’, but in the sense that the long-awaited return from exile, and indeed rebuilding of the temple, has happened. The heavenly Jerusalem has come to earth in the person of Jesus the Messiah and the power of the Spirit.<sup>422</sup>

Like other New Perspective scholars, Wright believes that Paul’s ethical standards have received less focus by scholars than they should have. He writes that in Paul’s thought,

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<sup>415</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 999.

<sup>416</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 872-873, 990.

<sup>417</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 969.

<sup>418</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 970.

<sup>419</sup> Moltmann, J., *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 142-143.

<sup>420</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1053, 1058-1059, 1060-1061, 1070-1071.

<sup>421</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1066.

<sup>422</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1139.

not just the future justification but also the future judgment is moved forward into the present time, in the Church. The behaviour that will not allow one to be saved in the future cannot be tolerated in the Church now.<sup>423</sup> Wright states:

It is important to note that ‘the gospel’ here in Romans 1:16 does not mean ‘how to be saved’. Nor does it mean ‘how to be justified’ as in some popular readings of verse 17. The logic of the sentences indicates without any doubt that ‘the gospel’ here must refer *back* to what he has already said in 1:3-4: that, the statement about Jesus, is the *content* of the gospel, and what is described here in 1:16-17 is its *effect*.... ‘The gospel’ is God’s good news, promised long ago, about his dying and rising son, the Messiah, the lord of the world. *When this message is announced, things happen* (Emphasis in the original).<sup>424</sup>

Although Wright has made many useful contributions, his work can at times be challenged. Even in the same book, Wright at times comes close to contradicting himself. For example, Wright states that Paul does not identify justification with transformation,<sup>425</sup> and states that for Paul righteousness does not mean transformation.<sup>426</sup> Yet later on Wright states:

What the gospel has unveiled is not a ‘new way of being religious,’ not even a ‘new way of being saved’.... Nor is it even ‘a new way of being God’s people’, though that is certainly involved. It is nothing short of ‘new creation’. A new world has come into being, and everything appears in a new light within it. To highlight this point has been the strength of the so-called ‘apocalyptic’ emphasis in recent American writing on Paul.<sup>427</sup>

A second way that his work can be challenged is in regard to its portrayal of Luther. Despite his frequent complaints about Luther, a quick glance at the bibliographies in Wright’s books seems to show that Wright has read relatively little of Luther. After examining nearly a dozen of his books including: *The Climax of the Covenant*, *Paul, Simply Christian*, *What St. Paul Really Said*, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, *Paul for Everyone*, *Romans*, *The Resurrection and the Son of God*, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, *The New Testament and the People of God*, one sees that none of them have any references to Luther’s writings in their bibliographies. His massive tome, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, has only two references to Luther’s works in its bibliography. These two together account for

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<sup>423</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 979-980.

<sup>424</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 916.

<sup>425</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 957.

<sup>426</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 958.

<sup>427</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1143-1144.

less than one percent of Luther's total lifetime output. In addition, when Wright refers to Luther's ideas in his books, he also rarely can cite any specific place where Luther states the ideas that Wright claims that he does. In contrast to this, Wright's citations of Bultmann's works, for instance, are extensive and specific. Wright's bibliographies also contain no reference to major Luther scholars, such as Althaus or Ebeling, whose summaries of Luther's writings could have helped make up for Wright's own lack of original source documents.

Yet although specific references to Luther's own writings in Wright's works are scarce, Wright makes many declarations concerning Luther's ideas. Among these, Wright states that Luther is essentially an antinomian.<sup>428</sup> Wright also ignores the fact that the majority of Luther's exegetical works focus on the Old Testament (Luther was essentially Wittenberg University's Old Testament professor) and he states that Lutheranism is Marcionistic.<sup>429</sup> In saying this, Wright also seems unaware of Luther's complaints about those of his own day who he thought showed little respect for the Old Testament.<sup>430</sup> Wright ignores the strong sacramental basis of Luther's thought and the fact that "mystical union" is included in all early Lutheran lists of the *ordo salutis*,<sup>431</sup> and despite the relatively stronger focus on sacraments within the Lutheran versus Reformed traditions, Wright claims that only Calvinism is participationist in its thinking, and Lutheranism is not.<sup>432</sup>

In stating this, Wright is obviously not aware of the significant influence that certain Medieval mystics had upon Luther, nor is he aware of the continuing place that Luther has in his thought for a mystical union with Christ.<sup>433</sup> As an example of this, Hoffman writes that in Luther's theological thinking faith can often "be immediately felt and experienced."<sup>434</sup> Further, in Luther's opinion, the spiritual experiences that we have as a result of faith are often the out-workings of the Holy Spirit within us.<sup>435</sup> In addition, Von Loenwenich writes that for Luther:

With faith the presence of Christ himself is posited. . . . Thus we have to do with an indwelling of Christ in the believer. Luther describes this in pictures which may be

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<sup>428</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 58.

<sup>429</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 60.

<sup>430</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:5-8.

<sup>431</sup> Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 25, 31, 170.

<sup>432</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 61.

<sup>433</sup> Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 26, 169.

<sup>434</sup> Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 51, 122, 135, 159.

<sup>435</sup> Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 188.

best summarized under the catchword ‘union with Christ.’ Christ and the believer grow together into one person. But it is a unity in diversity. In this union the ego of the believer is not erased.<sup>436</sup>

Above, we mentioned how Wright thought that among modern day Protestantism justification by grace through faith has turned into belief in a God who does not do anything. One cannot disagree that among some Protestants this has in fact become the case, and faith is reduced to an intellectual formula that one recites. At the same time, this problem is not new, nor did it originate with Luther. Luther had this very complaint about the faith of many people in his own day.<sup>437</sup> In his book, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, von Loewenich states that at times Luther differentiated between various levels of faith. Von Loewenich writes:

Thus some people only manage a puny, unformed faith that remains ineffective in life and which Luther deplors. Luther still does not hesitate to use the term “unformed faith.” Others, as for example the martyrs, demonstrate their faith in Christianity “in a heroic manner.” In his sermon on John 4:46ff. (1516), Luther distinguishes three degrees of faith, the inchoate, the progressing, and the perfect. The first is directed to signs and wonders, the second is deprived of these props and directed only to the Word, and the third, the perfect faith, is no longer dependent on the external Word but is a constant inner readiness to do God's will.<sup>438</sup>

Luther also saw a difference between historical faith and saving faith. Historical faith is mere intellectual acknowledgement of the facts surrounding Jesus’ life, ministry and existence. This kind of faith does not justify. Special faith, however, does. Special faith is the belief that the deeds of Jesus matter to the person who believes. Special faith is also sometimes accompanied by an experience of faith or feeling or sense.<sup>439</sup> Luther also saw prayer as very important for faith, at one point stating that a faith that is not a prayed faith is not a genuine faith.<sup>440</sup>

Further to this, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, Luther tells two stories, one of them about a nun, that illustrate the difference between real and living faith and mere intellectual faith.

Now since this little nun was filled with terror at the thought of the wrath of God and wanted to be saved, she made it a habit to say whenever the devil troubled her,

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<sup>436</sup> Von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 104.

<sup>437</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22:390-395.

<sup>438</sup> Von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 96.

<sup>439</sup> Von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 101-102.

<sup>440</sup> Von Loewenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 139, 142.

“Devil, leave me alone. I am a Christian!” And the devil had to leave her. On the surface this seems to be a simple technique and easy to learn. But it is necessary that the words be inspired by faith, as those of this little nun were. For the devil did not particularly fear the words: “I am a Christian.” No, it was her faith, the fact that she firmly relied on Christ and said: “I am baptized on Christ, and I entrust myself solely to Him.... Whenever such words proceed from faith, they generate a completely fiery atmosphere, which burns and pains the devil so that he cannot tarry. But if a person speaks without warmth about matters pertaining to God and salvation, as the common man does, then the devil merely laughs. But if your words are aglow in your heart, you will put the devil to flight. *For then Christ is present....* When the devil hears the name of Christ, he flees, because he cannot bear it. But if he does not feel the presence of Him who has destroyed him, he casts man into hell (Emphasis in the original).<sup>441</sup>

Then after telling another story that makes the same point, Luther adds.

This story is undoubtedly credible. My purpose in narrating it is to impress the fact that one must learn not only to recite the words of Holy Scripture by rote but also to believe them with one’s heart and to remain steadfast in times of peril and in the hour of death. For there are many who speak the words: “I am a Christian,” with their mouth but do not believe this in their heart. When trouble besets you, you will find out whether you take these words seriously.... When a person is not oppressed by sorrow, he has no occasion to perceive this.... The rebirth of which Christ speaks here is not acquired while dozing idly and comfortably behind the stove. If you are a Christian and really believe, join the nun with her words: I am a Christian!” What is the result? You will find relief, and your mind will be at ease; and you will be able to thank God that the devil had to take to his heels. For he cannot withstand these words of fire.<sup>442</sup>

Again, Luther warns against mere intellectual faith:

The pope and the devil have a faith too, but it is only a “historical faith.” True faith does not doubt; it yields its whole heart to the conviction that the Son of God was given into death for us, that sin is remitted, that death is destroyed, and that these evils have been done away with—but, more than this, that eternal life, salvation, and glory, *yes, God Himself have been restored to us*, and that through the Son God has made us His Children (Emphasis in the Original).<sup>443</sup>

While on rare occasions, Wright does admit that Luther’s thought runs deeper than the simple negative portrayal that he usually gives it,<sup>444</sup> for the most part Wright sticks to a negative and two-dimensional portrayal of Luther’s thought. With respect to Philip

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<sup>441</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22:357.

<sup>442</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22: 358-359.

<sup>443</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22: 369

<sup>444</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 915.



Melanchthon, another early leader within the Lutheran movement, Wright also seems largely unaware of his contributions. For instance, Wright is not aware that Melanchthon originated the three-fold use of the law, later adopted by Calvin and most Protestants, or that in his “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” Melanchthon writes that saving faith is not merely intellectual, but is lived out in penitence.<sup>445</sup>

Classical Lutheranism also does not state that faith is merely intellectual. In the Lutheran Orthodox period (roughly the first two hundred years after the Reformation), salvation was not reduced to mere belief in a correct doctrine. Instead, salvation was talked about as a process, entirely initiated by God, but nonetheless requiring some degree of human involvement and acceptance at certain points for the process to move forward. This process was referred to as “The *Ordo Salutis*” or “The Order of Salvation.” It was adapted and modified from the Orders of Salvation of medieval Catholic scholars. For the Orthodox Lutheran theologians it was understood to be broken down into five or six steps.

In his book, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Schmid has summarized the writings of various Orthodox Lutheran theologians. These steps included: 1) vocation (God calls the individual); 2) illumination (the individual learns the basics of Christian faith and salvation as well as understanding that he/she is a sinner in need of salvation); 3) conversion and regeneration (the individual repents, accepts God’s offer of grace through Jesus Christ, and trusts that Jesus is his or her saviour on a personal level); 4) mystical union (the individual is mystically taken into the body of Christ as a member); and finally 5) sanctification or renovation.<sup>446</sup>

Although Wright is critical of Protestant thought generally, he is kinder to Calvin than to Luther, on the whole. This appears to be because he has read more of Calvin than he has of Luther. If he had read Luther, he would have realized that in many cases Luther’s positions are closer to his own than he realizes. For instance, Luther, like Wright, speaks about God still acting to care for and preserve his creation.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Apology of the Augsburg Confession, in Theodore Tappert, ed. and trans. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 160-161.

<sup>446</sup> Schmid, H., *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. 5<sup>th</sup> edition*, (trans. Jacobs and Hay; Philadelphia: The Lutheran Bookstore. 1876), 448-490.

<sup>447</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22: 25-28.

In *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, Wright says that what Old Perspective scholars most object to is the notion of any narrative at all.<sup>448</sup> He states: “It has been characteristic of western Protestantism precisely that *one does not think in terms of a continuous historical narrative with individuals finding their identity within it*,”<sup>449</sup>

However, one person who would agree that modern day Christians should see themselves as participating in the continuing story of Israel, is Luther. He often states that God treats modern Christians similarly to the way that he has treated the Israelites. Just as God acted towards the Israelites, God can also punish Christians in his own lifetime for disobedience and idolatry. Concerning his own German people, Luther states that what happened to the Jews with their exile, could easily happen to the German people too if they in the future treat the Word of God with contempt. If that happens, Luther warns, people will one day say, “This is where Germany used to be.”<sup>450</sup> Again, these statements demonstrate that Luther perceived the historical story of God’s working in Scripture to be ongoing today. Modern-day Christians also, in Luther’s view, are living out their role within the story, in accordance with patterns laid down in Scripture.

### 5.3 JAMES DUNN

One of the foremost champions of the New Perspective is the British scholar James Dunn. Although supposedly Tom Wright coined the expression, “New Perspective on Paul,” it was Dunn who it seems for the most part popularized it.

Dunn shares other New Perspective scholars’ beliefs that the essential source for Paul’s thought is his Jewish heritage.<sup>451</sup> Like other New Perspective scholars too, Dunn hails Sanders for successfully demonstrating that Judaism was more grace-based than most scholars had thought. Dunn claims that when Sanders did this, he successfully overthrew the Reformation paradigm of Pauline interpretation and Luther’s interpretations of Paul at the same time. Dunn writes:

The Protestant reading of Paul was a reading *back* of Luther’s own experience *into* Paul. It was a retrojection back into Paul’s first-century self-testimony of what Krister

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<sup>448</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 111-112.

<sup>449</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 115. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>450</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22: 207.

<sup>451</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 29.

Stendahl has called ‘the introspective conscience of the West’... The second assumption Luther made was that the Judaism of Paul’s time was just like the mediaeval Catholicism of Luther’s day, at least so far as the teaching of God’s justice and justification were concerned. The second assumption was natural, given the first. If Paul had made the same discovery of faith as Luther, then he must also have been reacting against the same misunderstanding as Luther (Emphasis in the original).<sup>452</sup>

Dunn goes further. He does not merely believe that Luther was in error concerning Judaism or Paul’s motives for his Christian conversion.<sup>453</sup> Dunn also thinks that by overlooking Sanders’ insight, Protestants by and large seriously misunderstood Paul’s thought altogether.<sup>454</sup> Dunn writes:

The corollary of Luther’s restatement, however was less fortunate. For in understanding ‘works of the law’ as good works done to achieve righteousness his thinking was beginning to run at a tangent to Paul’s. Moreover, in attributing this belief in self-achieved righteousness to the Jews of Paul’s day, he added a further twist to the disparagement of Judaism which was not uncommon in his own day. And ... in interpreting the whole theology of justification by faith in terms of his own individual search for a quiet conscience, he lost sight of the whole corporate dimension of Paul’s doctrine as a way of asserting that Gentiles could be reckoned wholly acceptable to God without becoming proselytes.

It is important to realize that both emphases are rooted in a fundamental assertion of the sufficiency of faith; both protest against any attempt to add or require something more than faith on the human side when computing what makes a person acceptable to God. The difference which became apparent in earlier chapters is that the added factor against which Paul himself was protesting was not individual human effort, but that ethnic origin and identity is a factor in determining God’s grace. “Ethnic origin and identity is a different way of assessing human worth, but one more fundamental than the question of ability to perform good works.”... “Paul’s protest was not against a high regard for righteousness, against dedicated devotion to God’s law.”<sup>455</sup>

As stated in Chapter 2, in making these claims, Dunn is essentially constructing a fourfold comparison, and he also believes that the Protestant reading of Paul had entirely depended upon this fourfold comparison. Dunn believes that Protestant scholars had previously assumed that Paul reacted to Judaism in the same way that Luther was reacting to Medieval Catholicism. Both men, Protestants had believed, through their own personal need, were

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<sup>452</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, 14.

<sup>453</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective.” 29-31.

<sup>454</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, 14.

<sup>455</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, 142.

seeking a grace-based system of salvation as opposed to the legalistic religions which they had grown up with.<sup>456</sup> Borrowing Sanders' terminology "pattern of religion," Dunn thinks that Protestants had believed that Judaism and Catholicism had roughly the same "pattern of religion", and that Luther and Paul were challenging these legalistic patterns of religion in roughly the same ways and for the same motives. It was, therefore, possible to roughly equate Luther's and Paul's views, life experiences, and theological contributions.<sup>457</sup>

However, all this, claims Dunn, changed with E.P. Sanders. Sanders has shown that Judaism is much more grace-oriented than Protestants had assumed. Since this is the case, thinks Dunn, it is obvious that the "patterns of religion" of Judaism and Catholicism were different from each other. In addition, Luther and Paul can no longer be seen as essentially giving the same message.<sup>458</sup> They are, after all, reacting against different kinds of faiths – one legalistic, the other not-legalistic – not similar kinds of faiths, as Protestants had thought before.

It is important to state that Dunn, in part, is correct. There were many Protestants who had made exactly the same assumptions that Dunn is criticizing. As Corely, in particular, has mentioned, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Pauline scholarship sought to find non-supernatural motives for Paul's conversion. Scholars falling under Enlightenment influences were prone to equate Luther and Paul.

Dunn, however, does not see the problem of pre-Sanders' Pauline scholarship as being limited merely to the post-Enlightenment period.<sup>459</sup> Dunn thinks that the comparison between Luther and Paul originated with Luther himself.<sup>460</sup> Dunn thus thinks that the whole Reformation movement has lost its way. He writes: "The Christian doctrine of justification by faith begins as Paul's protest not as an individual sinner against a Jewish legalism, but as Paul's protest on behalf of Gentiles against Jewish exclusivism."<sup>461</sup>

Luther, Dunn thinks, believed that Judaism was a legalistic faith. Dunn also thinks that Luther believed that Paul was reacting to Judaism for the same reasons that he was

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<sup>456</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 13.

<sup>457</sup> Eriksson, "Modern Interpretations of Luther," 28-29.

<sup>458</sup> Eriksson, "Modern Interpretations of Luther," 29.

<sup>459</sup> Eriksson, "Modern Interpretations of Luther," 29.

<sup>460</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 13.

<sup>461</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 25.

challenging Medieval Catholicism. As we read earlier, although Dunn can give no reference in Luther's own writings to support this point, and despite Bruce Corley's essay to the contrary, as recently as 2014 Dunn still claimed that Luther equated his own experience with St. Paul's.

In many ways, Dunn's claim that Luther equated his own experience with Paul's has become the standard belief of many in the New Perspective camp. Dunn's views have no doubt influenced others, such as Wright, in their criticisms of Luther, and in their claims that Luther misunderstood Paul.

Dunn has broken with the Protestant perspective in several respects, whether consciously or not. Dunn repeats Augustine's claim that it is not faith alone that justifies, rather faith working through acts of love. Dunn writes: "It was not simply the sufficiency of faith alone which made works of the law irrelevant; it was faith expressed in loving actions which wholly relativized the distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision."<sup>462</sup>

Nevertheless, Dunn has kinder words for Luther and the "Old Perspective" than some New Perspective scholars.<sup>463</sup> He claims that Luther's essential approaches were helpful. He thinks that although Luther did not understand Paul correctly, almost by accident as it were, Luther still made a valid and correct contribution. He writes:

What Luther realized is of tremendous importance – that God's acceptance is the *beginning* of spiritual striving, not its *goal*.... Christianity starts with the sinner opening an empty hand to receive God's undeserved grace. It starts with Luther's recognition that God offers his acceptance as a free gift, the assurance that God's acceptance comes before and is far more important than anything we can do either for ourselves or for him (Emphasis in the original).<sup>464</sup>

Luther, says Dunn, at least realized that God relates to his people from the starting point of grace.<sup>465</sup> The fact that Luther arrived at this understanding was valuable although paradoxical because Luther arrived at the notion by interpreting the relevant verses in the wrong ways.<sup>466</sup> In the way that Dunn sees things, the parts of Paul's letters that Luther used to arrive at his insights of a gracious God were originally composed to deal with the issue of Gentiles

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<sup>462</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*, 114.

<sup>463</sup> Eriksson, "Modern Interpretations of Luther," 29-30.

<sup>464</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 8-9.

<sup>465</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*, 8-9; *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 345.

<sup>466</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 16.

joining the church.<sup>467</sup> For God to be righteous, claims Dunn, it means He is faithful to the covenant:

Correspondingly, to be reckoned as ‘righteous’ by God was to be recognized as belonging to his people, members of that covenant, within the sphere of his righteous/saving action. For Paul, no less than his opponents, it was essential for the Gentile Christians to be drawn into the sphere of God’s saving action hitherto focused in Israel.<sup>468</sup>

Regarding Dunn’s milder tone in responding to Luther, Westerholm in fact describes Dunn’s approach as almost saying that first-century Jews were in effect good Protestants.<sup>469</sup> Westerholm indeed might be providing an accurate depiction of Dunn’s thought. Dunn writes: “It is in this sense that we can recognize Paul’s doctrine of ‘justification by faith’ to be a thoroughly Jewish doctrine. The Christian specific, ‘by faith in Christ Jesus’, did not mark any fundamental shift on this point in the thinking of Paul the Jew or Peter the Jew.”<sup>470</sup> In any case, the main point, claims Dunn, where the New Perspective challenges the “Old Perspective,” is to have a more positive evaluation of the law.<sup>471</sup> Dunn, along with some others, raises the possibility that the Hebrew word *Torah* almost certainly had a broader meaning than the Greek word *nomos*.<sup>472</sup> The implication of this observation is to state that Paul would not condemn everything included in the Torah. For instance, Dunn points out that in several places in Paul’s writing Jesus is identified with wisdom, which is also seen to be identified as the Torah:

In effect what Paul and the other first Christians were doing was putting Christ in this equation in place of the Torah. And the rationale was probably the same: not so much that Christ as Jesus of Nazareth had pre-existed as such, but the pre-existent Wisdom was now to be recognized in and as Christ.<sup>473</sup>

Dunn also states that Paul does not criticize the law as such, just Israel’s trust in it as a means of salvation.<sup>474</sup> The law was never intended to be a means of salvation. It has other roles.

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<sup>467</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 28.

<sup>468</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s letter to the Galatians*, 39.

<sup>469</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul: The Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 183-184.

<sup>470</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s letter to the Galatians*, 76.

<sup>471</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 345-346.

<sup>472</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 131-132.

<sup>473</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 274.

<sup>474</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 145, 153.

Beginning with Philip Melancthon, and later Calvin, traditional Protestant thought had come up with three uses of the law. Dunn has found his own three uses of the law in Paul's thought. According to Dunn, the law for Paul first has an ethical use: "A study of the role of law in Paul's theology could start at several different points. But as we move through Romans the most immediately obvious function of the law is that of defining and measuring sin and transgression."<sup>475</sup> This is Dunn's first use of the law.

The law also has a second protecting role for the Jewish people in keeping them apart from the potentially corrupting influence of the pagan Gentiles around them. This is what Paul is talking about, says Dunn, in his description in Galatians of the law as a guardian, a *paidagogos*. The food laws, ritual hand washing and other ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law made it difficult for Jews and Gentiles to mix together in one community.<sup>476</sup> Third, for Paul the law has a role "to regulate and prosper life for the people chosen by God."<sup>477</sup> This would include the law's cultic use. Among other functions, the law delineates the sacrifices and the temple cult through which the Jewish people believed that they might find atonement for their sins.<sup>478</sup>

According to Dunn, Paul was aiming to say that Gentiles can join the Christian covenant without being forced to be circumcised or keep the Jewish ceremonial laws, including the food laws.<sup>479</sup> While this subject matter is not oriented towards the issues that Luther believed it to be,<sup>480</sup> (sinners needing to find a gracious God) still, Luther was right to emphasize that God begins his relationship with his people on the basis of grace.<sup>481</sup>

Therefore, says Dunn, New Perspective scholars can and do retain the essential Protestant viewpoint of a relationship to God from the starting point of grace. Furthermore, this is a belief which the New Perspective holds in common with the "Old Perspective."

As with Wright, Dunn's works can also be critiqued. For example, although Dunn's has kinder words for Luther and the Reformers than some other New Perspective scholars, his positive declarations concerning Luther's contributions also display some ignorance

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<sup>475</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 133.

<sup>476</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 138-143.

<sup>477</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 153.

<sup>478</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*, 77.

<sup>479</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*, 100.

<sup>480</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 30.

<sup>481</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 345, 388.

regarding the Reformers' chief controversy with the Roman Church. As we will see later, Luther's main contribution was not that a Christian's relationship *begins* with God's grace, as Dunn thinks. The grace-based beginning of a Christian's relationship with God was something that the Medieval Catholics already understood through their teachings on infant baptism. As opposed to what Dunn thinks, the main controversy during the Reformation was not over the doctrine of baptism, or "getting in," it was over the doctrine of penance, or "staying in." It was in this latter area that Luther and the Reformers saw God's grace applying and where they made their main contributions. The implications of this misunderstanding of Dunn's will be examined below.

#### 5.4 TERRY DONALDSON

Terry Donaldson began his career teaching at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, and has since moved to the University of Toronto. Donaldson takes as a given Sanders' approaches to Paul and Judaism. He works from Sanders' foundation to then further advance the conceptual framework of the New Perspective. For instance, like Sanders, Donaldson also believes that after his conversion to Christianity, Paul remained a covenantal nomist:

Paul perceives Christ and Torah as rival boundary markers, rival ways of determining the people of God, rival entrance requirements for the community of salvation.... Further, just as living in conformity with the Torah is the means of maintaining one's membership in the [Jewish] covenant community ("staying in," in Sanders's phrase), so continuing to "walk in Christ" (cf. Col 2:6-7) is the means of maintaining one's membership in the new community of salvation.<sup>482</sup>

Donaldson's primary concern is to explain how it was that Paul justified his mission to the Gentiles. While he follows Sanders in most respects, Donaldson is uneasy with Sanders' explanation of Paul's Gentile mission, and he feels that a further explanation needs to be made. The central thesis of his book, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* is as follows: "I am assuming that Paul can be viewed as a covenantal-nomist who came to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and I am asking how he also came to see a law-free mission to the Gentiles as an urgent personal corollary of this

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<sup>482</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 172.



belief.”<sup>483</sup>

Donaldson makes it clear that under the Old Perspective paradigm, it was amply clear why Paul needed to do mission work among the Gentiles. After all, in the Old Perspective a legalistic Judaism was contrasted with a grace-based Christianity. For Paul, that would have provided sufficient motivation for mission activity. Donaldson also argues that in the old paradigm it was assumed that Paul’s questions were the same as Luther’s, trying to be acceptable to God (justified) given the pervasiveness of sin, “and that his answer (by faith) was worked out in terms of a contrast with a justification based on meritorious self-achievement (by works).”<sup>484</sup>

Under the new paradigm, however, whereas Sanders says that both Paul and the Jews are covenantal nomists, then it is more difficult to explain why Paul would be so eager to do mission work among the Gentiles. Donaldson writes: “A recognition of the derivative nature of the juridical language forces a reassessment of the relationship among a whole range of Pauline options – Israel, the law, sin, Christ, the cross.”<sup>485</sup>

A further factor worth considering, Donaldson maintains, was that under the pre-Christian Jewish Covenant there were a variety of approaches used for converting Gentiles to Judaism. Many Jews did not insist that Gentiles needed to fully convert to Judaism to be part of the community of the redeemed. Given this background, why then would Paul be so insistent that Gentiles and Jews be in the same community on the same basis?<sup>486</sup> Furthermore, Sanders has managed to convince even those opposed to the New Perspective on other fronts that Jews do not have to earn their entrance into their own covenant. This, however, has left some New Perspective scholars with a puzzle. If works versus grace are no longer the main difference between Judaism and Christianity, then what is the chief difference? Why is it that Paul is so vehement in insisting that the Gentiles in Galatia not follow the Jewish laws? Various New Perspective scholars arrive at different answers to that question.

To solve this problem, Donaldson works through a variety of potential explanations

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<sup>483</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 76.

<sup>484</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 8.

<sup>485</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 13.

<sup>486</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, 104.

for this mission work. As he explains them, he eliminates the explanations that do not provide adequate justification for Paul's mission. The solution that Donaldson arrives at focuses on two potentially competing views on how one enters God's covenant; Jewish versus Christian. Does one enter the covenant of God by following the Torah of Moses, or by adhering to the new covenant set up by Jesus the Christ?<sup>487</sup> For Paul, the latter entry point is obviously what he sees to be valid and this is what justifies his Gentile mission.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that Terry Donaldson accepts as a given essential New Perspective approaches to Pauline interpretation and theology. Among these, Donaldson, like the other New Perspective scholars, understands that Paul stresses the need for a heightened level of ethical behavior among Christians.<sup>488</sup>

The call to engage in better behavior resonates throughout the New Perspective.<sup>489</sup> Dunn writes: "Paul did continue to maintain an external norm for Christian conduct, and that he summed it up in the love command drawn from the Torah."<sup>490</sup> New Perspective scholars think that Paul's concern for Christian ethics has been sidelined by Old Perspective thinkers who all too easily focus on grace.

According to Donaldson, the Reformers state that the problem with the law is that sin makes it impossible to keep the law. Also, even if it were completely kept, still it could not lead to salvation, since salvation arises on the basis of faith. Whereas Bultmann, Donaldson says, strengthens this to the point of saying that even the attempt to keep the law is sinful 'Man's effort to achieve his salvation by keeping the Law only leads him into sin, indeed this effort itself in the end is already sin,' faith then rather, is acceptance of the notion that God judges self-sufficiency, and recognizes one's creaturely dependence on God.<sup>491</sup>

Donaldson even talks about the possibility of losing one's salvation and losing one's covenant status through unethical behaviour.<sup>492</sup> In his classroom lectures at the University of Saskatchewan, he explored several Bible passages that would indicate that Paul understood that there is possibility of losing one's salvation after joining the community of the

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<sup>487</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 108-121, 172.

<sup>488</sup> Eriksson, *Martin Luther and the New Perspective on St. Paul*, 42.

<sup>489</sup> Eriksson, *Martin Luther and the New Perspective on St. Paul*, 42.

<sup>490</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*, 116.

<sup>491</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*, 108-109.

<sup>492</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 25.

redeemed. Some of these passages include the following: Galatians 5:19-21, 6:7-8; Romans 8:12-13; 1 Corinthians 9; Philippians 2:12, and 3:11,16.<sup>493</sup> Donaldson points out that in all of these passages Paul is not speaking about people who are outside of the church, instead Paul speaks to the people who are already part of the Christian church. It is to these people that Paul gives his warnings. Thus, Paul raises the possibility that a Christian in good standing might through their own unrepentant unethical activities cease to be saved.

While some Protestants believe that it is impossible to fall from grace once one has been saved, it is important to note that Donaldson does not differ from Luther in this regard when he says it is possible to lose one's salvation. Luther also believed the same thing. He taught that those who decide to persist in sin as a matter of personal policy and not repent could very well lose their saved status.<sup>494</sup>

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

New Perspective scholars, though they differ from each other in a variety of ways, still share many ideas in common. New Perspective scholars start their interpretation of Paul with a grace-based understanding of Judaism. In contrast with the Old Perspective, New Perspective scholars argue that not only was Judaism covenantal nomist, but the Christian Paul was as well. Following from this, compared to some Old Perspective scholars like Bultmann, New Perspective scholars have a heightened understanding of the necessity for ethical behavior within the Christian community. New Perspective scholars also maintain that Romans 9-11 is more important for Paul's thought and for the message of Romans than Old Perspective scholars typically do. New Perspective scholars have a different understanding of the term justification than Old Perspective scholars. They generally see it applying to the stage of "getting into" the covenant, not "staying in," the covenant. New Perspective scholars do not think that justification lies at the center of Paul's thought, and that it is a side issue for Paul. It is a doctrine chiefly used by him to enable Gentiles to join the church without becoming Jews. They also do not think that Paul was motivated to convert to Christianity out of the

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<sup>493</sup> Donaldson, "1997 Lectures 'Paul's Theology,' Emmanuel and St. Chad's Seminary," University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>494</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22:80; Martin Luther, "Against the Antinomians," AE 47:104-105.

need to find a gracious God. It is time to see what other scholars have said about New Perspective approaches.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESPONSES TO THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

Thus far we have examined the views of New Perspective scholars and their predecessors. We have also looked at the context in which the New Perspective arose, the opinions to which it is reacting and the history of some of these topics throughout church history. Those who disagree with New Perspective opinions need to be heard from.

The responses to the New Perspective and its intellectual forerunners are too numerous to completely cover here. Furthermore, some scholars make direct responses to New Perspective ideas, while with others their response arises as they write about other topics. In addition, many times New Perspective scholars either critique each other, or the logical implications of their arguments contradict each other. Finally, often the scholars critiquing the New Perspective mention the same ideas and make the same arguments. Therefore this Chapter will be organized according to the various arguments that are made, not according, as with Chapters 3, 4 and 5, to the scholars that make them. A brief introduction, however, should be given to some of the main opponents to the New Perspective that we hear from in this chapter.

Stephen Westerholm is regarded by many as being one of the foremost critics, if not the foremost critic of the New Perspective. Ironically, Westerholm occupies the same chair of studies that E.P. Sanders used to occupy at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Yet Westerholm does not entirely dismiss the New Perspective's contributions. For instance, as Sanders does, he thinks that Paul's presuppositions are Jewish and that Paul at times approaches matters from his Jewish perspective almost unconsciously.<sup>495</sup> Westerholm has advanced his arguments *contra* the New Perspective in several books. These include *Justification Reconsidered*, and *Preface to the Study of Paul*, but the most comprehensive is *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*. This latter book is an expansion of his earlier work, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*.

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<sup>495</sup> Westerholm, Stephen, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 416.

Andrew Das is another scholar who challenges the New Perspective. He is a Biblical Studies and Early Judaism professor at Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Illinois. In *Beyond Covenantal Nomism: Paul, Judaism, and Perfect Obedience*, he asks three questions. First, was first-century Judaism as grace-based as Sanders claims? Second, are “works of the law” confined to Jewish covenantal distinctives as Dunn claims? Third, New Perspective scholars often talk about the sacrificial system in Judaism as being an effective means of atonement for sin under the old covenant, but are these sacrifices as a means of atonement even acknowledged or recognized by Paul?

Seyoon Kim is a New Testament Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He critiques various aspects of Pauline scholarship, but his greatest focus lies in challenging the New Perspective. While Kim critiques Donaldson,<sup>496</sup> Kim particularly focuses on the work of James Dunn. Several places he points out apparent inconsistencies and contradictions in Dunn's arguments.<sup>497</sup>

Charles Gieschen is a professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The list of potential problems with the New Perspective has been well identified by Gieschen and so his statement will be quoted at length. Gieschen states that there are six problems with the New Perspective. First, it narrows the understanding of works of the law to Jewish identity markers rather than the full Mosaic moral Law. Second, he states that:

The New Perspective downplays evidence of the significant role that works of the Law play in maintaining one's righteous status in the covenant within first century Judaism, at least within some Jewish groups. Third, and closely related to the second problem, the New Perspective does not give sufficient attention to the significantly different anthropologies of first-century Judaism and first-century Christianity, the former often optimistic in its assessment of one's abilities to obey and the latter extremely pessimistic. Fourth, many adherents of the New Perspective tend to downplay the demand for “perfect obedience” or evidence that some Jews believed some humans to be capable of such obedience. Fifth, the New Perspective fails to see that Paul's understanding of the Law and human anthropology as articulated in Galatians and Romans was not merely a continuation of Jewish teaching nor did it develop primarily out of the necessity of the Gentile mission, but this understanding came from Paul's Christophany.... Paul's radical rereading of the Old Testament and

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<sup>496</sup> Kim, Seyoon, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 35-45.

<sup>497</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 8-10, 17.

his critique of Judaism in the light of Christ is sometimes downplayed in recent research. Sixth, the New Perspective supports the understanding that justification is not as central to Paul's soteriology as mystical participation in Christ. These two aspects ... are too often pitted against each other ... rather than appreciated for their interdependent and complementary relationship."<sup>498</sup>

These are four of the chief scholars responding to the New Perspective. When referring to other scholarly challengers, we will, if necessary, introduce them as appropriate.

## **6.1 IS COVENANTAL NOMISM TRULY GRACE-BASED?**

The first argument commonly raised against the New Perspective has to do with "covenantal nomism." Sanders of course defines "covenantal nomism" as a religious system where one enters God's covenant through grace, but where one remains in the covenant through performance of good works. Sanders claims that because of its "covenantal nomist" system, Judaism is thus a grace-based faith. Yet, scholars critical of the New Perspective state that even if Sanders is correct in describing Judaism in this fashion, a "covenantal nomist" religious system might not be very grace-based. If the ultimate basis of maintaining one's place in the covenant is through works, then there is little difference between "covenantal nomism" and merely stating that one is saved by works. In the last analysis, the chief deciding factor for one's salvation is works. Gieschen states: "Covenantal-nomism is still nomism."<sup>499</sup> In contrast to this, Gieschen looks to several passages in Isaiah which promises a righteousness from God for the Israelites in the future, not done by works. These, he states, predict the kind of covenant that Paul was talking about.<sup>500</sup>

Gieschen lists several scholars who have raised the same issue, among them Donald Hagner and Schriener. There are a few more who he could have included but did not, such as Douglas Campbell, Charles Talbert, and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor.

Murphy-O'Connor puts the argument well. People simplify theology, he states. The person who is taught that he enters the Jewish covenant through grace although he must persist in the covenant through works and the person who believes that he is saved through

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<sup>498</sup> Gieschen, Charles, "Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?" in *The Law in Holy Scripture* (ed. Charles Gieschen; St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 121-122.

<sup>499</sup> Gieschen, "Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?" 124-125.

<sup>500</sup> Gieschen, "Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?" 141.

works, have virtually the same approach to the Jewish covenant. For both individuals, it is their works that ultimately determine whether they are “saved” and are worthy of the age to come.<sup>501</sup> Hence, “covenantal nomism” easily slides towards legalism.<sup>502</sup> Along the same lines, in his *Perspectives Old and New*, Westerholm quotes Enns, who makes much the same argument as Murphy-O’Connor:

Despite Sanders’ arguments, it is still not entirely clear how “salvation” can be by grace but “staying saved” is a matter of strict obedience. If salvation can be lost by disobedience—i.e., if obedience is necessary to “preserve” salvation—in what sense can we say with Sanders that “salvation *depends* on the grace of God?” How can there be sins unto death when *election* is the basis of salvation?... I wonder too, whether we should equate salvation with election, as Sanders seems to do. Is salvation the best word to describe one’s *initiation*, into the covenant wholly apart from the final outcome?... It might be less confusing to say that *election* is by grace but *salvation* is by obedience.<sup>503</sup>

Several more scholars have come to the same conclusion. In some fashion each of them state that if the factor that determines whether a person stays in the covenant and retains their saved status is their works, then a “covenantal nomist” covenant is still a legalistic covenant.

## 6.2 IS JUDAISM GRACE-BASED?

A second, related critique to what was mentioned above focuses on Judaism as a whole. Is Judaism as “covenantal nomist” and grace-based as Sanders claims that it is? Gieschen argues that not just in Paul’s thought, but throughout the New Testament there is a different approach to the law and obedience to the law within Judaism than Sanders describes. Perfect obedience to the law is often what is expected, not just mere intent as one finds in Pharisaism. One also sees this in Paul’s letters. Paul seems to think that Judaism requires perfect obedience (Gal. 5:3).

Gieschen gives quotes from several Second Temple Jewish writings, such as *The Book of Tobit*, *The Psalms of Solomon*, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. In each case he states that these declare, in contrast to Sanders, that good

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<sup>501</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 41.

<sup>502</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, Jerome, *Paul, A Critical Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 336.

<sup>503</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 344 note 8.



works in fact are what ultimately saves an individual and allows that person to enter eternity with God.<sup>504</sup>

Passages like these in Second Temple writings demonstrate, says Gieschen, that Paul has not misunderstood Judaism as Räisänen has claimed. Gieschen quotes C.K. Barrett who says: “He is a bold man who supposes he understands first-century Judaism better than Paul did.” Gieschen states that there is evidence to say that some Jews even believed that certain individuals were able to keep the law perfectly, and did not need God’s forgiveness.<sup>505</sup>

From this Gieschen then concludes: “This evidence helps us see that the soteriological function given the law—not only the Gentile mission—was the situation that led to Paul’s emphasis on righteousness by faith apart from works of the Law.”<sup>506</sup> Later he adds: “In short, it is argued that early Judaism did not believe that God demanded perfect obedience or that individuals were capable of such obedience. There is, however, literary evidence to the contrary on both issues.”<sup>507</sup>

Kim agrees with Gieschen. While acknowledging that New Perspective scholars have done a service to modern biblical scholarship in highlighting the elements of grace within Judaism,<sup>508</sup> Kim also questions whether Judaism was really as grace-based as Sanders has represented it to be.<sup>509</sup> Kim refers to the works of scholars who have made deeper explorations of this issue and have come to the same conclusion. He states that there were two themes in Judaism, God’s grace in election, and the need to earn God’s favour to enter the life to come. The rabbis, says Kim, did not attempt to resolve the contradictions between those two approaches but allowed both themes to be present.<sup>510</sup>

Kim thus criticizes the New Perspective for ignoring elements of Jewish thought that lean towards works righteousness. He argues that sources such as Philo, Qumran and the *Book of Jubilees* are better sources for first-century Judaism than the Rabbinic writings that were compiled after the council of Jamnia that Sanders uses as his chief sources.<sup>511</sup> Kim

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<sup>504</sup> Gieschen, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 126-127.

<sup>505</sup> Gieschen, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 131-132.

<sup>506</sup> Gieschen, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 128-129.

<sup>507</sup> Gieschen, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 130.

<sup>508</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 83, 295.

<sup>509</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 61-62 note 212, 83.

<sup>510</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 146.

<sup>511</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 151.

states that New Perspectivists have elevated Sanders' understandings of "covenantal nomism" to the status of a dogma.<sup>512</sup> Once they have done so, they are also critical of Paul's interpretations of Judaism as having legalistic aspects to it. Some New Perspectivists even claim that Paul misunderstood Judaism.

Using *Jubilees* and Philo, Andrew Das takes issue with Sanders' claim that perfect obedience was not expected under "covenantal nomism" but only intent to obey the law. Das shows that Sanders, in his review of Jewish sources, consistently downplays the expectations for legal obedience found in these works and instead emphasizes grace and mercy over against expectations of moral perfection. Das writes:

Quite often, his analysis appears deliberately skewed to emphasize God's grace and mercy. Sanders minimized the Law's strict demand as one side of a tension between embedded nomism and the gracious covenantal framework. In at least three of the bodies of Second Temple literature that Sanders analyzed, the Law actually enjoined perfect obedience of its commands. If it is true that the Jews often saw the Law as requiring strict, perfect obedience, then the key premise in the "New Perspective on Paul" would be wrong. An incorrect premise would explain why scholars so frequently experience difficulty explaining why Paul's issue with the Law revolved quite often around satisfying the Law's demands. A few representative passages, then, will underscore that the apostle's "plight" with the Law was not just a matter of ethnic exclusion but also its demand for rigorous obedience.<sup>513</sup>

Das then goes through various sections of *Jubilees*, the Qumran documents and Philo, and demonstrates that these works expected perfect obedience from their listeners. Das finishes his section on Sanders by saying:

Although affirming with Sanders the importance of God's election and merciful regard toward the Jewish people, the Jews did maintain that the Law enjoins perfect obedience, contrary to the claims of the "New Perspective" Pauline scholars. These interpreters certainly appear to have erred by dismissing in advance the likelihood that Paul also considered perfect obedience of the Law's strictures difficult, if not impossible.<sup>514</sup>

Like the scholars above, Westerholm states that there are difficulties with Sanders' principal thesis that Judaism is grace-based. Westerholm critiques both Sanders and Dunn for overstating the grace-based elements of Judaism. As an example of this, Westerholm quotes

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<sup>512</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 294.

<sup>513</sup> Andrew Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism, Paul, Judaism and Perfect Obedience," in *The Law in Holy Scripture*. (ed. C. Gieschen; St. Louis: Concordia, 2004) 150.

<sup>514</sup> Andrew Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism, Paul, Judaism and Perfect Obedience," 158.

Dunn who in his *Justice of God*, describes the Jews as proto-Protestants.<sup>515</sup> Westerholm also critiques Sanders for almost describing Jews in the same way.<sup>516</sup> In response, Westerholm quotes Alexander who states:

[Sanders'] answer to the charge of 'legalism' seems, in effect, to be that Rabbinic Judaism, despite appearances, is really a religion of 'grace.' But does this not involve a tacit acceptance of a major element in his opponents' position—the assumption that 'grace' is superior to 'law'? The correct response to the charge must surely be: And what is wrong with 'legalism,' once we have got rid of abusive language about 'hypocrisy' and 'mere externalism?... If we fail to take a firm stand on this point we run the risk of misdescribing Pharisaic and Rabbinic Judaism, and of trying to make it over into a pale reflection of Protestant Christianity.<sup>517</sup>

Westerholm says that a close look at the sources reveals that there were two themes present in Judaism, divine election according to God's grace and the need for obedience. In a footnote Westerholm states the following:

Friedrich Avemarie argues that in the end we simply have to say that rabbinic literature shows two different ways of thinking about participation in the world to come. One is the principle of retribution: whoever obediently fulfills what Torah requires is rewarded with eternal life. The other follows the principle of election: whoever belongs to Israel has a share in all that has been promised to Israel, including a part in the world to come. Both ways of thinking are abundantly attested. Whereas Sanders' model requires the subordination of the retribution texts to the election texts, and whereas earlier scholars (such as Billerbeck) subordinated election texts to retribution ones, both stand side by side in the literature, functioning autonomously; and both have to be given due weight. There was no single, coherent soteriology in rabbinic literature.<sup>518</sup>

In another footnote on the same page Westerholm writes: "One may perhaps wonder how the rabbis could have used for pedagogic purposes statements that the last judgement would be based on the majority of one's deeds if everyone knew that salvation depended upon nothing but election and repentance."<sup>519</sup> Westerholm also notes that with respect to election as well, many of the rabbinic sources do not speak about election being by grace, instead they think that it was in some fashion merited from God by the Israelites.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Dunn, *Justice of God*, 7-8.

<sup>516</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 342. See also note 3.

<sup>517</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 342.

<sup>518</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 343 note 7.

<sup>519</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 343 note 6.

<sup>520</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 346.

In his *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, Westerholm challenges Sanders' grace-based depiction of Judaism right from the quotes within Sanders' book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* itself! Westerholm says that if one looks at the statements that Sanders himself provides as evidence for a non-legalistic Jewish faith, and one examines these quotes apart from the grace-based interpretation that Sanders gives them, the statements themselves do not make Judaism appear to be very grace-based.<sup>521</sup>

Westerholm also takes issue with apparent contradictions within Sanders' thought. Sanders is at pains to point out that Judaism did not see grace and works as being contrasted with each other. As a result, Judaism could not have been teaching that salvation is by works as opposed to grace, since within Judaism "grace and works were not considered alternative roads to salvation."<sup>522</sup> But, says Westerholm, if this is the case:

At this point, the head scratching begins: How can his view of grace be the same as that of a Judaism that did *not* consider "grace and works" to be "opposed to each other in any way"? If Jews did not distinguish grace and works as paths to salvation, then the old view that they believed in salvation by works, not grace, can hardly be right. But must it not be equally wrong, and for precisely the same reason, to maintain that Jews thought that they were saved by grace, not works? We are indebted to Sanders for the reminder that Judaism saw the importance of divine grace, but Sanders himself gives us reason to doubt that it assigned the *same* importance to grace as the apostle (Emphasis in original).<sup>523</sup>

Charles Talbert too states that Judaism was not quite as uniform as Sanders paints it to be. More than one opinion existed among Jews as to how covenant entrance was accomplished.<sup>524</sup> Some of these were more legalistic than Sanders has depicted. Talbert claims that in some cases, as opposed to what Sanders has said, some Jews did actually believe that one entered the covenant through works. There were other Jews, however, who Talbert calls "synergistic." Those in this camp, although he admits they may believe that the covenant might be entered through grace, would likely think that the difficulties involved in

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<sup>521</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 341-351.

<sup>522</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 297.

<sup>523</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 30.

<sup>524</sup> Talbert, Charles H., "Paul, Judaism and the Revisionists," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 63, (2001), 8.

“staying in” the covenant were such that for all intents and purposes the covenant would have been thought of as a legalistic one.<sup>525</sup>

All in all, scholars challenging the New Perspective throw doubt on Sanders’ and Dunn’s depiction of Judaism as being as grace-centered as they claim. Most scholars challenging the New Perspective salute Sanders for rightly demonstrating that there was more grace in Judaism than those of Bultmann’s generation believed. At the same time, Sanders’ critics state that Judaism might not fit so easily or neatly into his covenantal nomist categories.

### **6.3 DIVISION BETWEEN THE LAW’S LEGAL AND CEREMONIAL ASPECTS**

As previously mentioned, building on the work of Montefiore, Stendahl and others, James Dunn has argued that the term “works of the law” in Paul chiefly means the ceremonial matters that keep Jews and Gentiles separate and not generally the ethical aspects of the law of Moses.<sup>526</sup> N.T. Wright supports Dunn’s description of the law in this manner.<sup>527</sup>

Dunn’s ideas have aroused a great deal of response from scholars critiquing the New Perspective, and from those otherwise sympathetic to aspects of New Perspective thought. For instance, had he been alive today Montefiore likely would have defended Dunn’s approach to the law. Montefiore claims that the Rabbis believed that in the time of the Messiah the ceremonial aspects of the law would cease.<sup>528</sup> However, the Jewish scholar Shaye Cohen finds himself among those who take issue with the notion of a division between the law’s ceremonial and ethical aspects. In his *The Maccabees to the Mishna*, Cohen argues that no such division was present in first century Jewish thought. Cohen writes:

The legal portions of the Hebrew Bible are not familiar with the distinction between ritual and ethics, or the distinction between those rules which are peculiarly Israelite (or Jewish) and those which are followed by all civilized peoples. The prohibitions of idolatry and the worship of other gods are no less part of the Ten Commandments than are the prohibitions of murder and theft. The Holiness Code (Lev. 19) imagines that the quest for holiness includes the proper observance of the Sabbath and the sacrificial cult as well as helping the poor and loving one’s neighbor as oneself. When

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<sup>525</sup> Talbert, Charles H. “Paul, Judaism and the Revisionists.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 63, (2001), 10-15; Eriksson, “Christians Scholars’ Attitudes Towards Judaism, 41.

<sup>526</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, 77-79.

<sup>527</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1109.

<sup>528</sup> Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays*, 104 note 1.

they paraphrase the laws of the Torah, Philo, Josephus, and the *Temple Scroll* (from Qumran) depart from the order of the original, but none of them distinguishes “ritual” from “ethics” or implies that the one is more important than the other.<sup>529</sup>

On this front Schoeps also parts company with Montefiore.<sup>530</sup> Schoeps does not think that Paul divided the law into ethical and ceremonial components.<sup>531</sup>

Westerholm also does not think that Paul was frustrated merely with legalism or a misuse of the law when he talks about the law being done away with. Rather, Westerholm argues that Paul sees the law as eliminated in its entirety.<sup>532</sup> Then, once Paul has eliminated the law he sets up a system of ethics based on the Spirit.<sup>533</sup> In *Justification Reconsidered* he writes:

Circumcision (he argues, in effect) is not to be required of Gentiles, not because this part of a still valid Mosaic economy is inapplicable in their case, or even because the whole of a still valid Mosaic economy is not meant for Gentiles, but because the Mosaic economy itself has lost its validity.<sup>534</sup>

Also, in rebutting Dunn, several scholars point to 2 Corinthians 3:4-11. In this passage Paul talks about the letters chiseled on stone tablets (a clear reference to the Decalogue) being a ministry of death, a ministry superseded by the new covenant. Consequently a variety of scholars point out that Paul’s statements here give solid backing for the notion that Paul sees both ethical and ceremonial parts of the law as being done away with by the new covenant.

The Finnish scholar Heikki Räisänen agrees. Räisänen is sometimes considered to be a New Perspective scholar of a sort, but on this front he argues against Dunn. Räisänen points out that in a few places Paul talks about the law as including clearly moral aspects of the law such as the Ten Commandments.<sup>535</sup> In addition, in commenting on Galatians 5:3 H.D. Betz raises the possibility that it was not Paul, but Paul’s opponents who distinguished between the various aspects of the Torah that might need to be obeyed. For Paul, Torah obedience could not be divided into parts; it was almost certainly a matter of all or

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<sup>529</sup> Cohen, Shaye, J.D., *From the Maccabees to Mishna*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. 1987), 76.

<sup>530</sup> Schoeps, Paul, *The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, 199.

<sup>531</sup> Eriksson, “Christians Scholars’ Attitudes Towards Judaism,” 50.

<sup>532</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 330-333.

<sup>533</sup> Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*, 198-216.

<sup>534</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 14.

<sup>535</sup> Räisänen, Heikki. *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 25; Eriksson, “Christians Scholars’ Attitudes Towards Judaism,” 49.

nothing.<sup>536</sup>

Andrew Das also challenges Dunn's views on Paul and the Law. For instance, Dunn has argued that one reference in the Qumran documents supports his claim that the phrase "works of the law" means Jewish ethnic identity markers, or the ritual aspects of the law. Das examines the reference Dunn mentions, as well as other aspects of the Qumran approach to the law, and he argues that these sources do not say what Dunn claims they say. The force of the expression "works of the law" when it is used in the Qumran writings is to include all the laws of Moses, says Das, and ethical matters are listed as examples in these occasions. Das writes:

The *Rule of the Community at Qumran* confirms this interpretation of 4QMMT. The *Rule of the Community* called members to "return to the law of Moses according to all that he commanded" (1QS 5:8). In 1QS 5:9, individuals were examined upon entry with respect to their "works of the law," especially whether they had been careful "to walk according to all those precepts" (see also 1QS 6:18). The precepts included the "avoidance of anger, impatience, hatred, insulting elders, blasphemy, malice, foolish talk, and nakedness" (1QS 5:25-26; 6:24-7:18). Circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, and the food laws were, therefore, only the starting point. The Qumran parallels further suggest that Paul had more than just the ethnic or boundary-marking components of the Law in mind in Galatians 3:19, which is best taken as a reference to the necessity of perfectly obeying the entire Law.<sup>537</sup>

Seyoon Kim, as well, states that separating Paul's view of the Law into ceremonial and ethical components does not make sense given what Paul has written in Galatians. Kim writes:

When they had not had the "works of the law" imposed on them in the first place, how could their justification be a liberation from them or from the law? Thus, the freedom that the Galatian Christians experienced with Paul's gospel of justification cannot have been one from the Jewish covenant distinctives nor even from the law of Moses as a whole. It was rather freedom from "the elemental forces of the world" (Gal 4:3,9) to which their own religious law that was functionally analogous to the Jewish law belonged. They had been held enslaved to the [quoting Dunn] "fear of infringing its taboos and boundaries" lest some disaster should befall them. When they accepted Paul's gospel of justification by grace through faith, they were liberated from this fear and this slavery. But with the acceptance of the yoke of the law of Moses under the instigation of the Judaizers they were in dangers of falling back into the same kind of slavery in which they would constantly have to bear the "fear of

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<sup>536</sup> Betz, Hans Dieter. *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches In Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 259-261.

<sup>537</sup> Andrew Das, "Beyond Covenantal Nomism, Paul, Judaism and Perfect Obedience," 163.

infringing [the] taboos and boundaries” of the Mosaic law (Gal. 4:8-11). Thus, Paul’s talk of the Galatian Christians as having experienced liberty from the law when they accepted his gospel (5:1, 13) implicitly affirms that he preached to them his gospel of justification *sola gratia/fide* against the sanction and punishment of any law, the Mosaic law as well as their own analogous law, rather than against the Jewish covenant distinctives.<sup>538</sup>

Although Kim agrees with Sanders that Jewish ethnic exclusion was one of the targets in Paul’s writing, Kim also thinks that a gospel of justification that was largely limited to delivering Gentiles from the necessity of keeping Jewish ceremonial laws is problematic because it was almost irrelevant for Jews. If there already was grace within the Jewish covenant as New Perspective scholars claim, then in effect, says Kim, the only real impact of Jesus’ ministry would be merely to free the Jews from nationalistic prejudice against the Gentiles. If that was functionally the main contribution of Jesus, then Kim questions if Jesus could truly be considered to be a Jewish messiah. Kim writes:

Is this credible? If a Messiah did not benefit Israel, what kind of messiah would he be? A Messiah who does not save Israel is an oxymoron!... [But Dunn] rejects the more traditional interpretation which I represent, namely, that the Damascus revelation of the crucified Jesus as the vindicated Messiah led Paul to reassess the law as a means of achieving one’s justification.<sup>539</sup>

Again Kim writes:

I have already noted the problematic implication of Dunn’s minimalist view, that it makes the gospel practically irrelevant to Jews. But here I must point out another problem of the minimalist view: how odd Paul’s “gospel” to the gentiles would have been if it only announced that through the crucifixion and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah the God of Israel had shown his favour to the gentiles and welcomed them into his covenant relationship without any requirements such as circumcision and the food laws, so that they could have table-fellowship with Jewish believers! Would anybody—Paul or any of his gentile hearers—have considered this announcement a “gospel”? Is there any evidence that Paul’s initial gospel was only this?<sup>540</sup>

With regards to the understanding of the phrase, “works of the law,” Westerholm mentions that when Paul gives examples of the law’s requirements Paul often lists the law’s moral requirements, “the prohibition of stealing, adultery, and idol worship.... The particular

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<sup>538</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 72-73.

<sup>539</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 20.

<sup>540</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 49.



commands listed are, of course, all taken from the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1-17).”<sup>541</sup>

Westerholm also notes that Paul uses law and works of the law interchangeably.<sup>542</sup>

Westerholm points out that Paul would have understood the term “righteousness” in the same way in which it was used in the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament “righteousness” is used to describe moral categories. For instance, it is used in contrast with wickedness. The term “righteousness” is not typically used to describe covenant membership.<sup>543</sup> Noah, for instance, was declared righteous before any covenant was set up in Scripture. Also, Abraham inquired about “righteous” individuals in Sodom, people obviously not among God’s chosen people.<sup>544</sup> Similarly, Westerholm demonstrates that the word “righteous” in Paul’s texts is used in the same way as a moral category held in opposition to “sin” and “wickedness” and not to describe covenant membership.<sup>545</sup> Since, in Greek, the word “justify” is a cognate of the word “righteous,” one would expect that similar understandings hold true of “justification,” that it concerns moral issues of sinfulness rather than covenant membership.

Westerholm does agree that as a corollary of Paul’s doctrine of justification, that no one can deny others of a different, race, class or gender a right to stand before God. Nevertheless, he challenges Dunn’s view that the law in Paul’s eyes served chiefly to function in the role of establishing Jewish “ethnic identity markers”.<sup>546</sup> If Paul were advocating that only certain ceremonies be done away with then surely that would be more evident from his epistles. In his earlier book, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*, Westerholm states:

Were it true, however, that Paul considered the law or any part of it still binding for the Christian, he would have had to provide his churches with detailed instructions as to which commands they were obligated to observe and which they were not: this would obviously be a very important matter! But there is no evidence that he made any such distinction. On the contrary, it is clear that, for Paul, Torah was a unit. On this point he did not differ from the standard Jewish view: the person who is obligated to observe the law is obligated to observe its every precept.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 298.

<sup>542</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 319.

<sup>543</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 59-64.

<sup>544</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 62.

<sup>545</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 65-68.

<sup>546</sup> Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*, 118-119.

<sup>547</sup> Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith*, 207.

## 6.4 ANTHROPOLOGY

Several of those critiquing the New Perspective suggest that one of the reasons for the differences between Paul and Judaism regarding their approach to legalism and grace has to do with their anthropology. By the term “anthropology” here we mean the understanding that a person or a group has regarding human nature. Are humans basically good or evil? Are they free or not free? Understanding the anthropology of a religious group is important because if a religious group has a more positive and optimistic view of humanity’s ability to obey God’s law then it is more likely that the particular religious group will expect obedience as a necessary requirement. If a religious group has a more negative view of human nature, they are more likely to believe that humans are in desperate need of God’s grace, and thus the requirements for strict law-observance will be downplayed. In Chapter 2 we discussed how Thomas Aquinas’ and Gabriel Biel’s more positive estimation of human nature led them to espouse more rigorous and legalistic approaches to God’s covenant and Augustine’s more negative view of human nature led him to emphasize God’s mercy and grace to a greater extent.

Many scholars have pointed out that Judaism and Paul have different opinions on human nature and how sinful a typical human being actually is. In contrast with much of what one finds in Judaism, Paul seems to have a very pessimistic anthropology. Westerholm states that while there are many Old Testament passages that can support a pessimistic anthropology, most Jews of Paul’s day were not as pessimistic as Paul.<sup>548</sup> Jewish leaders held to a more optimistic view of human nature that held that people, through their own efforts, could keep God’s law. Paul’s pessimistic anthropology, however, was one of the forces that led Paul to believe that people could not keep God’s law and thus they needed God’s grace. Even E. P. Sanders admits that in Judaism there is no concept of original or universal sin such as is found in Paul’s writings.<sup>549</sup>

Gieschen’s article highlights the work of Timo Laato and a lesser known Swedish scholar, Hugo Odeberg, whose work Laato depends upon, to identify the differing anthropologies between Paul and Rabbinic and Pharisaic thought. As Gieschen states, both Odeberg and Laato argue that while the Judaism of the Pharisees and Sadducees was more

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<sup>548</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul: The Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 419-420.

<sup>549</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 32.

apt to be optimistic in terms of human free will, Paul in Romans 1:18-3:20 was clearly pessimistic on this front. They also note that while Paul talks about “the fall” and Genesis 3 as the place where evil entered the world, many in the Pharisaic tradition did not hold to a doctrine of “the fall,” but instead they saw Genesis 3 as just one of several instances in the Bible where humans disobeyed God.<sup>550</sup> Many first-century Jews held to other explanations for evil. For instance, the *Book of Enoch* identifies the entrance of evil with the activities of fallen angels. *Sirach* and the *Life of Adam and Eve* blames the situation on Eve.<sup>551</sup>

All of this goes to show that Paul was not just one more regular Pharisee, or Hellenistic Jew who believed that his Messiah had come. There were significant differences between his belief system and those of other Jews of his day. Therefore, since his anthropology is clearly different, Gieschen and Westerholm state that it is not reasonable to assume that Paul would share the same soteriology as the Jews of his day as well, as Sanders has suggested.

## **6.5 BREAKING WITH PROTESTANT THEOLOGY**

Many New Perspective scholars claim that despite its different approach to justification, the New Perspective nevertheless fits within Protestant understandings. Dunn salutes Luther for, as Dunn thinks, rediscovering that one can enter God’s covenant through grace. Wright, while more critical of Luther, has kinder things to say about Calvinism. Wright is also a popular author among many North American Protestants. Because of this, some Protestant scholars who are critical of the New Perspective are at pains to argue that the New Perspective does not fit within Protestant approaches to the faith. Piper and Johnson are among these.

Phil Johnson’s article “What’s Wrong with Wright: Examining the New Perspective on Paul,” explains what in his view are some of the logical consequences of Wright’s theology. In short, Johnson thinks that Wright is reintroducing Medieval semi-Pelagianism back into the church.

While he does produce a compelling argument that New Perspective scholars are at

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<sup>550</sup> Gieschen, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 135.

<sup>551</sup> Gieschen, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 136-137.

odds with basic Protestant beliefs, there are some weaknesses to Johnson's article. He spends more time sounding the alarm about how Wright's theology differs from classical Reformed Protestantism than looking at the biblical text itself and attempting to respond to the substance of the New Perspective viewpoints. He also warns people away from the New Perspective on the basis of its forebears. Schweitzer, Sanders, Dunn, and Stendahl, he states, are not "evangelicals" who believe that all thirteen Pauline epistles are Pauline. Because they are not evangelicals he warns his audience away from too closely subscribing to Wright who has built upon their ideas.

In his criticism of the New Perspective Johnson also does not provide a context for the New Perspective's rise. For instance, he does not mention the German biblical scholars, like Bultmann, against which Schweitzer and the New Perspective scholars respond. Johnson also does not seem to be interested or at least does not have or give space to explain the relevance of a grace-based understanding of Judaism.

Towards the end of his article Johnson does somewhat venture into the biblical text. Johnson does state that had he had more space he likely could have said more. He explains that Romans 3:20 challenges Wright's belief that "works of the law" describes the ceremonial law not the moral law, and he points out that Paul's Old Testament quotes in the early chapters of Romans all support the notion of justification as salvation of the individual not the corporate Gentile ethnic group. He also argues that the one instance of the use of "justification" in the gospels, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, talks about justification in moral terms, rather than applying the concept to Jewish ceremonies.

The main strength of his article is to explain the logical consequences of New Perspective thought, that it will, in his view, certainly challenge central Protestant thought and understandings of a God whose salvation is attained by grace through faith. On that front he is likely correct.

A more thorough examination of the New Perspective's place within Protestantism appears in John Piper's book, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*. One of the chief criticisms he makes in this book is that Wright does not teach either traditional Protestant understanding of justification, nor Catholic nor Orthodox understandings either. Piper writes:

If Wright is correct here, then the entire history of the discussion of justification for the last fifteen hundred years—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—has been misguided. Virtually everyone has been committing a “category mistake,” and the entire debate between Roman Catholics and Protestants about imputing versus imparting divine righteousness “makes no sense at all.” This is a remarkable claim to make about church history. But Wright is ready to play the man.<sup>552</sup>

Later Piper says:

I do not mean to treat the Reformed confessions as having authority on a par with Scripture. What has been taught in the past does not settle what should be taught in the future. Scripture, rightly understood, remains the sole infallible authority in these matters. But I do want to affirm that when Wright gives the impression that the biblical texts that connect justification with works have not been rigorously handled both exegetically and theologically, it is misleading. In fact, in my view, his own references to justification “by the whole life lived” or “by works” seem unreflective compared to the history of Reformed exegesis.<sup>553</sup>

Piper critiques Wright’s emphasis that the Gospel’s message primarily focuses on the lordship of Jesus Christ the coming king. Concerning Wright’s understanding of the gospel

Piper writes:

In other words, when the gospel is preached, it is not the doctrine of justification that is preached but the death and resurrection and lordship of Christ over the world. The Holy Spirit uses this news to awaken faith in the heart. This is God’s divine call through the gospel. By this call and faith, we are made partakers of Christ’s victory and become part of God’s family. Then the doctrine of justification comes in and declares to us what has happened to us. It thus gives assurance—but does not save, or convert, or make us part of God’s family.<sup>554</sup>

In certain places Piper contends that Wright has been vague in his portrayal of Paul’s thought and its implications. Piper challenges Wright to clarify the details of his arguments and not merely paint in broad strokes. Piper writes:

Huge and important questions go unaddressed here. The allusion to 1 Corinthians 3:10–17 (“he himself will be saved, but only as through fire,” v. 15) as confirming the seriousness of the final judgment does not work. At the place where it cries out for reflection, Wright does not come to terms with the fact that Paul threatens baptized professing Christians not just with barely being saved, but with not being saved at all at the last judgment (Gal. 5:21; 6:7–9; 1 Cor. 6:9). The whole question of how Paul

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<sup>552</sup> Piper, John, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007), 60.

<sup>553</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, 115.

<sup>554</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, 96.

can speak this way and how our works actually function at the last day are passed over. This is a silence where we very much need to hear Wright speak with detail and precision, since the issues are so controversial and so important for the central doctrine of justification.<sup>555</sup>

In addition to the above Piper adds:

Here he [Wright] says at least two key things. One is that when believers are identified with Christ, “what is true of him is true of them and vice versa.” The other is that “the accomplishment of Jesus Christ is reckoned to all those who are ‘in him.’” Here is where Wright believes he is expressing “the truth which has been expressed within the Reformed tradition in terms of ‘imputed righteousness.’” This is true as long as one speaks only of the general structure of union with Christ: All Jesus accomplished is reckoned to us. Or: What is true of him is true of us. If we took the analysis no further, we would say: Yes, that is certainly what the traditional view says. But if one asks what Wright believes is in fact reckoned to us, or what in fact it is about Christ that is true of us, the ways divide. He himself makes this plain as he explains the difference between his view and the traditional view of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.<sup>556</sup>

Again Piper states:

But I think he is saying: The reason that defining faith as faithful obedience is not a smuggling in of “works” is because the faithful obedience is “God-given,” not “provided from the human side.” But that is not the issue—whether it is produced by us semi-Pelagian-like or given by God in sovereign grace. The issue is whether justification by faith really means justification by works of any kind, whether provided by God or man. That is the issue, and Wright again leaves us with the impression that human transformation and Spirit wrought acts of obedience are included in the term “faith” when he speaks of present justification being by faith alone.<sup>557</sup>

Piper warns that Wright leaves the issue of a sinner’s personal reconciliation with God woefully under-emphasized. A proclamation of Jesus’ lordship void of an explanation of how we can be reconciled with Jesus amounts to terrifying news, not good news, says Piper.

For the sake of these great realities, Wright wants to keep the gospel from being a message for “how to get saved,” and he wants to keep the gospel distinct from the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This is puzzling and seems to amount to keeping the gospel separate from the very things that will make the lordship of Jesus good news for sinners. Why should a guilty sinner who has committed treason against Jesus consider it good news when he hears the announcement that this Jesus has been

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<sup>555</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, 118.

<sup>556</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, 123.

<sup>557</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, 131.

raised from the dead with absolute sovereign rights over all human beings? If Wright answers, “Because the narration of the events of the cross and resurrection are included in the heralding of the King,” the sinner will say, “What good is that for me? How can that help me? Why does that provide hope for me or any sinner?” If the gospel has no answer for this sinner, the mere facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus are not good news. But if the gospel has an answer, it would have to be a message about how the rebel against God can be saved—indeed, how he can be right with God and become part of the covenant people. I do not think Wright needs to marginalize these essential and glorious aspects of the gospel in order to strengthen his case that the gospel has larger global implications.<sup>558</sup>

There are some weaknesses in Piper’s book. He arguably pays more attention to the question of whether Wright fits within Protestantism than the question of whether Wright has correctly interpreted the Scriptures and Paul. While the former question is important the latter question is much more crucial for determining the legitimacy of New Perspective ideas. As well, being a Reformed Baptist, Piper does not seem to understand the importance of some of the sacramental foci within Wright’s interpretation of Paul, an aspect of Protestant interpretation important to Anglicans, Lutherans and some Calvinists. Nevertheless, Piper has successfully demonstrated that, in several areas, Wright’s interpretations and traditional Protestant thought significantly diverge.

## 6.6 SCRIPTURAL CHALLENGES

In addition to critiquing the overall logic and thrust of New Perspective arguments, scholars challenging the New Perspective find support for their position in specific Scriptural texts. In his *Justification Reconsidered*, Westerholm begins his argument with 1 Thessalonians. For the most part, New Perspective scholars state that themes of justification in Paul are confined to Romans, Galatians and Philippians. This is one reason why New Perspectivists claim that justification is not central to Paul’s thought.

However, Westerholm suggests that although one sees the doctrine of justification clearly spelled out in Galatians, similar ideas are present in Paul’s earlier works.<sup>559</sup> 1 Thessalonians, typically seen to be the first of Paul’s letters, might not have used the term justification, but it does indeed focus on the problem of allowing people to be reconciled to a

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<sup>558</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, 88-89.

<sup>559</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 11.

deity. The need to placate potentially angry gods was something that Gentiles were already used to hearing about from their previous pagan religions. In contrast to what New Perspectivists usually cast as Paul's gospel, 1 Thessalonians does not focus on the task of allowing Gentiles to join God's people without going through Jewish ritual law.<sup>560</sup>

"Salvation in Thessalonians meant deliverance from God's wrath and judgment; it also means the same in Corinthians,"<sup>561</sup> argues Westerholm. In 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul also talks about a world which is perishing because of misdeeds that merit God's wrath. Again, however, Paul's gospel offers an escape from God's condemnation. Corinthians even uses the language of justification, though sparingly.<sup>562</sup> Yet when, in Corinthians, he uses the terms: "justification," "righteous" and "unrighteous" they clearly refer to moral issues, how sinners can face a righteous God, not matters concerning how Gentiles can join the church without needing to follow Jewish food laws.<sup>563</sup>

As Westerholm does, Kim also argues that the essential ideas behind justification also appear in 1 Thessalonians and in 1 and 2 Corinthians.<sup>564</sup> Kim thus claims that the topic of justification, reconciliation with God, shows up even when Paul is not directly talking about including Gentiles in God's covenant.<sup>565</sup> Because of this fact, we can maintain that the doctrine of justification is central to Paul's thought.<sup>566</sup>

In Galatians we see the justification doctrine fully fleshed out. Here, according to Westerholm, Paul states that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete.<sup>567</sup> Later Westerholm goes on to say:

When Paul declares, then, that "a person is not justified by works of the law" (Gal. 2:16), he is, to be sure, denying that Gentiles should be circumcised; but the point of the formula, and the reason *why* Gentiles ought not to be circumcised, is that God's favour cannot be enjoyed by *sinners* under a covenant whose condition for blessing is compliance with its laws. Indeed, it is the law's requirement of deeds that comply with its demands that distinguish it, in Paul's thinking, from the path of "faith" and "grace."<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 4-5.

<sup>561</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 7.

<sup>562</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 7.

<sup>563</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 8-10.

<sup>564</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 85-100.

<sup>565</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 47.

<sup>566</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 82.

<sup>567</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 14.

<sup>568</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 15.



In discussing Romans, Westerholm believes that Paul maintains the same theme in his discourse as he did in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Thessalonians. Romans, 1:18, states Westerholm, gives Paul's opinion that the preaching of the gospel is necessary because God's wrath is about to be visited on a world which has not lived as it should have lived.<sup>569</sup> He writes:

In Romans, then, as in Galatians and Corinthians, Paul uses justification language as the answer to the human dilemma apparent already in Thessalonians: How, in the face of coming judgement, can anyone, (Jew or Gentile) find salvation"? How (in other words) can sinners find a gracious God? The answer: God shows himself gracious by providing, in Christ, justification for all (Jew and Gentile alike) who believe.<sup>570</sup>

Westerholm also notes that in Romans 9 Paul sets up a faith versus works contrast.<sup>571</sup> Israel pursued righteousness through the law, yet Israel did not attain to righteousness because they pursued this by works and not by faith.

A number of scholars have commented that Romans 3:18-20 causes problems for the New Perspective claim that works of the law are only Jewish identity markers. Westerholm also refers to this passage:

In this passage, then, the "works of the law" by which no human being can be declared righteous (3:20) are hardly the boundary markers of the Jewish people (cf. Das, *Law*, 190: "In Rom 2:17-29, however, Paul sees absolutely no problem with Jewish identity markers as long as they are accompanied by full observance of the law"; also Martin, *Law*, 146-147). They are rather the good deeds that God requires of all human beings (2:7, 10), that God has spelled out for the benefit of the Jews in the Mosaic Law (2:13, 18), but that human beings—all of whom are "under sin," none of whom is righteous (3:9, 10)—have not done. Dunn's observation that "there was always something odd not to say suspect about the assumption that Paul's polemic against 'works of the law' was a polemic against 'good works'" (*Partings*, 136) misses the point, as I read both Paul and his "Lutheran" interpreters. Neither Paul *nor* the "Lutherans" ever opposed good works, though Paul *and* the Lutherans were sure that sinners are in no position to be declared righteous for having done them.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 18.

<sup>570</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 21.

<sup>571</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 328.

<sup>572</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 388 note 107.

## 6.7 JUSTIFICATION NOT THE CENTRE

As Gieschen has mentioned, above, New Perspective scholars challenge the centrality of justification in Paul's thought. As we have already noted, Schweitzer argued that justification cannot lie at the center of Paul's thought, since Paul's statements on justification cannot explain his ethics. Terry Donaldson explains that since Paul's justification language almost always occurs when he is talking about Gentiles joining the covenant, in the view of New Perspective scholars, notions surrounding justification are altered in at least two ways. First, New Perspective scholars claim that perhaps in Paul's thought justification is not so much a means of salvation, as the Reformers had taught, but rather an avenue by which Gentiles can be brought into the covenant community and secondly, that justification is not a central theme in Paul.<sup>573</sup> In summarizing the views of modern New Perspective scholars and their predecessors Donaldson states that: "The common notion then in all of these people is that Paul's juridical language is not at the center of his thought, rather it is peripheral and derivative, arising out of and fashioned to defend a set of independent and already-held convictions."<sup>574</sup>

However, as touched on previously, McGrath states that the use of the term "central" in this debate causes difficulties.

So is the concept of justification of central importance to Paul? The question of the precise role of the concept of justification to Paul's understanding of the gospel remains intensely controversial within modern Pauline scholarship. Martin Luther regarded it as central, not simply to the apostle's theology, but to the proclamation of the Christian gospel as a whole, a judgement which some leading Protestant theologians maintain to this day. While some recent writers have endorsed Luther's position, others have been somewhat more critical of this traditional Lutheran stance, seeing the centre of gravity of Paul's thought as lying elsewhere. On their reading of Paul, it is actually quite difficult to identify *any* centre to his thought, not least because there is disagreement among scholars as to what the idea of a 'centre' actually means. A principle of coherence? A summarizing principle? A criterion of authenticity? These difficulties stand in the path of any attempt to reach agreement on the importance of justification to Paul's thought. Three broad positions may be discerned within recent scholarship on this question.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 10-13.

<sup>574</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 12.

<sup>575</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Third Edition, 24.

New Perspective scholars generally follow Albert Schweitzer who claimed that participation in Christ is more of a central concept for Paul than justification by faith.<sup>576</sup> However, Gieschen thinks that the dichotomy that New Perspective scholars have put between justification and participation in Christ is an excessively stressed one. He looks especially to Isaiah to provide the background for Paul's concepts of the righteousness of God. In these passages Gieschen argues that righteousness is not an abstract concept, but an end-time action by God that brings about a changed status for his people.<sup>577</sup>

Furthermore, in response to Schweitzer's claim, in addition to what Gieschen has said, one has to ask if Schweitzer is setting up a false expectation by assuming that there should be a connection between justification and ethics. After all, in the Old Testament covenants, election (the entrance to the covenant) cannot explain the Torah ethics either. As Paul forcefully argues in Galatians 3:15-18, election, God's choosing of Abraham, came first, then the Torah (the ethical requirements of the old covenant) arrived four hundred years later. The two aspects of the covenant were separate from each other, and as Paul argues, not linked. However, one certainly can claim that election is central to the Old Testament covenant.

In the same way, one might ask why it should be any different in the new covenant? In the new covenant justification comes first, then afterwards the new system of ethics follows. As we discuss later, some scholars claim that the system of ethics that Paul applies to Christians is called the law of Christ or the law of the Spirit. Just as the Torah followed Abraham's election, Paul's new system of ethics is applied afterwards and separately from justification. One has to ask then if the centrality of justification is really challenged by the fact that justification may not be linked to Paul's ethics.

In addition, scholars such as Talbert and Westerholm state that Gentile inclusion in the covenant does not replace justification as being the centre of Paul's theology. Rather, Paul advocates equal inclusion into the covenant for both Jews and Gentiles on the basis of justification by grace through faith.<sup>578</sup> Talbert writes: "One can only say that if the

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<sup>576</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 11.

<sup>577</sup> Gieschen, "Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?" 140-141.

<sup>578</sup> Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*. 118, 129; Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 46.

theological justification for equality of Gentiles and Jews has no substance, the end sought by this rhetoric is untenable. Instead, Paul advocates equality of Gentiles and Jews *because of* justification through faith.”<sup>579</sup>

Westerholm also takes issue with the common New Perspective argument that the terms “justification,” and “righteousness,” in Paul’s thought do not focus so much about ethics or moral behaviour so much as about covenant status, particularly for Gentiles. In his *Preface to the Study of Paul*, Westerholm says that in Romans 1-2 Paul talks about the moral law, not with reference to the Torah, but more along the lines of how the moral law is represented in the Book of Proverbs.<sup>580</sup> The fact that, in Romans, Paul condemns Gentile immorality without making reference to the Torah makes it seem less likely that the gospel he preaches to the Gentiles is one which promises to free Gentiles from the Torah’s ritual ceremonies. The point in Romans 1-2 is that all people, under the law of Moses or not, know that they should live better than they are currently managing to live.<sup>581</sup> In his *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, Westerholm gives a very convincing refutation of the New Perspective view that righteousness in Paul chiefly means covenant membership. Relying a great deal on the opening chapters of Romans, Westerholm demonstrates that *dikaïos* in Paul’s usage does include moral behaviour.<sup>582</sup>

John Piper makes similar claims as Westerholm and Talbert. Piper argues that justification is not a side issue nor is it confined to merely allowing Gentiles to enter the covenant. Piper says that Paul’s language of righteousness does not neatly fit only into the categories that Wright attaches to it.<sup>583</sup> Rather justification deals with larger moral issues as well. He writes:

The term “justification” refers to what happens in ordinary courtrooms, not just at the end of the age (Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32). It refers to Elihu wanting to justify Job (Job 33:32); to the evil of justifying the wicked for a bribe (Isa. 5:23; cf. 1:17); to the wisdom of God being justified (Matt. 11:19); to God’s being justified now by the crowds (Luke 7:29); to a man’s trying to justify himself and save face (Luke 10:29;

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<sup>579</sup> Charles Talbert, “Paul, Judaism and the Revisionists,” 15 note 56.

<sup>580</sup> Westerholm, Stephen, *Preface to the Study of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 29.

<sup>581</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 18.

<sup>582</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 249-277.

<sup>583</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, 40-41.

cf. 16:15). And in the theological sense in the New Testament, it far more often refers to the present reality of justification, not the future.<sup>584</sup>

Finally, Kim sees another problem with the New Perspective idea that through “justification” Paul was chiefly aiming to allow Gentiles into the covenant rather than to come up with a general theology of salvation. One of the ideas motivating the scholarly thrust of the New Perspective was the after-effects of the holocaust and the painful legacy of anti-Semitism. To their credit, says Kim, the New Perspective scholars have been eager to relieve Judaism of the charge of being a works-righteousness based faith. In a post-holocaust world this is very commendable. In their efforts to eliminate the charge of the Jews being legalists the New Perspective camp has redefined Paul’s gospel to be one that challenges Jewish particularism, Jewish ethnic and religious imperialism. Paul’s gospel, according to New Perspectivists, challenges Jewish attitudes of superiority over and against Gentiles. This, however, is the problem, says Kim. To excuse the Jews from the charge of being works-righteousness oriented, New Perspectivists have instead in essence called them racists and religious imperialists. Is that any better an accusation to lob at the Jewish people? Which is worse, to be excessively worried about right versus wrong or to be a racist and religious bigot?<sup>585</sup> When seen from this angle Kim claims that the New Perspective has thus not ended up defending the Jewish people at all.

## 6.8 ANACHRONISM

One of the dangers of the New Perspective approach, argues Westerholm, is anachronism. In his book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Schweitzer warns against anachronism, exporting the concerns of our own culture and day onto the New Testament. In particular he sees this taking place regarding various scholars’ depictions of the life and character of Jesus.<sup>586</sup> Of course, one has to be on guard against anachronisms, whether they are obvious and ridiculous, such as the claim that the Hittites were called Hittites because they hit people or whether they exist in more sophisticated form, such as what Albert Schweitzer criticizes in

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<sup>584</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification*, 58.

<sup>585</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 61.

<sup>586</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Third Edition (trans. W. Montgomery; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1956), 4.

his book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Yet, says Westerholm, this is exactly what New Perspective scholars have done with Paul by reducing the doctrine of justification to make it merely deal with Jewish ethnocentrism. In their efforts to reduce the centrality of justification and to make it focus chiefly on the issue of inclusion of Gentiles and not on moral matters, New Perspective scholars have thrust modern concerns onto an earlier age. While the goals of racial inclusion are very worthwhile and valid, and while Paul is undoubtedly concerned with them, the issue in this debate is whether this goal amounts to an accurate summation of Paul's thought when it comes to justification. Westerholm writes:

Ironically, it was precisely by modernizing Paul that Stendahl made welcome his suggestion that others, not he, had modernized Paul. Our secularized age has undoubtedly thrust earlier concerns about human relationships with God into the background—if not rendered them completely unintelligible. Conversely, in our multicultural societies, acceptance of people from ethnic and cultural backgrounds other than our own is more crucial than ever to community peace. Both negatively and positively, then, Stendahl posits a Paul attuned to modern agendas.<sup>587</sup>

In his book *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, Westerholm devotes his Chapter 15 to the definition of justification. He forcefully demonstrates that when both Paul and the other biblical voices discuss matters of justification and righteousness they see justification and righteousness applying to moral matters, issues of sin, guilt and the redemption from it, and not merely ethnic inclusion.<sup>588</sup>

Other scholars in addition to Westerholm have stated that New Perspective scholars stumble into anachronistic readings of Paul. One of these scholars is Philip Alexander. In his essay "Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature" he writes:

Particularly valuable are the interpretations of the Amoraim, the generations of the Sages immediately after the close of the Mishnah. The alternative to reading the Tannaitic sources discriminately in the light of the later tradition is often naively to introduce modern agendas and ideas to the study of these texts, and then dress up one's findings as historical scholarship. It is somewhat disturbing to note the extent to which the systematic construction of Tannaitic theology has been dominated by Christian scholars who have a liberal Protestant agenda and little or no knowledge of the later rabbinic theological tradition, or by Jewish scholars who have been, arguably, theologically influenced by liberal Protestant thought."<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 3.

<sup>588</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*, 261-296.

<sup>589</sup> Philip Alexander, "Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (ed. D.A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, Mark A. Seifrid: Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 299.

## 6.9 THE DAMASCUS EVENT

One of the reasons that those criticizing the New Perspective see justification as central is because they also see Paul's theology as arising from the Damascus event, the beginning of Paul's Christian journey. Gieschen, for instance, maintains that it was not the Gentile mission that formed Paul's theology, but his conversion experience near Damascus.<sup>590</sup>

Kim as well critiques Dunn's "interpretation of the Damascus event."<sup>591</sup> According to Kim, Dunn sees Paul's initial call to the Gentiles as stemming from his Damascus road experience. However, Dunn thinks that Paul worked out the implications of his call to the Gentiles and their law observance perhaps fifteen to seventeen years afterwards.<sup>592</sup> This is particularly the case with Paul's theologies of justification by grace through faith which Dunn thinks arose out of the controversies at Antioch and Galatia.<sup>593</sup>

Kim challenges Dunn's views in this area. Kim thinks that both Paul's call to the Gentiles *as well as the shape of his gospel* emerged from the Damascus road experience. Kim challenges Dunn to demonstrate any place where one can see evidence of a progression in Paul's thought where his gospel gradually developed afterwards.<sup>594</sup> Unlike Dunn, Kim sees Paul's conversion on the Damascus road as having direct influence on Paul's theology and sense of mission.<sup>595</sup> Kim writes:

In my book I was concerned to show *how* the main lines of Paul's theology originated from the Damascus revelation rather than *when* they did so, let alone when the mature formulations of various Christological and soteriological doctrines came into being. I still stand by my main thesis that Paul's gospel is basically an unfolding of the revelation of Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road.<sup>596</sup>

Again challenging Dunn, Kim writes:

It is not credible that Paul—who was going to Damascus in order to persecute the Hellenists precisely for ignoring circumcision in their mission to the gentiles—decided to join in their mission without any consciousness of the issue of circumcision. It is inconceivable that Paul went about with this mission among the

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<sup>590</sup> Gieschen, "Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?" 139-140.

<sup>591</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 2.

<sup>592</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 3.

<sup>593</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 22, 53.

<sup>594</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 19.

<sup>595</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 293.

<sup>596</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 5.

gentiles for as long as seventeen years without posing and resolving this issue theologically.<sup>597</sup>

Referring to the timeline that Paul sets out in Galatians, Kim asks that if Paul was not preaching justification until Antioch or Galatia then exactly what gospel was Paul preaching for the several years prior to that?<sup>598</sup> After all, Paul chastised the Galatians for abandoning the teaching that he had previously delivered to them. That teaching, then obviously had to have had some continuity with what he presented in the chapters of Galatians itself.

In contrast to Dunn's approach, Kim states that Paul talks about those who challenge his gospel as enemies of Christ. Paul also describes himself as someone who used to be an enemy of Christ. Kim maintains that by reflecting on God's action towards him near Damascus, Paul came up with his doctrine of reconciliation.

Kim also states that if 1 Thessalonians is about escaping God's wrath at Jesus' return, then the book's themes are in essence not merely focused on the task of "getting in" the covenant, but also on the process of "staying in."<sup>599</sup> Logically then, if 1 Thessalonians deals also with the topic of justification, as Westerholm and Kim assume, then since 1 Thessalonians also focuses on the process of "staying in," one can also maintain that justification in Paul's thought deals with the topic of "staying in."<sup>600</sup>

## 6.10 CONCLUSION

Various scholars critique aspects of New Perspective thought. While most of these scholars admit that the New Perspective has made a contribution, they also point out various difficulties and inconsistencies in New Perspective ideas. In addition, those critical of the New Perspective question whether the evidence supports some of the strong claims that Sanders and others have made concerning the grace-based nature of Judaism and the less than central role that justification supposedly plays in Paul's thought. All in all, one can say that Westerholm speaks for other scholars critical of the New Perspective when he concludes that the teachings of Augustine and the reformers are closer to the meaning of Paul than

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<sup>597</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 29.

<sup>598</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 45.

<sup>599</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 86, 93.

<sup>600</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 237.



those of the New Perspective revisionists.<sup>601</sup> It is the teachings of one of these reformers, Martin Luther, that we examine next. New Perspective scholars make frequent mention of Luther. Actual references to Luther's works in their writings, however, are much more scarce if existent at all. How then does Luther's actual thought compare with the portrayal of it given by New Perspective scholars?

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<sup>601</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 82.

# **CHAPTER 7**

## **CORRECTING SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT LUTHER**

While New Perspective scholars have made valuable contributions in the New Testament field, nevertheless, this study has thus far argued that New Perspective scholars have for the most part misinterpreted Luther. To some extent this may be understandable. If the chief sources for their insights on Luther are nineteenth century and early twentieth century biblical scholars such as Bultmann, it is not surprising that New Perspective scholars' views of Luther would at times be distorted. However, not only have they misunderstood Luther, their books contain few, and in some cases, no references to Luther's published works. It thus appears that they are not in fact truly acquainted with Luther's writings. It therefore seems necessary to present some corrections to the typical misunderstandings that one finds within New Perspective writings.

Many books have been written on Luther's theology. Given space restrictions it is not possible to reproduce their contents here. Nevertheless, it is expedient that a few key observations be made.

### **7.1 JUSTIFICATION AND JEWISH ETHNIC EXCLUSIVENESS**

New Perspective scholars are quick to juxtapose the Reformation view of justification with their own. According to New Perspectivists, Paul's justification language was concerned with the ability of Gentiles to transcend the Jewish ethnic identity boundaries, demarcated by the ceremonial aspects of the law, and to join the early Christian communities. The Reformation approach to justification, in contrast, sees justification as the process by which God forgives sins and immoral acts through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. Dunn writes: "The Christian doctrine of justification by faith begins as Paul's protest not as an individual sinner against a Jewish legalism, but as Paul's protest on behalf of Gentiles against Jewish exclusivism."<sup>602</sup> A page or two later, Dunn adds that the Reformation view on Paul's

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<sup>602</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 25.

attack on Jewish boasting understood the Jewish boasting that Paul was critiquing involved the boasting of self-achievement. But, according to Dunn, Paul is talking about the boasting of Jewish distinctiveness.<sup>603</sup>

While it is certainly true that the Reformation emphasis is to understand justification in primarily moral and not ethnic categories, Luther understood the other side of the argument as well. He did not posit a juxtaposition between a Pauline gospel which preached the transcending of sinful barriers between God and humanity and a Pauline gospel which preached about the transcending of ethnic barriers between Jews and Gentiles. In Luther's lectures on the gospel of John, he does mention that Paul took issue with the Jews boasting in their ethnic exclusiveness. Luther then, along with Dunn, recognized that this was part of Paul's message. Luther, however, thought that this was not the main focus of Paul's message.<sup>604</sup> Furthermore, Luther understood that the process by which Gentiles overcame Jewish ethnic exclusiveness and joined the church was not in itself justification, *per se*, but a by-product of the doctrine of justification.

## **7.2 FAMILIARITY WITH EARLY CHRISTIAN AND MEDIEVAL THOUGHT**

New Perspective scholars and others sometimes imply that Luther's range of reading and research was limited. They sometimes speak as if Luther was unaware of the approaches to justification and the treatment of the law found within the early Church Fathers, the approaches that Stendahl draws upon in his *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, for instance. One quickly sees, however, that Luther was very aware of these approaches to justification.

As an example of this, this study earlier stated (see Chapter 2.2) that Dunn has posited a view of the law which divided the law into ceremonial and ethical components. Paul was opposed to the former, but not the latter, says Dunn.<sup>605</sup> At times, it appears as if Dunn believes that in arriving at this notion he has found a new understanding of how Paul dealt with the law. But Dunn either is unaware of the fact or he does not mention that medieval Catholic thinkers such as Erasmus made similar distinctions to those which he

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<sup>603</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God*, 26; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 69.

<sup>604</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE. 22:40.

<sup>605</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, 77-79

himself makes. Lohse demonstrates that Luther also was well aware of this distinction.<sup>606</sup> In his 1535 Galatians commentary,<sup>607</sup> and towards the end of his treatise *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther gives several pages refuting the notion that the law can be divided into ceremonial and ethical components.

Westerholm also points out that Dunn's argument is not a new one and that both Luther and Calvin were aware of the approach that divided Paul's critique of the law into ethical and ceremonial components. In a footnote Westerholm mentions Calvin's response to the notion. Calvin rejects the idea that "works of the law" referred to ceremonies only. The reason given by Calvin is that the examples that Paul gives primarily come from the moral side of the law.<sup>608</sup> In a footnote two pages later Westerholm cites Luther addressing the same issue.<sup>609</sup> Westerholm maintains that "justification", "righteousness", and "faith" mean what Luther, Calvin and Augustine expound them to mean.<sup>610</sup>

As opposed to being ignorant of patristic and medieval theology, even a small sample of his work demonstrates that Luther is familiar with the early Church Fathers, and he makes frequent references to their works, especially to that of Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome as well as to Chrysostom.<sup>611</sup> He is also aware of the classical pre-Christian Greek and Roman authors.<sup>612</sup> In addition, he is well acquainted with medieval theologians whom he frequently complains about. Among others these include the writings of Gabriel Biel, Thomas Aquinas,<sup>613</sup> and Duns Scotus.<sup>614</sup> Luther expresses his frustrations with the medieval theologian Peter Lombard and his *Sentences*.<sup>615</sup> Gabriel Biel revived the theology of William of Ockham in Germany. Luther studied this at the University of Erfurt, as well as the theology of other scholastics and the philosophy of Aristotle on which they were based.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther. An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 64.

<sup>607</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:122.

<sup>608</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 316 note 57.

<sup>609</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 318, note 65.

<sup>610</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 74.

<sup>611</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:355.

<sup>612</sup> Martin Luther, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15," AE 28:85; Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:292, 321, 340; Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," AE 31:41.

<sup>613</sup> Martin Luther, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15," AE 28:85

<sup>614</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:223.

<sup>615</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:223.

<sup>616</sup> Harold Grimm, "Introduction to Martin Luther's 'Disputation Against Scholastic Theology,'" (Luther's Works, American Edition, Volume 31), 6.

Luther has this to say regarding his reading of Scotus and other medieval scholastic theologians:

Scholastic theology was like that, with everything uncertain and yet requiring great effort. One teaches, or he learns, the fundamentals of Scotus, and later he has nothing except uncertainty and doubt. But if I believe in Christ, I love my brother, I carry my cross; I am not tossed on an uncertain sea, but I have this confidence, that my call is God-pleasing, because that is His Word.<sup>617</sup>

Luther celebrates the contributions of Augustine, though not uncritically. He has kind things to say about some medieval thinkers such as Jan Hus,<sup>618</sup> John Wycliffe,<sup>619</sup> and the mystic Bernard.<sup>620</sup>

In his lectures on John, Luther goes on for several pages describing his struggles when reading through the Church Fathers. He lists various Church Fathers and theologians which he read, among others including Gregory, Francis, Augustine, Ambrose, Aquinas, Bernard, Benedict, Scotus, Bonaventura, Lombard, Dominic, Jerome, and the writings of various popes. Luther states that it took him twenty years to realize that he could not accept everything that these people had said as being correct interpretations of God's word. He recognized that they were pious people and worth treating with respect. At the same time he eventually came to realize that he had to sift through their writings, keeping only what was in agreement with Scripture and the teaching of Christ and discarding the rest. Even Augustine, Luther states, can err.<sup>621</sup>

Luther's contemporaries judged Luther to be well acquainted with the tradition of the church as well. Bucer first heard Luther explain Reformation concepts in 1518. At that time one of the aspects of Luther's thought which won Bucer over to the Reformation cause was Luther's familiarity with the Church Fathers.<sup>622</sup>

Luther, in fact, is much better steeped in theology of the church's first fifteen centuries than most of his followers are. In this fashion Luther's life can serve as a model for modern-day Protestants to be acquainted with the entire tradition of the church and not

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<sup>617</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:223.

<sup>618</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28: 242, 243.

<sup>619</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28: 242, 267.

<sup>620</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:323.

<sup>621</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE. 22:255-262.

<sup>622</sup> H. Grimm, "Introduction to the Heidelberg Disputation" (Luther's Works, American Edition, Volume 31), 38.

merely with the periods after the Reformation. Furthermore, Luther's familiarity with medieval and patristic thought should caution his critics from too quickly assuming that he is more ignorant than they are.

### 7.3 LUTHER AND MORAL LAXITY

As already explained, by far the most frequent charge that New Perspectivists lob at the Old Perspective thought is that it is excessively lenient in its interpretation of Pauline morality and ethics. Donaldson comments on this, stating that Paul seems to talk about the danger of works only in the situations of Gentiles tempted to Judaize and in other places where Paul gives ethical commands he does not warn about the dangers of works.<sup>623</sup> In addition, in his *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, Sanders quotes Raisanen in saying: "In reading Rudolf Bultmann 'one gets the impression that zeal for the law is more damaging than transgression.'"<sup>624</sup> In *Judaism*, Sanders also writes:

The notion that Paul devalued 'good works' is a straightforward academic error, readily visible to anyone who will read his letters without wearing glasses that filter out selected passages. The notion that 'works' and 'grace' are opposed to each other, like the supposed opposition of fate and freewill, is contrary to the ancient Jewish view. Reliance on grace and the requirements of works are, however, expressed in the Scrolls with unusual intensity, and each one is stated with a remarkable degree of extremism.<sup>625</sup>

Often Luther is the one who is blamed for making the shift away from a more rigorous view of Pauline ethics. Again Sanders says this in his 1991 book, *Paul*.<sup>626</sup> Luther's Catholic opponents of his own day frequently made similar charges.<sup>627</sup> This is not a new idea, however. Prior to the rise of the New Perspective other Christian leaders made the same claim. For instance, A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, wrote as much in his book, *The Fourfold Gospel*.<sup>628</sup> Simpson, of course, was writing before more than a handful of Luther's writings had been translated into English and

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<sup>623</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 112.

<sup>624</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 48 fn 1.

<sup>625</sup> Sanders *Judaism*, 376.

<sup>626</sup> Sanders, *Paul*, 101.

<sup>627</sup> Eck, John, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces: Against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church*, 55, 59-61.

<sup>628</sup> Simpson, A. B., *The Fourfold Gospel* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications Inc. 1890), 12.

he likely had not had the opportunity to study Luther on this area. Nevertheless he expresses a widely held assumption concerning Luther's approach to Christian obedience.

Most certainly the charge of moral laxity can be laid at the feet of many Protestant thinkers. However, anyone who has read even a small sample of Luther's writings discovers that Luther did not encourage a lax approach towards Christian ethics.<sup>629</sup> Von Loewenich writes about this:

Great earnestness dominates these thoughts of Luther. If it is ever asserted that Luther made lesser practical demands of men than medieval Catholicism, one glance at Luther's theology of the cross should be sufficient to convince one of the opposite. The most radical asceticism and the most sublime mysticism, stripped of their false tendencies, are here given their due in their rightful concerns and are even surpassed in the seriousness of their approach. Unvaried in its emphasis, the melody sounds forth from Luther's theology of the cross: Whoever would follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me! Here the enormous claim of this theology becomes directly clear. A glance at Reformation history shows that Luther did not evade this claim.<sup>630</sup>

Statements regarding the need for Christians to follow the law and for preachers to preach the law in addition to the gospel are everywhere throughout his works.<sup>631</sup> There are so many references to this idea in his writings that it would be impossible to refer to them all in this paper, yet since the charge of antinomianism is so often made, we will attempt to deal with this it at some length here.

The Luther scholar B. Lohse describes Luther as seeing two chief themes in Scripture, namely God's judgment and God's grace.<sup>632</sup> Luther believed that there is more judgment in the Old Testament than in the New, and more grace in the New Testament than

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<sup>629</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 4.

<sup>630</sup> Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 118.

<sup>631</sup> Althaus, Paul, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Translated by Robert C. Schultz. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 251-274; Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul*, 41; Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE: 22:38-39, 139-140, 146-147, 178-180; Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, AE 54:233; Martin Luther, *Good Works*, AE 44:17-114; Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26: 310, 314-316, 343, 344, 350, 448; AE 27:30, 80-81, 85; Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:225; Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:13-14, 16, 23, 50, 51, 58, 59, 60, 67, 72, 126, 136, 255, 272-273; Martin Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses or Explanations of the Disputation Concerning the Value of Indulgences," AE 31:84, 86, 87, 89; Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Corinthians 15" AE 28:159; Martin Luther, *Temp. Auth.*, AE LW 45:91-92; Martin Luther, "Against the Sabbatarians, Letter to a Good Friend," AE 47:74; Martin Luther, "Against the Antinomians," AE 47:103-114; Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, AE 31:358-359; Plass, Ewald M., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 326, 343, 355, 504, 534, 722-723, 725-726, 870, 1210, 1279, 1343, 1499-1521.

<sup>632</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 29, 41.

in the Old, but judgment and grace appear in both.<sup>633</sup> Consequently Luther tried to reflect both law and grace in his preaching and writing.

Luther is known as the theologian who rediscovered God's grace. Yet it is worth noting that the document that started the Reformation, Luther's 95 theses, did not chiefly concern itself with the preaching of God's grace. In fact, the first few theses focused not on grace but on avoiding cheap grace. As Lohse says:

The Ninety-Five Theses dealt primarily with indulgences and penance. As he had done previously, Luther did not reject every use of indulgences, but rather limited their efficacy to the remission of temporal punishments imposed by the church. In addition he protested against the false sense of security that indulgences created.<sup>634</sup>

The first of his Ninety-Five theses is: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." In other words, believers should repent regularly throughout their life and not just once. The third thesis is: "Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh." In other words, repentance should be accompanied with a suitable change in lifestyle.

In his essay introducing Luther's Ninety-Five theses, the author (likely Harold J. Grimm), states that with his first thesis Luther attempted to argue that repentance should not be a one time "mechanical act" but "a permanent inner attitude."<sup>635</sup>

Lohse also states that Luther's criticism of indulgences was partly or even chiefly based in his desire to preserve repentance in its purity. Lohse writes: "Luther warned of the dangers of indulgences. Luther did not reject the possibility of an indulgence in principle, but rather identified a contradiction between true contrition and the desire to receive an indulgence."<sup>636</sup>

In addition to the Ninety-Five theses, exhortations to perform good works occur throughout his works. In his treatise "On The Councils and The Church" Luther writes:

In addition to these seven principal parts there are other outward signs that identify the Christian church, namely, those signs whereby the Holy Spirit sanctifies us according to the second table of Moses; when he assists us in sincerely honoring our

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<sup>633</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 157.

<sup>634</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 44.

<sup>635</sup> Martin Luther, "Ninety-Five Theses," AE 31:22.

<sup>636</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 42.



father and mother, and conversely, when he helps them to raise their children in a Christian way and to lead honorable lives; when we faithfully serve our princes and lords and are obedient and subject to them, and conversely, when they love their subjects and protect and guard them; also when we bear no one a grudge, entertain no anger, hatred, envy, or vengeance toward our neighbors, but gladly forgive them, lend to them, help them, and counsel them; when we are not lewd, not drunkards, not proud, arrogant, overbearing, but chaste, self-controlled, sober, friendly, kind, gentle, and humble; when we do not steal, rob, are not usurious, greedy, do not overcharge, but are mild, kind, content, charitable; when we are not false, mendacious, perjurers, but truthful, trustworthy, and do whatever else is taught in these commandments—all of which St. Paul teaches abundantly in more than one place. We need the Decalogue not only to apprise us of our lawful obligations, but we also need it to discern how far the Holy Spirit has advanced us in his work of sanctification and by how much we still fall short of the goal, lest we become secure and imagine that we have now done all that is required. Thus we must constantly grow in sanctification and always become new creatures in Christ. This means “grow” and “do so more and more.”<sup>637</sup>

Notice that in the above quote Luther does not expect that we would rely solely on the Holy Spirit to cause good works to flow out of a Christian. Luther understands that there is some level of responsibility on the part of each human to live up to God’s expectations.

Throughout his exegetical writings and in several other places as well one sees Luther critiquing slack morality as well as a lazy approach to the Christian life. For instance, in his lectures on Galatians, Luther says the following:

For when reason hears that righteousness or the blessing is obtained on the basis of grace and the promise, it immediately draws the inference “Then the Law is worthless.” The matter of the Law must be considered carefully, both as to what and as to how we ought to think about the Law; otherwise we shall either reject it altogether, after the fashion of the fanatical spirits who prompted the peasants’ revolt a decade ago by saying that the freedom of the Gospel absolves men from all laws, or we shall attribute to the Law the power to justify.<sup>638</sup>

In his *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, James Dunn makes this comment regarding how he thinks Reformation thinkers and modern day commentators influenced by them interpret God’s law. Dunn writes:

It is on the basis of such teaching that the fundamental gospel/law dialect of Reformation theology has been established: gospel and law stand in sharpest antithesis. And contemporary commentators have not hesitated to conclude that for Paul the law is in indeed a hostile or even demonic power, a tyrant like sin, with a

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<sup>637</sup> Martin Luther, “On The Councils and The Church,” AE 41:166.

<sup>638</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:343.

function similar to that of Satan. Or again, a common conclusion has been that in Paul's view the law never had any positive role in the process of salvation. On the contrary, by the law humankind is led or driven into sinning.<sup>639</sup>

While Dunn might be correct in his views of modern day commentators, Luther's view on the law was different. For Luther, the importance he placed on the preaching of the Law and its role in preparing humans to receive the gospel cannot be downplayed. Luther states that the Law does not on its own justify, but the Law prepares us to receive grace. Consequently Christians cannot be saved unless it is properly preached. Luther writes:

For as long as the presumption of righteousness remains in a man, there remains immense pride, self-trust, smugness, hate of God, contempt of grace and mercy, ignorance of the promises and of Christ. The proclamation of free grace and the forgiveness of sins does not enter that man's heart and understanding, because that huge rock and solid wall, namely, the presumption of righteousness by which the heart itself is surrounded, prevents this from happening.... To break and crush it, God needs a large and powerful hammer, that is, the Law.<sup>640</sup>

A few pages later Luther adds:

To the question, 'If the Law does not justify, what is its purpose?' Paul therefore, replies: 'Although the Law does not justify, it is nevertheless extremely useful and necessary.... It has this value, that grace can have access to us. Therefore the Law is a minister and a preparation for grace.'<sup>641</sup>

Luther continues:

Therefore we do not abolish the Law; but we show its true function and use, namely, that it is a most useful servant impelling us to Christ.... When the Law drives you this way, so that you despair of everything that is your own and seek help and solace from Christ, then it is being used correctly; and so, through the Gospel, it serves the cause of justification.<sup>642</sup>

Luther's mention of the need to preach the Law occurs elsewhere as well. In his "Explanations to the Ninety Five Theses," he speaks about God's condemnation through the Law as a necessary prerequisite for later justification."<sup>643</sup> Also, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, right after his exposition on "For God so loved the world that he gave his

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<sup>639</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 130.

<sup>640</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:182, 310.

<sup>641</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:314.

<sup>642</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:315-316.

<sup>643</sup> Martin Luther, "Explanations to the Ninety Five Theses," AE 31:99-100.

only begotten son”, Luther goes on for several pages strictly admonishing his preachers on the need to risk unpopularity within their parishes and convict their listeners of their sins. If they fail to do this, he says, they invite God to punish them and hold them personally accountable for all the sins of the people whose actions they did not bother to preach against.<sup>644</sup>

Encouragement to perform good works shows up in many places throughout Luther’s writings; even in places where one would not expect to find it. For instance, in his lectures on Corinthians, Luther first advocates marriage because he says that the necessity of providing for a family forces the parents to have faith to trust that God will provide for them. However, being in a monastery where one’s economic needs are taken care of by the community and by donations of those outside eliminates the necessity of trusting in God, for provision. Luther then goes on further to advocate marriage on the basis that in addition to encouraging faith it also encourages those who partake in it to perform good works as well. He holds up monastic life in contrast as one that could allow for laziness.<sup>645</sup>

Whatever one thinks of Luther’s critiques of monasticism, still we see from this passage that for Luther, while faith is primary, clearly good works are also viewed as part of what is essential for a good Christian life. As opposed to what Sanders had stated in 1991,<sup>646</sup> Luther does not see faith in Christ as giving an excuse for release from the necessity of performing good works. This message is especially stressed in his 1520 tract *The Freedom of a Christian*. In this work, after starting by stressing the inability of works to gain eternal salvation for a human, Luther spends the better part of the tract’s second half by explaining the necessity of performing good works. In this section of the work Luther even states that there is what we today would call a sanctifying role to good works. Luther writes:

We must, however, realize that these works reduce the body to subjection and purify it of its evil lusts, and our whole purpose is to be directed only toward the driving out of lusts. Since by faith the soul is cleansed and made to love God, it desires that all things, and especially its own body, shall be purified so that all things may join with him in loving and praising God. Hence a man cannot be idle, for the need of his body drives him and he is compelled to do many good works to reduce it to subjection.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22:371-374.

<sup>645</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7*, AE 28:20.

<sup>646</sup> Sanders, *Paul*, 101.

<sup>647</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, AE 31:359.

Luther often speaks about faith being the necessary foundation that prepares us to perform good works. Thus one of the chief purposes of preaching salvation by grace through faith in Luther's thinking is in order to foster good works. Luther knows that when humans believe that the performance of good works is necessary in order to achieve salvation, then good works would be self-interested and would thus cease to be good. However, if salvation is received through other means such as faith, then our good works can become truly altruistic. In his essay on Luther's ethics William Lazareth writes: "With their salvation thus assured in the unmerited forgiveness of Christ, grateful Christians are free to redirect their reason and good works toward serving their neighbour's welfare."<sup>648</sup>In this sense there is even a sanctifying aspect to faith.

Faith sanctifies us and prepares us for good works for a second reason. When we understand that God is good enough to forgive sins this helps us trust in God and in his will. Then, those who trust in God will also be more likely to obey God. Luther speaks about this aspect of faith in several of his writings, *Freedom of a Christian* is one of these, where he writes:

It is a further function of faith that it honours him who it trusts with the most reverent and highest regard since it considers him truthful and trustworthy.... So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous.... The very highest worship of God is this that we ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to one who is trusted. When this is done, the soul consents to his will. Then it hallows his name and allows itself to be treated according to God's good pleasure for, clinging to God's promises, it does not doubt that he who is true, just, and wise will do, dispose and provide all things well. Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by this faith?<sup>649</sup>

Also, unlike the scholars of Schweitzer's day, Luther does not perceive there to be a large gulf between the concepts of salvation by faith and participation in the body of Christ. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther also speaks faith as functioning to accomplish what

Orthodox Lutheran theologians later called mystical union with Christ. Luther writes:

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the

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<sup>648</sup> William Lazareth, "Introduction to 'The Christian in Society,'" (Luther's Works, American Edition, Volume 44), xiii.

<sup>649</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, AE 31:350.

soul become one flesh [Eph. 5:31-32]. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage – indeed the most perfect of all marriages ... it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil.... Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins death and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers? ... Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption.<sup>650</sup>

Further opposition to laxity in morals can be found in Luther's allegorical interpretation of Deuteronomy. Allegorical translations of Scripture were common during the Middle Ages. Luther was sceptical about these, and he strongly advised caution in using allegory too freely, but he admitted that at times it could be a valid way to interpret certain Scriptural texts. In his allegorical interpretation of Deuteronomy<sup>12</sup>, Luther emphasizes that the Christian life does not give one license to freely embrace sin:

The blood to be poured upon the earth like water and not to be eaten with the flesh, whether in sacrifices or in other foods, means that in matters either of faith or of Christian liberty nothing is to be taught or followed which smacks of the old man, that is, of flesh and blood. For it is equally godless to take faithful consciences captive by fleshly doctrines of works and to want to be justified by works, or to make them so free that they do nothing at all and use liberty as an occasion to the flesh (Gal 5:13). He, therefore, does not eat the blood but pours it on the earth like water who is justified by faith, despises justifying works, and nevertheless condemns laziness and the license of the flesh. When we do this, it will be well with us, as Moses here says, and we do what pleases the Lord. For this is His good, pleasing, and perfect will (Rom. 12:2).<sup>651</sup>

Luther adds to this:

But to part the hoof is ... rightly to divide the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15), that is, so to teach that you apply Gospel and Law rightly, lift up, make alive, and set the conscience free through the Gospel and not suppress or burden it with the Law or works and sins. On the other hand, see to it that you do not free the flesh through the Gospel, but hold it down and mortify it through the Law and works, just as it is proper for the old man and the body of sin to be destroyed. To chew the cud, however, is to take up the Word with delight and meditate with supreme diligence, so

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<sup>650</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, AE 31:351.

<sup>651</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:126.

that (according to the proverb) one does not permit it to go into one ear and out the other, but holds it firmly in the heart, swallows it, and absorbs it into the intestines.<sup>652</sup>

The same theme occurs later in the work as well:

But the bringing of the tithes denotes that we are wholly given to the service of the neighbour through love, as Paul says (Gal 5:13): “Through love be servants of one another.” This, however, does not happen unless, being first justified by faith, you keep all the Commandments of God and are righteous. Furthermore, it must be done cheerfully, and not sadly or unwillingly; finally, without uncleanness, that is, you must not ask the same thing in return; but you must act with a simple and pure heart. Nor shall you spend anything on the dead; that is, no unfruitful work shall be done in love. Everything shall be alive, holy, free, joyous, and pleasing to God.<sup>653</sup>

Luther never attributed to the law the ability to justify, but in his work he consistently upheld a view that the law was important. For example, two of the hymns he wrote specifically focus on the Ten Commandments.<sup>654</sup> Luther’s *Small and Large Catechisms* also place a great deal of prominence on the Ten Commandments.

In the *Small Catechism* Luther even expands the commandments, increasing the requirements covered by each commandment. He also makes the commandment positive rather than negative. In his explanations to each commandment Luther comes up with a list not only of the evil acts that one must avoid, but of the good deeds that one must also do. This too has the effect of increasing the scope and breadth of the commandment.

There was an occurrence which gave Luther an opportunity to speak in a simple way of his own approach to the Ten Commandments. At one point Luther’s barber asked him for advice on how to pray. Luther’s response to this request forms the bulk of a book which Herbert Brokering has edited entitled *Luther’s Prayers*. In addition to other forms of prayer, Luther encourages his barber to meditate on the Ten Commandments with these words:

If I have time and strength before the Lord’s Prayer, I meditate on the Ten Commandments in a similar manner. Thus I take one after another, so that as far as possible I may be altogether free to pray each one, and I make a four-strand wreath of every Commandment. Accordingly I consider each Commandment as follows, or in similar thoughts and words: (1) As a precept, which it is in itself, and I take to heart

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<sup>652</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:136.

<sup>653</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:255.

<sup>654</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Antinomians,” AE 47:109 note 6; Eriksson, “Luther and the Third Use of the Law,” 5.

what our Lord so earnestly requires of me; (2) I make of it an occasion for thanksgiving; (3) A confession; (4) A prayer.<sup>655</sup>

This introduction is then followed with prayers in the manner described above. And there are ten prayers, one for each commandment, for the earnest ability to obey the commandment more fully.<sup>656</sup>

#### **7.4 DISCIPLINE WHILE ON EARTH FOR SIN**

The Enlightenment, of course, was an intellectual movement that arose roughly one hundred and fifty years after Luther. Yet the Enlightenment had a profound effect on Luther scholarship. Scholars from that era frequently took Enlightenment values and ideals from two centuries after Luther's lifetime and, in anachronistic fashion, imposed them back onto the Reformer.<sup>657</sup> As a result, even today some portrayals of Luther make him out to somewhat resemble an Enlightenment philosopher, someone who teaches that God does not intervene in the affairs of this life, neither rewarding good works nor punishing human sin. According to this Enlightenment version of Luther, Luther teaches that God is largely inactive in this world, perhaps at best sympathizing with us in our suffering, but not much more.<sup>658</sup>

Instead one sees that there are many places throughout Luther's writings where this Enlightenment-influenced portrayal is directly challenged. Luther has a strong belief in the efficacy of prayer. In addition, although Luther can at times speak about God allowing his faithful servants to go through hardship, many times as well, Luther speaks about God being very active with his interventions into regular human affairs. What this means is that in Luther's view we often see God rewarding human good deeds in this life<sup>659</sup> but at the same time we occasionally see God punishing human sin in this life.

Luther is very clear to state that because of the gospel, those who repent can enter heaven without fear of divine punishment. Yet in several places in his writings Luther raises

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<sup>655</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Prayers*, (ed. Herbert Brokering; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1967), 42.

<sup>656</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Prayers*, 43-58.

<sup>657</sup> Jenson, "Response" to 'Why is Luther so Fascinating: Modern Finnish Luther Research,'" in *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, (eds.: Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21.

<sup>658</sup> Forde, Gerhard, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), vii-ix.

<sup>659</sup> Martin Luther, "Against the Sabbatarians," AE 47:95.

the possibility of divine discipline *in this life* for sins that have been committed.<sup>660</sup> He makes several mentions of this possibility in his “Against the Sabbatarians,”<sup>661</sup> as well as his *Sermons on the Gospel of John*.<sup>662</sup> As well, at the end of his *Small Catechism*’s section on the Ten Commandments, Luther speaks about God’s blessings for those who obey the commandments. Luther also warns about God’s judgments upon those who break these commandments.<sup>663</sup> While not necessarily pleasant to think about, one has to acknowledge that the threat of God’s earthly wrath towards those who break his laws serves as an incentive for Christians to keep the laws and do good works.

Luther’s writings elsewhere maintain the same theme.<sup>664</sup> In his lectures on Deuteronomy Luther states:

Moses strikes at and anticipates that hidden perverseness of the heart by which many, when they hear the threats and curses of God, console themselves inwardly and say: ‘it won’t be so bad!’ And so they continue smugly in their godlessness. Especially the works-righteous and the idolatrous people do this, for they are deceived by the beautiful appearance of godliness and do not think that the threats of the law apply to them, as is seen in all the prophets. Just as true godliness naturally brings with it fear of God, so godlessness and hypocrisy produce smugness. Against the smugness of the wicked, therefore, Moses inveighs most bitterly down to the end of the chapter, just as all the prophets do; and he foretells that curses and devastations threaten these people especially, so that they, overturned like Sodom and Gomorrah, will be talked about and hissed by the whole world.<sup>665</sup>

In his “Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses, Luther speaks about several ways in which God punishes people for sinning. One of the ways that he discusses is divine punishment visited upon people during their earthly lives.<sup>666</sup> As an example of this, Luther discussed the possibility of war with Turkey. In Luther’s day the Turkish Ottoman Empire was the sole superpower in Europe. Germany and Austria faced a very real threat from Turkish invasion. Vienna was eventually besieged twice. Since the Ottoman Empire had on occasion also practiced forced conversion to Islam, many Europeans were also fearful of the religious

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<sup>660</sup> Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 42.

<sup>661</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Sabbatarians,” AE 47:74.

<sup>662</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:83-86, 137, 168.

<sup>663</sup> Small Catechism, in Theodore Tappert, ed. and trans. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 344.

<sup>664</sup> Martin Luther, “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15,” AE 28:130; Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22:83-84.

<sup>665</sup> Luther’s Works, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:272-273.

<sup>666</sup> Martin Luther, “Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses,” AE 31:90-92.



aspects of a potential invasion. Luther, however, saw this Turkish military threat not in terms of its military or political aspects. Rather, he saw it as a manifestation of divine discipline. His advice to the European powers was to therefore not waste their energies coming up with military or political schemes for the defense of Europe, but to instead repent of their sins that had caused God to bring about the Turkish threat in the first place.<sup>667</sup>

Luther's Corinthians lectures also contain the theme of earthly judgment against those who are slack in doing good works and who do not respect the Scriptures and good doctrine. Luther writes:

Therefore we should beware of such loose talk and guard against mocking God and His Word thus. For God has a way of punishing such people visibly before they expect it, and He does this as a warning to others. Numerous examples have been observed, which cannot be enumerated here, showing that God strikes about Him fiercely against these mockers who consider it a great delight to speak so scornfully and derisively about the Gospel. These examples should not be forgotten and ignored so lightly. To be sure, God does not always punish in that way. If He did, but few people would survive on earth. But as a frightening example to others, He occasionally indicates how displeased He is with this and what He will do when He thinks the right time has come. But then they will have tarried too long.... And He will surely strike them before they are aware of it, if they do not desist in time. How much misery we hear of daily! There are all sorts of terrible misfortunes: fire, water, murder and sudden death! Even though many are not going their way unconcerned, do you not suppose that God may be postponing His punishment until a time when they have long forgotten the sin? Then they regard themselves as pious, lament and cry as though they did not deserve this. For God does not let punishment follow immediately on the heels of sin but lets people go on long enough and restrains Himself to see if they will reform. However, in the end and when least expected He comes with real terror. The speed of the punishment is in proportion to the body; He is quick to punish an individual or a small group, but He tarries long with a country or a city, waiting till it is ripe for punishment. In the end, however, no one goes unpunished.<sup>668</sup>

Although Luther speaks about the possibility of real divine discipline in this life, Luther also sometimes speaks only of the threat of divine discipline. Luther states that at times this is a necessary action by God as he did with the people of Nineveh in the book of Jonah. God sometimes uses a threat to drive to repentance someone that he wishes to justify, so that God can later bestow grace upon that person. In this regard, Luther states: "In short, God works a

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<sup>667</sup> Martin Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses," AE 31:91-92.

<sup>668</sup> Martin Luther, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15," AE 28:159.

strange work in order that he may work his own work.”<sup>669</sup>

## 7.5 MORTAL SIN: LOSING SALVATION

In addition to encouraging people to perform good works and to talking about the possibility of God’s earthly judgments for those who do not, Luther also mentioned the possibility of eternal judgment for those who do not repent from certain sins. Later Lutheran Orthodox theologians also had the same belief.<sup>670</sup> There are several statements within the *Book of Concord*, as well as in Luther’s other writings, which stress that one can commit mortal sin. Mortal sins are those which, unrepented from, can cause the loss of salvation.<sup>671</sup> In his “Smalcald Articles,” Luther states:

It is therefore necessary to know and to teach that when holy people, aside from the fact that they still possess and feel original sin and daily repent and strive against it, fall into open sin (as David fell into adultery, murder and blasphemy), faith and the Holy Spirit have departed from them.<sup>672</sup>

Similar themes show up in his writings on Galatians.<sup>673</sup> In his Deuteronomy lectures, Luther also mentions that not just personal sins, but wilful attempts to lead people into sects, false doctrines or heretical beliefs would constitute a mortal sin.<sup>674</sup>

Luther does, however, as always, hold out the possibility of restorative repentance. In his Galatians writings he says: “Those who sin because of weakness, even if they do it often, will not be denied forgiveness, provided that they rise again and do not persist in their sins; for persistence of sin is worst of all.”<sup>675</sup>

## 7.6 THREE USES OF THE LAW

James Dunn thinks that traditional Protestants have misread Paul and brought about an excessively negative view on the law. In response Dunn protests: “Paul’s protest was not

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<sup>669</sup> Martin Luther, “Explanations to the Ninety Five Theses,” AE 31:99.

<sup>670</sup> Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 459, 482.

<sup>671</sup> Eriksson, “Luther and the Third Use of the Law,” 10.

<sup>672</sup> Smalcald Articles, in Theodore Tappert, trans. and ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 310.

<sup>673</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 27:81.

<sup>674</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:197-199

<sup>675</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 27:80.

against a high regard for righteousness, against dedicated devotion to God's law."<sup>676</sup>

However, the understanding of the law by the central figures in the Reformation was not as negative as it has sometimes been portrayed to be by modern Protestant scholars.

Protestants have traditionally discussed the idea of obedience to Christ after conversion in terms of three uses of the law.<sup>677</sup> In his *Loci Theologici*, Philip Melancthon was the first person to come up with this idea of three uses of the law for Christians.<sup>678</sup> According to Melancthon's understanding, the first use of the law is its use by the state to create and promote civil order. The law's second use involves the manner in which the law is used to cause a Christian to reflect upon his own sinfulness and disobedience and thus to drive him to repentance and to the mercies of Christ. The third use of the law is its use as a guide for the life of the re-born believer.<sup>679</sup>

It is important to realize that this threefold formula is Melancthon's construction and not Luther's.<sup>680</sup> Calvin later adopted it from Melancthon. Nonetheless, Luther's lectures on 1 Timothy demonstrate that in essence Luther does subscribe to Melancthon's formula of three uses of the law although he does this in a slightly different fashion than Melancthon. Luther combines the first and the third uses of the law into a single use, which he calls the use of the law as a restraint against sinful behaviour.

Luther does not seem to think it important to differentiate whether the law is used as a restraint due to the force of the state or whether the law functions as a restraint because of the force of one's personal conscience. In both cases the law functions as a restraint and thus in that way becomes a guide to our own personal behaviour.<sup>681</sup> Luther also says that the person who lives apart from the law lives apart from faith:

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<sup>676</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, 142.

<sup>677</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 8.

<sup>678</sup> Fagerberg, Holsten, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions* (trans. G Lund; St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 65.

<sup>679</sup> Gerhard Forde, "The Christian Life," in *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume 2, (eds. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 415.

<sup>680</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 9.

<sup>681</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," AE 28:231, 235. In this passage Luther himself spells out a third use of the law, but this is a use which he does not recommend or support. According to Luther the third use of the law is the attempt to earn one's own way into heaven through one's own achievement of righteous acts, supposedly accomplishing righteousness by oneself. And this false third-sense of the law Luther, of course, sees as absurd and wrong-headed.

Paul speaks thus about Antichrist as one who acts as if he were outside of Law and obeys no law. The *disobedient* is not subject to the Law, obeying neither God nor man. Another may explain it in another way: whoever lives a willful life, obeys no one willingly, whether they be public magistrates or others whom he owes obedience. Those are the general ideas. The Greeks call such a person “lawless,” one who does absolutely anything he pleases contrary to God’s law. The *ungodly* operate against both God and man. These are the two who do not believe; they hold in contempt faith, the Word, and everything else.<sup>682</sup>

If the third use of the law is defined as being a guide to the life of the reborn Christian, then in Luther’s writings there is no place where he presents this view stronger than in his catechetical writings on the Ten Commandments. Here, it is clear that Luther intends Christians to obey the Commandments, not just to reflect on the Commandments ability to reveal sin. Luther finishes his section on the Ten Commandments in the “Small Catechism” with the words:

God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear his wrath and not disobey these commandments. However, God promises grace and every good thing to all those who keep these commandments. Therefore we are to love and trust him and gladly act according to his commands.<sup>683</sup>

There are other places in Luther’s writings where the substance of a third use of the law is found, hence we can conclude then that Luther’s third use of the law is evident in his writings in at least two ways. First he sees the law as a restraint from sinful behavior. Second he teaches that a Christian is supposed to engage proactively in loving actions towards God and neighbor. In the latter sense we see how in Luther’s understanding the law acts as a guide to one’s life and a positive motivation to act righteously. Luther writes: “Were a Carthusian monk to wear a hair shirt for a hundred years, he would not realize his aim, he would not know how to please God. But if anyone believes in Christ and loves his brother, he is certain that he is pleasing God.”<sup>684</sup> Again Luther writes: “What is the aim of our charge? Love. This is the full thunderclap against a human doctrine that cannot reflect love from a pure heart.”<sup>685</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures on 1 Timothy,” AE 28:237.

<sup>683</sup> Small Catechism, in Theodore Tappert, ed. and trans. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 344.

<sup>684</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures on 1 Timothy,” AE 28:225.

<sup>685</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures on 1 Timothy,” AE 28: 225.

One then can see that Althaus is correct in stating that Luther in effect does support a third use of the law in the modern understanding of it.<sup>686</sup> Althaus writes:

Luther does not use the expression “the third function of the law *tertius usus legis*... In substance, however, it also occurs in Luther. As we have seen, Luther does not consider the form which God’s law assumes over against the sinner to be the first and therefore not the only possible form and meaning of the law. Since he knows of a law of God before man’s fall into sin, why should he not also recognize it in the life of a Christian—not only in its theological function and thus not only intended to lead the old man to know his sin and cleanse him of it, but also in its function of training the Christian in good works.<sup>687</sup>

Althaus is not alone in this opinion. Despite the possible absence of a clear formulation of the *triplex usus legis* in Luther’s writings, a great number of scholars say that there is definite *triplex usus legis* material in much of Luther’s work. Fagerberg is among these.<sup>688</sup> He writes: “Joest ... has concluded that a number of ‘*tertius usus legis* passages’ can be found in the Luther material even though the term itself was never used.”<sup>689</sup> Fagerberg also claims that with respect to the law’s role as a norm and guide to Christian living, the Reformers, writing in the Lutheran Confessions, use other terms besides law. They usually instead use precept and command.<sup>690</sup> But in any case, law, precept, or command, the notion of ethical claims for the lives of Christians are present in Luther’s writings and in the foundational doctrinal statements of Lutheran Churches worldwide.

## 7.7 LUTHER AND THE ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY

We have seen that Luther has a firm role for the law in the life of a Christian. However, those who claim that Luther minimized the need for Christian ethical behaviour follow in a long tradition. Even in Luther’s own lifetime, a number of those involved in the Reformation movement took some earlier writings by Luther concerning grace and interpreted them to mean that the law has no role in the life of the Christian. One such instance of this taking place has been given the title, “the Antinomian Controversy.” In particular, in the years

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<sup>686</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 273.

<sup>687</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 273.

<sup>688</sup> Eriksson, “Luther and the Third Use of the Law,” 15.

<sup>689</sup> Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, 84.

<sup>690</sup> Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, 80-81.

1537-1540, this controversy surfaced within reformation circles. One of Luther's younger colleagues, John Agricola, was at the centre of this controversy surrounding the law.<sup>691</sup>

John Agricola, a friend and colleague of Luther, and a professor in Wittenberg, had published some articles expressing that Luther and Melanchthon were in error with respect to their views on several points of the law. Agricola agreed with Luther when Luther said that true repentance should arise from the perception of God's goodness in the gospel. However, he disagreed with Luther's insistence that the function of the law is to convict someone of sin. Agricola, in fact, came to equate the preaching of the law as unevangelical, reactionary, and incompatible with the gospel. He claimed that the law had nothing at all to do with the sinner's justification even in the initial repentance stages.<sup>692</sup>

In reply to this, Luther, as Dean of the theological faculty, had these writings of Agricola's confiscated and in turn preached some sermons warning about the dangers of the moral laxity found in this "antinomianist" perspective. Later Luther ordered that the anonymous articles that had been circulating in Wittenberg with a similar "antinomianist" perspective be published, so that he could have a public disputation between himself and Agricola concerning their contents. Agricola failed to show up at the first disputation. He came to the second but again avoided the third. The disputations all went ahead regardless of his presence in December 1537 and in 1538. The text of these dissertations still exists but unfortunately, as of recently, there was no English version of them yet translated.

In the first two disputations Luther claims that there are two components to repentance; one component is awakened by the law and the other by the gospel.<sup>693</sup> Repentance first involves sorrow for sin, which is aroused through hearing the law. And secondly repentance involves the intention of leading a better life. This intention of doing better cannot be awakened by the law but only by the gospel.<sup>694</sup>

In all three disputations Luther is reported to have held to the basic theme that it is necessary to humble the sinner through the preaching of the law before great redemption accomplished in Christ can be realized.<sup>695</sup> Luther later wrote a letter which is the treatise that

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<sup>691</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 16.

<sup>692</sup> Mackinnon, James. *Luther and the Reformation*. Vol.4 (London: Longmans Green and Co. 1930), 164.

<sup>693</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 17.

<sup>694</sup> Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 167.

<sup>695</sup> Martin Luther, "Against the Antinomians," AE 47:104.

we call “Against the Antinomians.” In this letter Luther further clarifies his position. Making a reference to Agricola’s statement, “To the gallows, therefore, with Moses,” and other comments to the effect that the Decalogue’s proper place was in the municipality and not in the pulpit,<sup>696</sup> Luther speaks out against “the new spirits who have dared to expel the law of God and the Ten Commandments from the church and to assign them to city hall.”<sup>697</sup>

Luther also attempts to refute charges that he himself had previously maintained that there is no place for the law in the life of a Christian.<sup>698</sup> Luther does this by drawing attention to the place of prominence that the Ten Commandments have in his catechetical writings.

Luther writes:

It is most surprising to me that anyone can claim that I reject the law of the Ten Commandments, since there is available, in more than one edition, my expositions of the Ten Commandments, which furthermore are daily preached and practised in our churches.<sup>699</sup>

Luther then goes on to say that “I myself ... recite the commandments daily word for word like a child.”<sup>700</sup>

With regards to the issue of whether or not the law should be preached in order to bring the hearers to repentance, Luther appeals to the structure of Romans where in the first few chapters Paul draws attention to the wrath of God. And only after focusing on God’s wrath does Paul talk about grace. He says: “then, after they have become sinners, he teaches them how to obtain mercy and be justified.”<sup>701</sup>

Luther also addresses the subject of how the law should be preached in sermons. He tells Dr. Guttel, the pastor in Eisleben, to

[p]reach that sinners must be roused to repentance not only by the sweet grace and suffering of Christ... but also by the terrors of the law. For they are wrong in maintaining that one must follow only one method of preaching repentance, namely, to point to Christ’s suffering on our behalf.<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 165.

<sup>697</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Antinomians,” AE 47:107.

<sup>698</sup> Eriksson, “Luther and the Third Use of the Law,” 18.

<sup>699</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Antinomians,” AE 47:109.

<sup>700</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Antinomians,” AE 47:109.

<sup>701</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Antinomians,” AE 47:114.

<sup>702</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Antinomians,” AE 47:111-112.

Luther's concerns about the antinomian position also appear in his commentary on John,<sup>703</sup> and his *Table Talk*.<sup>704</sup> Given Agricola's doctrinal stances and his reluctance to appear at the disputations, Luther eventually had him removed from the Wittenberg faculty. During the third disputation, Luther is reported to have said:

True it is that at the early stage of this movement we began strenuously to teach the gospel and make use of these words which the Antinomians now quote. But the circumstances of that time were very different from those of the present day. Then the world was terrorized enough when the pope or the visage of a single priest shook the whole of Olympus, not to mention earth and hell.... To the consciences of men so oppressed, terrified, miserable, anxious, and afflicted, there was no need to inculcate the law. The claimant need then was to present the other part of the teaching of Christ in which he commands us to preach the remission of sin in his name so that those who were already sufficiently terrified might not learn to despair, but to take refuge in the grace and mercy offered in Christ. Now, however, when the times are very dissimilar from those under the pope, our Antinomians – those suave theologians – retain our words, our doctrine, the joyful tidings concerning Christ, and wish to preach this alone, not observing that men are other than they were under that hangman, the pope, and have become secure, forward, wicked violators – yea, Epicureans who neither fear God nor men. Such men they confirm and comfort by their doctrine. In those days we were so terrorized so that we trembled even at the fall of a leaf.... But now our softly singing Antinomians, paying no attention to the change of the times, make men so secure who are of themselves already so secure that they fall away from grace.<sup>705</sup>

As is obvious in the quote above, for Luther, mortal sin is a possibility. It is possible to lose one's salvation because of a deliberate and unrepentant sin carried out as a matter of personal policy.<sup>706</sup> If we can use Sanders' terms, what this means then is that Luther too has an understanding of "getting in" and "staying in." With Luther, one "gets into" God's covenant by grace through baptism. Once one has entered the covenant, one persists and remains in the covenant also, by God's grace. This grace is accessed whenever one is willing to repent. Elsewhere Luther describes repentance as the renewal of the covenant that God makes with a person in baptism.<sup>707</sup> However, mortal sin is a possibility and one runs the risk of stumbling into this and falling from grace when decides that repentance is not essential. If one wishes to use Sanders' terms, this would be Luther's "pattern of religion." It too is a covenantal

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<sup>703</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22:139, 146 fn, 390 fn.

<sup>704</sup> Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, AE 54:233.

<sup>705</sup> Martin Luther, "Against the Antinomians," AE 47:104-105.

<sup>706</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 19.

<sup>707</sup> Martin Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," AE 35:34.



pattern. However, unlike medieval Catholicism and unlike Sanders' "covenantal nomism," one does not "stay in" God's covenant through the performance of good works. Good works are necessary, but they do not save or allow one to remain saved. Instead, throwing one's sins upon the merits of Jesus, as offered through the cross, does.

## 7.8 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter we have looked at various New Perspective misunderstandings of Luther's position. Luther did know that Paul was critiquing Judaism's ethnic exclusiveness. He just did not think that this was Paul's central critique of Judaism. Luther also had a good grasp of medieval and patristic ideas and biblical interpretations.

The bulk of the Chapter also responded to the frequent New Perspective claim that Luther misunderstood Paul's insistence upon high ethical standards. Since Protestantism originates with Luther, New Perspective scholars have at times faulted Luther for being the source of a lax approach to ethics found within some modern Protestant thought. Even a cursory reading of Luther, however, reveals that Luther can in no way be seen to be an antinomian. Within his writings one sees a strong role for Christian ethics and the law. Westerholm agrees, arguing that Luther wants God's law kept when it comes to a guide for moral conduct. Luther just does not see the law playing a role in saving a Christian's soul.<sup>708</sup>

As well, the need for repentance and Christian obedience was not a feature of an isolated period in Luther's career but it remained throughout his life. Luther's "Ninety-Five Theses," and *The Freedom of a Christian* were written near the beginning of his career. The tract, *Against the Antinomians*, was written near the end of his life.

Luther's thoughts can be summed up neatly by the following: "Nothing that we do or are able to do contributes toward our obtaining grace and resurrection; although we do and must do good works."<sup>709</sup> The attempt to link Luther with antinomianism is a simple misunderstanding of his position.

In the following chapter we examine some further misunderstandings of Luther's approaches. We will see how, in formulating his chief argument against Old Perspective,

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<sup>708</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, the Lutheran Paul and His Critics*, 409.

<sup>709</sup> Martin Luther, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15," AE 28:114.

James Dunn has misunderstood Luther's central critique of Catholicism. As a consequence, Dunn's analysis of and understanding of the Reformation interpretation of Paul is flawed.

## CHAPTER 8

# LUTHER, DUNN, JUDAISM AND MEDIEVAL CATHOLICISM

One of Dunn's central arguments against the "Old Perspective" involves a comparison between Medieval Catholicism and Judaism. In this argument Dunn makes assumptions about Luther's reactions to both medieval Catholicism and Judaism. Since Dunn brings these two faiths, and Luther's understandings of them, into the discussion surrounding the New Perspective, it is necessary to examine Luther's response to Judaism and Medieval Catholicism as well.

As mentioned previously, Dunn claims that Protestants used to think that Paul was to Judaism what Luther was to Medieval Catholicism. Both men, Protestants thought, were advocating grace-based faiths in opposition to legalistic religious systems. However, thanks to E.P. Sanders and others, we now know that "covenantal nomist" Judaism was much more grace-based than we had realized. Since this is the case, we can no longer equate Paul with Luther. Luther, then in essence, has misunderstood Paul. Let us hear from Dunn again:

The second assumption Luther made was that the Judaism of Paul's time was just like the mediaeval Catholicism of Luther's day, at least so far as the teaching of God's justice and justification were concerned. The second assumption was natural, given the first. If Paul had made the same discovery of faith as Luther, then he must also have been reacting against the same misunderstanding as Luther.<sup>710</sup>

There are several problems in the statement that Dunn makes above. To begin with, Dunn does not provide sources from Luther's own writings to demonstrate that Luther actually believed the things that Dunn says he did. In addition, in this statement Dunn assumes that the "patterns of religion" of Judaism and Medieval Catholicism (as Sanders would call them), are essentially different from each other. "Getting in," and "staying in," in the two faiths are different, as Judaism is more grace-based than Medieval Catholicism, he thinks.<sup>711</sup> Dunn also believes that Luther has misunderstood Judaism. Dunn has thrown down the

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<sup>710</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God, A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 14; Eriksson, "Modern Interpretations of Luther," 24.

<sup>711</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 28.

gauntlet. Is this truly the case? In evaluating Dunn's argument we will begin by examining Luther's response to Medieval Catholicism.

## **8.1 LATE MEDIEVAL NOMINALISM – THE THEOLOGY AGAINST WHICH LUTHER REACTED**

Heiko Oberman has studied the school of thought that Luther was chiefly reacting against, late Medieval Catholic nominalism. In his books *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents*, and *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, Oberman explains that Gabriel Biel was the dominant theologian against which Luther reacted. Although Luther respected Biel, he disagreed with his theology.

Both medieval and modern Catholics, Oberman demonstrates, believe that one enters God's covenant not through works but by grace. This entrance takes place in the sacrament of baptism.<sup>712</sup> Christians who believe that baptism is a sacrament do not regard baptism as a human work, but an act of God and a means of God's grace.<sup>713</sup> The grace-filled nature of baptism is especially illustrated by the fact that normally baptism happens during infancy. This is the case for Catholics today as it was in the medieval period.<sup>714</sup> Infants cannot earn or achieve their own baptism. As mentioned previously, Luther had no quarrel with the Medieval Catholics over their understanding of baptism. Even as a Catholic, Luther had believed that one entered God's covenant through grace.<sup>715</sup> Luther's chief complaint against the church of his time did not center around "getting in" but what came after baptism, namely "staying in."

Oberman points out that medieval Catholics had a set of terms to describe the process of initial covenant entry and later maintenance of one's place within the covenant. These

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<sup>712</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph, ed. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church. English Translation for use in Canada* (Ottawa: Publications Service, Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, 1994), 265-266, 269.

<sup>713</sup> Ratzinger, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 274.

<sup>714</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology, Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 194-195.

<sup>715</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 25.

were called first and second justification.<sup>716</sup> First and second justification are roughly equivalent to Sanders' understandings of "getting in" and "staying in."

In Medieval Catholic thinking each person had to be justified twice. The first time was through baptism. Medieval Catholics also believed in an age of innocence. If a baptized child died before their age of innocence had expired, then they were fortunate enough to be saved through the merits of Jesus Christ alone.<sup>717</sup> However, one's innocence expired at age seven.<sup>718</sup> For those who lived beyond this time the matter of "staying in" became important. These individuals had to undergo second justification, the ongoing renewal and maintenance of one's status within the community of salvation. Second justification took place through good works, through a Christian's effort to live according to the Church's moral and ceremonial laws and also through the avoidance of mortal sin.<sup>719</sup> Medieval Catholic thinkers believed that God's grace helped Christians achieve these necessary good works, but theologians argued amongst themselves as to how much God actually helped and how much the human was solely responsible for performing the good works.<sup>720</sup>

## 8.2 MEDIEVAL CATHOLICISM: COVENANTAL NOMISM?

Earlier (see Chapter 5.1) we pointed out that Sanders claims that Judaism is covenantal nomist, one enters the covenant through grace but stays in through works. Again Sanders defines covenantal nomism as follows:

There does appear to be in Rabbinic Judaism a coherent and all-pervasive view of what constitutes the essence of Jewish religion and of how that religion 'works'.... The all-pervasive view can be summarized in the phrase 'covenantal nomism.' 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.<sup>721</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology, Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 134-135; Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 67.

<sup>717</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 26.

<sup>718</sup> Lueker, Erwin, ed., "Age, Canonical" in *Lutheran Cyclopaedia, Revised Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 14.

<sup>719</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 134-135.

<sup>720</sup> Eriksson, "Luther and the Third Use of the Law," 26.

<sup>721</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75.

However, we have just seen that medieval Catholicism in this regard is quite similar. Medieval Catholics believed that one “got into” the Christian covenant through grace but “stayed in” the covenant and eventually achieved salvation through works. As opposed to having dissimilar “patterns of religion,” as Dunn thinks, the two faiths arguably are more similar than Dunn realizes. One can say that both are covenantal nomist.<sup>722</sup> Both Medieval Catholics and first-century Jews thought that one entered their respective covenants through grace; the Jews by birth and the Catholics by infant baptism.<sup>723</sup> Neither birth nor infant baptism requires work on the part of those entering the covenant.

When it came to “staying in,” Medieval Catholics believed that one achieved this by good works; avoiding sin and doing good deeds. Catholics also had rituals that needed to be followed, such as eating fish on Fridays and fasting in some fashion during Lent.<sup>724</sup> As discussed earlier, the Jews also believed that “staying in” took place through the performance of good works; following the Torah of Moses, in both its ethical and ritual aspects.

The notion of atonement for sin operated with a somewhat similar structure as well in both faiths. Medieval Catholics undertook to perform certain activities that effectively worked to atone for their various sins. These included penances, and the viewing of holy relics and indulgences. In the Jewish religion, the sacrificial system performed the same function.

In both faiths, the actions that would atone for sin usually incurred a financial cost on those seeking atonement.<sup>725</sup> It cost money to purchase an indulgence. Viewing holy relics often also cost money. For Jews, the animals required for sacrifice either had to be bought, or they came from one’s own herd.

Both faiths used priests as intermediaries in order to perform the sacrifice or prescribe the penance. Israelite priests were involved in the sacrifice of animals and Catholic priests prescribed penances or were employed to sell indulgences which had been ultimately granted by the Pope. In both faiths as well, the human was usually responsible for initiating the process of atonement by approaching the priest and requesting that the necessary penances be

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<sup>722</sup> Eriksson, “Martin Luther and the New Perspective on St. Paul,” 75.

<sup>723</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 67-68.

<sup>724</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 68.

<sup>725</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 69.

applied, indulgences be purchased or animals be sacrificed. Again, given Sanders' definition, both faiths appear to be covenantal nomist. Given the overall similarities of the "patterns of religion" of first-century Judaism (as depicted by Sanders) and Medieval Catholicism, it is easy to see why Luther and the other Reformers saw similarities between the two faiths.

Furthermore, the Reformers were not the first people to identify connections between Medieval Catholicism and Judaism; Medieval Catholics themselves saw the similarities.<sup>726</sup> As Oberman points out below, Medieval Catholic scholars claimed that both their faith and the Jewish one are chiefly based around the law:

Bartholomaeus von Usingen, disciple of Biel, teacher of Luther, and one of the first pamphleteers against early Lutheranism, is a good Gabrielist when he insists that Christ has redeemed the faithful from the servitude of sin and the power of the devil, but not from the Law. Though Christ abrogated the judicial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, he has given his Holy Spirit to the Church to establish new ceremonial and judicial laws, and he has retained the moral law. Christ has fulfilled and perfected the law of Moses in order that He be imitated. The New Law is *Lex imitationis*, necessary for salvation. This survey of the material before us brings us to the conclusion that *whether Old or New, both Testaments fall in the same category: Lex*. With the medieval tradition Biel asserts that due to interiorization, origin, and effect, the two Laws differ. The Law of Christ remains the narrow gate that has to be passed through on the road to the fulfilment of the promises of the Gospel. Though the quantitative difference between the laws is clearly acknowledged, both their dispensers fall in the category of *Legislator*.<sup>727</sup>

In other places, Oberman demonstrates that the medieval theologians Duns Scotus and Gabriel Biel frequently linked and contrasted their religious systems with that of Judaism. Both theologians claimed that the two religions are structured similarly. It is only the case that in their opinion, Christianity is better. Christianity, they thought, has more helpful saints, a superior set of laws to follow, and better doctrine.<sup>728</sup> Oberman writes:

In a more elaborate description he [Biel] points to the fact that in two respects the imperfection of the righteousness of the law of Moses can be established. On the one hand it proved to lead not to the glory of God but to that of the Scribes and Pharisees. On the other hand – and more importantly – Moses' law required exterior acts and ceremonies, whereas Christ calls for interior acts which are not forced but voluntary.... [T]he righteousness of Christians has to be more ample and sincere and, therefore, more perfect than the righteousness of the Jews. This imperfection of the

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<sup>726</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 69.

<sup>727</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology, Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 118-119.

<sup>728</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology, Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 114.

Old Law – and, we add, by no means the imperfection of the law as such – is intended by St. Paul when he writes in his letter to the Galatians: ‘by works of the law shall no one be justified’ [2:16]. In short, the Law of Christ is the fulfilment of the Law of Moses inasmuch as it implies the interiorization of righteousness. The righteousness of the New Law is in the full sense of the word legal righteousness.<sup>729</sup>

Surrounded by these kinds of viewpoints, one can only expect that Luther would follow the lead of other medieval theologians and also compare Medieval Catholicism with Judaism.

In conclusion, given Sanders’ definition of covenantal nomism as a religion where one enters through grace and stays in through works, it is easy to argue that late Medieval Catholicism is also a covenantal nomist faith. In both faiths, Judaism and Medieval Catholicism, one “got into” the community of salvation by grace but one “stayed in” through works. With both faiths, as well, various means of atonement were provided. With both faiths these were initiated by the one seeking atonement, they were performed via the priesthood who acted as intermediaries, and they also often incurred a financial cost upon those seeking to have their sin absolved.

All of this throws Dunn’s fourfold comparison into doubt. As opposed to showing that Judaism has a dissimilar “pattern of religion” to Medieval Catholicism, Sanders may have inadvertently demonstrated just how similar, in this respect, the two faiths actually are.

### **8.3 THE PROBLEM FOR DUNN’S ARGUMENT**

As demonstrated earlier, Dunn has built a large part of his argument on the premise that Luther saw his conversion experience as stemming from a similar motive to that of Paul’s. Dunn claims that Luther thought that both he and Paul were reacting against legalistic faiths. Dunn further claims that Sanders’ discovery of Jewish covenantal nomism means that Medieval Catholicism and first-century Judaism were not as similar to each other as most modern day Protestants had assumed. Sanders’ discovery, in Dunn’s mind, then overturns the Reformation approach to Paul, and launches the New Perspective.

However, Bruce Corley has shown that, as far as we can tell, Luther never did compare his conversion to Paul’s. Moreover, even if Luther had done so, we have just demonstrated that Judaism and late Medieval Catholicism were both covenantal nomist and

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<sup>729</sup> Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology, Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 112-113.



have “patterns of religion” that are closer to each other than Dunn has realized.<sup>730</sup> This means that Dunn’s central argument collapses.<sup>731</sup>

It is also important, however, to point out that Dunn has made yet another mistake when evaluating Luther’s thought. Dunn thinks that Luther rediscovered that we “get into” God’s covenant through grace. Actually, it was at the “staying in” phase of the covenant where Luther discovered that God’s grace really applied.<sup>732</sup> Dunn appears to assume that Luther views baptism with the eyes of a non-sacramental theologian influenced by Enlightenment thinking, seeing baptism as a symbol and nothing more.

However, denominations that believe that there are such things as sacraments see baptism as the entry point to the Christian covenant, “getting in.”<sup>733</sup> Both Luther and the Medieval Catholics fall into this camp themselves. Luther speaks in this regard about the importance of baptism in his later lectures on Galatians:

In Baptism there is the promise of salvation (Mark 16:16): ‘He who believes, etc.’ If anyone denies here, as the fanatical spirits do today, that righteousness and salvation are granted to an infant as soon as he is baptized; if anyone evades this promise in this way by saying that it becomes valid when a man reaches the use of reason and is able to do good works and to obtain what is set forth in the promise by doing good works; if anyone says that Baptism is not a sign of the will of God towards us but only a mark that distinguishes believers from unbelievers – such a person utterly deprives Baptism of salvation and attributes salvation to works.<sup>734</sup>

It appears, as well, that Dunn is unaware of the ideas of first and second justification present in Medieval Catholicism. If so, then Dunn likely misunderstands Luther’s critique of Medieval Catholicism as well. This means, in addition, that Dunn would have an incomplete grasp of Luther’s interpretation of Paul.<sup>735</sup> This is demonstrated in the following quote (emphasis added):

What Luther realized is of tremendous importance – that God’s acceptance is the *beginning* of spiritual striving, not its *goal*.... Christianity starts with the sinner opening an empty hand to receive God’s undeserved grace. It starts with Luther’s recognition that God offers his acceptance as a free gift, the assurance that God’s

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<sup>730</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective, 73-77.

<sup>731</sup> Eriksson, “Martin Luther and the New Perspective on St. Paul,” 81.

<sup>732</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 77.

<sup>733</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 74.

<sup>734</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, AE 26:241-242.

<sup>735</sup> Eriksson, “Modern Interpretations of Luther,” 34.

acceptance comes before and is far more important than anything we can do either for ourselves or for him.<sup>736</sup>

Dunn states, in the above passage, what he believes that Luther discovered. This, however, was not what Luther was concerned about. As stated before, Medieval Catholics already knew that one began one's relationship with God on the basis of undeserved grace. Catholics received this undeserved grace through the process of baptism. Luther agreed with the Catholics on this front and he maintained the same view of baptism in his own thinking.<sup>737</sup> Lutherans are also taught that baptism effects covenant entry.

It was *not* at the beginning, *not* at the "getting in" point where Luther discovered God's grace. Rather it was at the "staying in" point where Luther made his contribution. This happens through God's grace. Again, as Lohse says, the Reformation was not centered around debates over baptism but over the doctrine of penance.<sup>738</sup> Dunn has missed this essential aspect of the Reformation response to medieval Catholicism. As a result, his understandings of Luther's contributions are at best distorted.

Luther's understanding of saving faith is the trust that one has that enables one to repent. One has faith that Jesus is one's saviour, that Jesus will hear the prayer of repentance and will forgive. This understanding of what it takes to "stay in" is different from what one finds in both Judaism and Medieval Catholicism. Both these two faiths understand that some level of human obedience is necessary to "stay in," obedience either to the ceremonial or ethical commands.

Dunn's misunderstanding of Luther leads him to make other errors as well. For instance, at one point Dunn claims that "covenantal nomist" Judaism was such a grace-based faith that Jews are in essence proto-Protestants.<sup>739</sup> Dunn would not be able to say this if he truly understood the central contribution of Protestantism to medieval theology – that "staying in" and not just "getting in" takes place through God's grace.

In summary, Luther's difficulty with medieval Catholicism was not, as Dunn thinks, with regard to what it took to "get into" the covenant. Both Luther and the Catholics agreed

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<sup>736</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God, A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 8-9.

<sup>737</sup> Small Catechism IV in Tappert trans. & ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 348-349.

<sup>738</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther. An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 42-43.

<sup>739</sup> Dunn, *The Justice of God, A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 7-8.

that baptism, or first justification as the Catholics described it, was the grace-based entry point to Christianity. Furthermore, infant baptism was the norm in the medieval Catholic period. No infant works to get themselves baptized. Luther's critique of Catholicism concerned the doctrine of penance, what it took to "stay in" the covenant and arrive in heaven; second justification.

Also, in order to assess Dunn's argument, it is necessary to be able to determine whether the "patterns of religion" of Judaism (as Sanders depicts it) and Medieval Catholicism were in any way similar to each other. We have had a brief discussion about these issues and have found that indeed similarities can be found. Both late Medieval Catholic nominalism and Judaism (as Sanders describes it) are covenantal nomist faiths. As opposed to showing that medieval-Catholicism and Judaism were fundamentally different from each other, by depicting Judaism as covenantal nomist Sanders has inadvertently made a case for stating that the two faiths have similar "patterns of religion." Because of this, Dunn's argument, at least in this particular area of his inquiries, collapses.<sup>740</sup> Since Dunn has misunderstood Luther's critique of Catholicism, this means that Luther's approach to Paul comes off looking stronger and receiving less harm from Dunn's challenge than might be supposed.

#### **8.4 LUTHER AND THE JEWISH COVENANT**

In this Chapter so far we have examined Luther's approaches to Medieval Catholicism. We have noted that his response to Medieval Catholicism was different than what Dunn and the New Perspective scholars have assumed. It is now time to examine Luther's understanding of Judaism. It also is different than what New Perspective scholars have assumed it to be.

New Perspective scholars react to what they call the Old Perspective or the Reformation approach to Paul and Judaism. However, much of the time, for the New Perspective scholars, it appears that it is Bultmann's approaches that define what the Old Perspective is. Bultmann most certainly viewed Judaism as a legalistic religion. What about Luther? Is his opinion at all similar?

Charles Gieschen does not think so. He has an interesting understanding of Luther's

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<sup>740</sup> Eriksson, "Martin Luther and the New Perspective on St. Paul," 81.

approach to Judaism. In contrast to Bultmann, Luther affirmed that there was grace within the Jewish covenant. Gieschen writes:

Certainly first-century Jews, as well as sixteenth-century Roman Catholics, believed in the grace of God and stressed the role of faith; neither emphasized that doing works of the Law apart from the grace of God is the way to salvation. Although Luther at times painted the theology of both groups in broad strokes that accentuated their essential differences from biblical teaching (e.g., ‘salvation by works’), nevertheless he recognized that grace and faith were foundational in the soteriology of Judaizers at Galatia, as well as that of the Roman church.<sup>741</sup>

Gieschen also agrees that those who try to fault Luther for having a law-free life miss his position.<sup>742</sup> It is the opinion of this study that Gieschen is correct. At times Luther does speak in generalities or paint in “broad strokes,” as Gieschen says. Hence, on occasion Luther will state that the Pope, Jews and Muslims all advocate salvation through good works.<sup>743</sup>

However, in contrast with Islam, in the case of both Judaism and Catholicism Luther thought that the emphasis on salvation by works was a misunderstanding of the true nature of their respective covenants. Frequently Luther makes comments to the effect that neither Christianity nor Judaism were inherently legalistic by nature but that they were only misunderstood to be so. For instance, in his lectures on the gospel of John, Luther talked about the grace-based nature of Judaism being demonstrated in the desert when the serpent was lifted up on the pole for the healing of those afflicted with snakebites. No work or no program of activities was required for the Jewish people to be healed. They merely had to *look* at the pole and believe. They simply needed faith.

Luther points out that Jesus uses this very same Old Testament story to explain the nature of his own work and the salvation that came from it.<sup>744</sup> Luther writes: “But whoever believes in this crucified Christ will not be lost and perish but will have everlasting life, just as those who looked at the bronze serpent in the wilderness did not die but were saved.”<sup>745</sup>

Luther saw this as just one of many examples where one finds salvation by grace through faith in the Jewish covenant, and where one also finds elements within the Old

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<sup>741</sup> Gieschen, Charles, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 144-145.

<sup>742</sup> Gieschen, Charles, “Paul and the Law, Was Luther Right?” 146.

<sup>743</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22:334.

<sup>744</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22:338-339.

<sup>745</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22: 340.

Testament stories which foreshadow Christ.<sup>746</sup> For instance, Luther liked the Old Testament book of Jonah for its message of grace. Although he thought that the existence of their faith was testified to by outward actions as they repented, Luther states that the people of Nineveh were ultimately saved by their faith.<sup>747</sup> Also, concerning the salvation of Abraham, Luther writes: “For these facts are clear and sure: Abraham was righteous before circumcision; and because he is accounted righteous through faith, righteousness comes about, not because of the law or works, but simply from faith, or trust in the promise.”<sup>748</sup>

In several places in his writings, including his commentaries on John’s gospel, Luther emphasized that the Jewish covenant, in his view, was no different than the Christian covenant. It was just an earlier version of the same covenant. The Jews, and even the people living before Abraham, were merely asked to have faith in the promise of the coming Messiah, the one who was to crush the head of the serpent, while Christians were asked to have faith in the fulfilled promise – the Messiah that had already arrived.<sup>749</sup> The Luther scholar Lohse agrees:

At the same time, it is significant that for Luther such Jews as have converted are turning ‘again to the faith of their fathers, of the prophets and patriarchs.’ Indeed, Luther was always of the opinion that the believers of the old covenant had been Christians. The Jews would thus only be taking up their true faith once more.<sup>750</sup>

Various places within Luther’s writings illustrate this aspect of Luther’s thought.<sup>751</sup> Luther’s lectures on Genesis demonstrate again and again how Luther acknowledged that the Jewish covenant was set up by God and entered through grace.

In his treatise “Against the Sabbatarians,” Luther mentions that several Old Testament passages record situations where Gentiles came to faith in the God of Israel. According to Luther these passages include the stories about: Pharaoh during the time of Joseph, the Ninevites, Nebuchadnezzar, Naaman the Syrian, Cyrus and Darius, In each case these Gentiles came to faith, but they were not expected to be circumcised or follow the laws

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<sup>746</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22: 339-345.

<sup>747</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Jonah* (From the Latin Text), AE 19:25.

<sup>748</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:84-85; Eriksson, “Christian Scholars’ Attitudes Towards Judaism,” 39.

<sup>749</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22:31-32, 70.

<sup>750</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 340.

<sup>751</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:63.

of Moses. Repentance and acknowledgement of the God of Israel alone was required of them. The fact that obedience to the Torah was not required of these people demonstrates the grace-based nature of the Old Testament covenant, particularly as it applied to Gentiles.<sup>752</sup>

## 8.5 SACRAMENTS BEFORE BAPTISM

As indicated above, Luther believed that God had originally established Judaism to be a grace-based covenant. Luther further believed that the grace-based nature of Judaism and the covenants prior to it were also revealed through the fact that God had set up sacraments that witnessed to the existence of each covenant and which served as vehicles of God's power. Those who believe that there are such things as sacraments (including Luther) hold that sacraments are not only symbols of God's grace, but actual physical means or vehicles of God's grace. Since this is the case, the very term "sacrament" for Luther, implies that God's grace and power is attached to the act.<sup>753</sup> Luther writes:

For all the sacred accounts give proof that by His superabundant grace our merciful God *always* placed some outward and visible sign of His grace alongside the Word, so that men, reminded by the outward sign and work or Sacrament, would believe with greater assurance that God is kind and merciful.... It is as if It [Wisdom] were to say: 'I have always displayed Myself to the eyes and ears of men in such a way that they could become aware of My presence *in the sacrifices, in circumcision, in burning incense, in the cloud in the Red Sea, in the manna, in the brazen serpent, in the tabernacle of Moses, in the temple of Solomon*'.... *In the same way* the very Word, Baptism and the Eucharist are our light bearers today, toward which we look as dependable tokens of the sun of grace.... Contrariwise, where these signs of grace are not present, or where they are despised by men, there is not only no grace, but execrable errors follow, and men set up for themselves other forms of worship and other signs.... It was a great comfort for Adam that, after he had lost Paradise, the tree of life, and the other privileges which were signs of grace, there was given to him another sign of grace, namely the sacrifices, by which he could perceive that he had not been cast off by God.... These were true manifestations of divine mercy which the wretched people needed in order not to be without some light of the grace of God. The same thing happened in the papacy. After those genuine signs of grace began to be regarded with indifference and were despised, superstition could not remain inactive but sought other signs: vows, orders, pilgrimages, intercessions by the saints, and other things.... When the light of the Word and these signs of grace which have been given by God have been lost, men run, of necessity, after the desires of their

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<sup>752</sup> Martin Luther, "Against the Sabbatarians," AE 47:84-87.

<sup>753</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:85, 92. Emphasis in the original.

hearts. Thus after despising the tabernacle and the temple, the Jews brought their sacrifices under trees and in groves.<sup>754</sup>

We see in the passage above how Luther makes a direct comparison with what he regards to be the sacraments or means of grace in the previous Jewish covenant, and the sacraments and means of grace in the present Christian covenant. He also makes a comparison between Judaism and Medieval Catholicism. Luther believes that in both faiths the adherents gradually shifted away from a true understanding of the grace-centered nature of their covenants and instead began to institute human works as a replacement. One might dispute whether or not Luther, by saying this, understood Judaism correctly. Nonetheless, this is his understanding. Luther expresses similar opinions in his *Table Talks* where he says:

However, there is this difference between circumcision and baptism, namely that circumcision was performed before Christ in anticipation of the very grace which is in baptism, while baptism is observed after Christ on the strength of the grace which he has secured. The grace is the same, and the only difference is between the past and future tense. However, both look to the last judgment when all will be revealed.<sup>755</sup>

As opposed to what Bultmann thinks, Luther knows that one enters the Jewish covenant through God's grace and Luther frequently makes statements to that effect. For instance, following Colossians 2:11-12, Luther sees baptism as the new covenant's replacement and equivalent for circumcision.<sup>756</sup> In keeping with this understanding, Luther also refers to circumcision as a sacrament.<sup>757</sup> The following passage demonstrates the link that Luther sees existing between baptism and circumcision. In this passage Luther critiques those who opt for merely rational and not sacramental or supernatural explanations for both rites:

Let us first ask that wiseacre Madame Jezebel, natural reason: Is it not a foolish, contemptible, useless commandment that God demands circumcision? Could He find no other member on the body than that one? Had Abraham followed his reason, he would not have believed that it was God who required this of him; for it is certainly so foolish in our eyes that it could hardly be more foolish. Great disgrace and shame came to the Jews because of it; they were despised by all the world and were considered a veritable abomination.... Thus we have Baptism in the New Testament.

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<sup>754</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 1:248-249; Eriksson "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 86.

<sup>755</sup> Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, AE 54:55; Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 87.

<sup>756</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 86.

<sup>757</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 87.

We are to dip under the water and believe that there we become cleansed from sins and saved; likewise, that Christ's body is in the bread of Holy Communion; likewise, that we are to worship a crucified human as Lord and God. All of this is immeasurably above, and contrary to reason. Thus all works and words of God go against reason; and reason, in turn, goes against God.<sup>758</sup>

Luther at times speaks about circumcision as the covenant entry point.<sup>759</sup> He states this because from Genesis 17:14 he knows that the failure to circumcise a child means that the child is disqualified from membership in God's people.<sup>760</sup> As well, speaking of it as the covenant entry point further equates baptism with circumcision.<sup>761</sup> But for the most part, Luther understands that it is birth as a Jew, primarily, and not circumcision, that determines one's place in the Jewish covenant.<sup>762</sup> Luther writes: "In short, circumcision was a sacrament by which they were to be reminded that they were the people of God. But they did not become the people of God through circumcision."<sup>763</sup> In other places, Luther speaks about circumcision as not the entry point, but the reminder to those descended from Isaac that they are in fact Jews.<sup>764</sup>

In his exposition on Genesis 17, Luther even goes so far as to claim that the Jews have erroneously claimed that circumcision is the covenant entry point, when it really is birth, divine election through physical descent from Abraham.<sup>765</sup> Furthermore, Luther states that circumcision on its own did not make the members of the old covenant righteous, nor did it save them, rather, belief did in addition to the circumcision.<sup>766</sup> In this respect, Luther's statements on the efficaciousness of circumcision for salvation are quite similar to what he says about baptism. Elsewhere, Luther claims that while baptism is necessary, on its own without belief, it will not be sufficient for the salvation of those who are baptized.

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<sup>758</sup> Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, 3:1164; Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 42.

<sup>759</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 43.

<sup>760</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:86.

<sup>761</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 6-14*, AE 2:44.

<sup>762</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1-4*, AE 26:120.

<sup>763</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:85; Eriksson "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 44.

<sup>764</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:92.

<sup>765</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 45..

<sup>766</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:86-87.



A further similarity that one finds in Luther's thought between circumcision and baptism concerns the fact that Luther states that circumcision is useless without the Word.<sup>767</sup> He writes: "For wherever God's word is no longer present, circumcision is null and void."<sup>768</sup> When he says this, Luther again makes a direct comparison to baptism. Concerning baptism in his *Small Catechism* he comments: "It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water.... For without the Word of God, the water is merely water and no Baptism."<sup>769</sup> Thus, overall, we see that Gieschen and Lohse are correct. Luther sees grace present in Judaism certainly at its entry point. Luther also refers to both baptism and circumcision as sacraments. Since one can fall away from faith, he sees both baptism and circumcision, in their covenants, necessary for salvation, but not on their own sufficient for salvation.<sup>770</sup> He regards both rituals as useless without the Word of God attached.

Again, in contrast both to Bultmann and to what the New Perspective scholars think, Luther did not understand the Jewish covenant as being, at its core, fundamentally different from that of Christianity. The Jewish covenant, as God set it up, thought Luther, was not intended to be focused on legalistic works-righteousness. The Jews had only misunderstood their own covenant to make it thus. In fact, Luther frequently states that the Jewish covenant was almost the same as Christianity. The Gospel has always been present in the world, says Luther. He writes: "The doctrine of the Gospel has been in the world ever since our first parents fell, and by various signs God confirmed this promise to the fathers."<sup>771</sup>

In his lectures on Genesis 4, Luther again talks about the similarities between Christianity and Judaism.<sup>772</sup> Furthermore, as we will see below, in Luther's view these similarities are demonstrated by God's practice of instituting sacraments for each version of the covenant. Luther writes:

In order to reinforce the promise of our salvation, God has this in mind from the very beginning of the world: Men were to have signs by means of which they might comfort themselves in their sins and gain courage through their reliance on divine grace. It is not the work itself that is of value in the sacrifice; it is the mercy and power of the divine promise.... Therefore, what Baptism and the Lord's Supper are

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<sup>767</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, AE 47:163-164.

<sup>768</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, AE 47:164.

<sup>769</sup> *Small Catechism*, IV, in Tappert, 349.

<sup>770</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 354, 368—370.

<sup>771</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 6-14*, AE 2:163.

<sup>772</sup> Eriksson, "Luther, Paul and the New Perspective," 93.

for us, sacrifice and offering was for Adam after the promise. God revealed His grace in the sacrifices and gave His approval of them by kindling and consuming them with fire.<sup>773</sup>

Furthermore, in keeping with what one sees in Romans 4:1-5, Luther thought that the patriarchs and Old Testament heroes were saved by faith in the same way as post-Easter Christians.<sup>774</sup> Luther believed that God had set up new symbols of grace, Jesus' sacrifice instead of the sacrifices of animals, baptism instead of circumcision.<sup>775</sup> Yet, the same divine love and intent was behind both covenants. Luther writes: "'the will of His sign [*sic*]' is changeable; for He did away with circumcision, instituted Baptism, etc., although the same 'will of good pleasure,' which had been predetermined from eternity, continued in force."<sup>776</sup>

In essence, Luther believed that the same divine intent and method of salvation existed throughout time. God, however, at various points changed the signs of grace and the rituals which accompanied this Gospel.<sup>777</sup> Sacrifices existed prior to Noah, and in encouraging their offspring to make sacrifices to God, Adam and Eve serve in the office as priests. Luther writes that Adam and Eve:

Inasmuch as they are filled with the Holy Spirit and are enlightened by the knowledge of Christ, who is to come, they set before their children this very hope of a future deliverance and exhort them to show their gratitude to so merciful a God. It is evident that the sacrifices which were handed down had no other purpose.<sup>778</sup>

The rainbow was given as a sign of grace to Noah and those who came after him.<sup>779</sup> God gave circumcision to Abraham to help Abraham believe that God would fulfill his promise.<sup>780</sup> Moses gave greater structure to the previous practice of offering sacrifices, and in the modern day baptism and Eucharist were given as the signs of grace to the Christian church.<sup>781</sup> Nevertheless, all along, according to Luther, each sign has revealed in essence the same Gospel and gracious outpouring of love and care by God.

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<sup>773</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, AE 1:250.

<sup>774</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 6-14*, AE 2:22, 26, 76-80, 84.

<sup>775</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 46.

<sup>776</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 6-14*, AE 2:44; Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 47.

<sup>777</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 48.

<sup>778</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, AE 1:247.

<sup>779</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, AE 1:248.

<sup>780</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, AE 1:248.

<sup>781</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, AE 1:248.

Luther's perception was that there were two things that had been misapplied with the Jewish covenant. First, the Jewish people had misunderstood the nature of their covenant, turning a covenant that had been intended to have been focused on grace and instead making it one based on works and human accomplishment.<sup>782</sup> In this regard, Luther thinks that the Jews made the same mistake as the Medieval Catholics.<sup>783</sup> In his Galatians lectures, Luther writes:

Therefore, just as the Jews do not imitate the Abraham who had faith but imitate the Abraham who performed works, so the papists and all self-righteous people do not look at and grasp the Christ who justifies but look at and grasp the Christ who performs works; and thus they retreat so much farther from Christ, from righteousness and salvation. But if both groups want to be saved, it is necessary that the former imitate the Abraham who had faith and that the latter take hold of the Christ who justifies and saves - the Christ whom Abraham himself took hold of and through whom he was blessed.<sup>784</sup>

Luther's second issue with the Jewish covenant is that it is no longer in force. In his opinion it is antiquated and out-of-date. The signs of grace have shifted again, as they had in the past. The covenant of Moses had never been intended to be permanent.<sup>785</sup> Luther comments: "But just as we no longer have any need of the Sacrament of Baptism when the promise of the New Testament is fulfilled in eternal life, so circumcision is no longer necessary, since the promise given to Abraham has been fulfilled through Christ."<sup>786</sup> Luther does have a grace-based view of the Jewish covenant. He does see difficulties in the covenant, but not because of any intrinsic legalism in the Jewish covenant.

Again, however, we see how this revelation causes problems for Dunn's critique of Luther. Dunn's critique is based on the premise that Medieval Catholicism was not covenantal nomist, which it was, and that Luther would not have thought that grace could be found in the Jewish covenant, which he did. Once again, Dunn's critique of Luther's theology appears to be aimed more at Bultmann than at Luther.

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<sup>782</sup> Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 48.

<sup>783</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, AE 1:249.

<sup>784</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1-4*, AE 26:247; Eriksson, "Christian Scholars' Attitudes Towards Judaism," 48.

<sup>785</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 6-14*, AE 2:361.

<sup>786</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, AE 3:92.

## 8.6 LUTHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE JEWS

One of the factors driving the New Perspective is the desire to remedy the long-standing antagonistic approach that many Christians have had towards the Jews. We have already heard Terry Donaldson's opinions on this matter.<sup>787</sup>

Anti-Semitism has been a longstanding problem within Christendom. Rabbi David J. Levy is correct seeing the sources of anti-Semitism as being multi-faceted, but one source is the attitudes of Christian scholars. In his book *The Teaching of Contempt*, Jules Isaac talks about his views of the contributions that Christian teaching has made towards the rise of anti-Semitism. One of these directly touches on the debates surrounding the New Perspective. In summarizing Isaac's thoughts, Levy writes: "According to Isaac, the second contributing factor was the 'theological contention, invented reinforced and propagated for hundreds of years, that at the time of Jesus the religion of Israel was mere legalism without a soul.'" <sup>788</sup>

Therefore, the admission that there is grace within Judaism is an important step in rectifying some of the historical sources for anti-Semitism. In this respect, E.P. Sanders has performed a valuable service in changing attitudes among Christian scholars towards Judaism.

We can thus celebrate the changing of attitudes towards Judaism among Christian scholars. At the same time, there is a risk that in one's attempts to improve relationships between Jews and Christians and improve perceptions of Judaism by Christians one can try to put Judaism into a mold in which it cannot fit. In his dissertation, David Levy refers to Peter Haas, who makes this complaint about some of the post-Holocaust theological approaches to Judaism. Haas says: "The recasting of Judaism to fit the discursive needs of Christian theology must invariably so distort the Judaism lived by Jews that the validity of the whole enterprise falls into immediate question." <sup>789</sup>

There is a further risk that one can also demonize those who one disagrees with by trying to link them with what took place during the Third Reich, even though the linkage might be scholarly doubtful. Again Levy quotes Stephen Haynes who states:

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<sup>787</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World*, 18.

<sup>788</sup> David Joseph Levy, "The Holocaust: A catalyst for theological education as exemplified by the writing of Dr. John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M." (MA. diss., Wilfred Laurier University, 1996), 6.

<sup>789</sup> Levy "The Holocaust," 15.

It is troubling that many Christians employ a rhetoric of discontinuity to erect protective barriers between Christian faith and the worst forms of anti-Semitism.... Holocaust Theologians often rely on a rhetoric of continuity that weds Christian and Nazi brands of anti-Semitism in formulations that are emotionally powerful but historically dubious.<sup>790</sup>

Siemon-Netto has argued that Shirer and others have attempted to do this with Luther. Hence it is worth examining not just Luther's opinions of Judaism but his relationship with the Jewish people, as this has some bearing on modern biblical scholarship and on New Perspective views of Luther.

Luther's relationship to the Jewish people of his day was complex. In an address, first given at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in 1993, and later given in condensed form to the general synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Rabbi David Levy pointed out that Luther regrettably lived in a very anti-Jewish era. All the major figures of the Reformation, Erasmus, Reuchlin, Calvin and Luther at times made deplorable comments about the Jews. According to Levy, in this regard, Calvin comes off looking the best, being slightly less vitriolic than the other Reformation figures. Yet even Calvin at times referred to Jews in derogatory terms.<sup>791</sup>

Although his motives were largely aimed at converting Jews to the Christian faith, for the better part of his life, Luther advocated tolerance towards the Jews. After his treatise *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, some Jews even saw in Luther an ally and a defender.<sup>792</sup> Luther at times, in his younger years, also criticized those who attacked the Jews. For instance, in his treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther complains about other preachers and states:

Now there are not a few who preach Christ and read about him that they may move man's affections to sympathy with Christ, to anger against the Jews, and such childish and effeminate nonsense. Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and for me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in us.<sup>793</sup>

Also, in an era where people thought well of aristocracy Luther had this to say about the Jews:

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<sup>790</sup> Levy "The Holocaust," 15.

<sup>791</sup> David Levy, "Everybody Hated the Jews" (paper presented in Church History class, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. November 3, 1993).

<sup>792</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, AE 47:124.

<sup>793</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, AE 31:357.

By virtue of their blood Jews are the noblest aristocrats on earth. If one wished to portray people of noble birth, it would be necessary to take the Jews because of their calling and election. For they were set apart and exalted by God above all others, to them was given the promise of Christ. God said to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, “Through your Seed shall all the nations or families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), not only spiritually through Christ but also physically. The greatest and foremost men on earth issued from their blood; for example, the holy and inspired patriarchs, prophets, and kings from whom we received the Old Testament Scriptures. They were outstanding both as teachers and warriors, and through them God did mighty deeds and wonders. It was for them, according to Biblical record, that the powerful kings of Babylon and Nineveh, as, for example Belshazzar (Dan. 5:30) and Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:37) and many others after them, were punished. We need not even make mention of the fact that Jesus, their kinsman, was descended from their seed after the flesh. This is why He declares in John 4:22: ‘Salvation is from the Jews.’ Since God thus preferred and elected this race above others for the physical birth of His newborn Son, according to the promise given to the patriarchs and finally also to David: ‘One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne’ (Ps. 132:11), it stands to reason that, if any one is, the Jews must be endowed with noble blood.<sup>794</sup>

While Luther believed that the second Jewish dispersion from Jerusalem was similar to the first, a result of discipline from God, his opinion was that this did not take place because of some inferior racial Jewish status. In fact, he warns his own German people that the same thing will happen to them if they succumb to false doctrine.

After they have rejected the divine Word, such affliction, tribulation, and trouble will come upon our country that people will one day say: ‘This is where Germany used to be’. Therefore we should intercede with God for our progeny, our children’s children, that we may transmit the doctrine to them, that the name of God may be hallowed among us, that His kingdom may remain with us, and that we may live in accordance with the will of God.<sup>795</sup>

Very unfortunately, near the end of his life, Luther shifted from his previous tolerance of the Jewish people and their covenant to a much more antagonistic stance. Still even at this point, Luther still called circumcision a sacrament.<sup>796</sup> He also said that circumcision, like baptism, was a real vehicle of God’s grace when understood and enacted in the proper fashion. He also stated that as was the case with baptism, circumcision was not an effective

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<sup>794</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22:92.

<sup>795</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John 1-4*, AE 22:207.

<sup>796</sup> Eriksson, “Luther, Paul and the New Perspective,” 91.

means of God's grace when not performed correctly.<sup>797</sup> The fact that even during his lowest moments and during his most antagonistic writings towards Judaism, Luther yet understood that Judaism was entered in a grace-based fashion demonstrates that Luther had a much different view of the Jewish covenant than Bultmann did.

Let us close off this section where we started, with the effect of anti-Semitism on modern scholarship. It is first worth pointing out that the focus of scholarship in this area could perhaps be improved. It is only right that the holocaust receives the attention that it does from scholars! Yet at the same time one has to ask why it is that the anti-Jewish writings of Karl Marx<sup>798</sup> and the corresponding anti-Jewish activities of the former communist governments in Eastern Europe have received significantly less attention either from the general public or from scholars. This is curious.

Second, the attempt made by some authors, such as Shirer, to directly fault Luther for the wrongs of the Third Reich, a period of time four hundred years after his death, does not seem reasonable. Pointing fingers at historical figures for crimes they did not commit is itself a dubious practice, but if blame is to be laid, it would make sense to attach that blame to figures who were much closer in time to the actual events.

Nevertheless, David Levy's point still stands. Anti-Semitism has been widely prevalent among many Christian historical figures. As well, sadly, anti-Jewish attitudes or teachings on the part of Luther or any Christian scholar from the early church period down to the present does contribute towards a climate where events such as the holocaust would be more likely to happen. As a result, the sad legacy of anti-Semitism among Christian scholars, as a group, has contributed to some of history's painful events. Levy regards the holocaust not as an isolated incidence of anti-Semitism, but as one example, together with others, in an on-going pattern of anti-Semitism stretching throughout the past seventeen centuries.<sup>799</sup> The current problem of rising anti-Semitism in North America and Europe needs to be guarded against in our own day as well. However, to single out Luther from amongst these historical

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<sup>797</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, AE 47:160-164.

<sup>798</sup> Marx, Karl, *A World Without Jews*, Fourth Enlarged Edition, With an Introduction and Epilogue by Dagobert D. Runes, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960).

<sup>799</sup> David Levy, "Everybody Hated the Jews."

figures and historical currents and lay direct blame on his shoulders for the Third Reich in the way that Shirer does is not reasonable.

Just because someone claims to be a historical figure's disciple, does not mean that this is the case. As an example, the Jacobins during the French Revolution claimed that they were descendants of the Greek philosophers and were setting up a republic based on the pure principles of Greek philosophy and reason.<sup>800</sup> Yet just because this claim was made, this does not mean that Socrates and Plato can be faulted for France's reign of terror. In the same way, just because a twentieth-century German nationalist claims that he found a spiritual ancestor in Luther, it does not mean that Luther can be blamed for actions taken by twentieth-century German nationalists.

To adequately confront the tragedy of Christian anti-Semitism one needs to acknowledge all of it. Instead, if one chooses to blame one Christian historical figure alone for a problem which is more widely spread, one does not adequately confront the problem. Instead of owning up to the issue, by blaming one historical figure only, one is really attempting to dodge the issue and conveniently absolve oneself.

At the same time, when confronting the last and most antagonistic period of Luther's relationship with the Jews, it is important to state that Luther, like other church leaders during the Reformation and beforehand, were in error and sinned. We can salute the New Perspective scholars and their predecessors for at least attempting to remedy the sad legacy of anti-Judaism within Christian scholarship; a legacy that goes back through the enlightenment, the Reformers and to the early Church Fathers before them.

## **8.7 RESULTING ISSUES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF LUTHER**

In this and the previous chapter we have examined some New Perspective interpretations of Luther's thought. We have discovered that New Perspective scholars have misunderstood Luther's approaches on many fronts. This is perplexing. Sanders, Dunn and Wright are respected scholars with international reputations. How is it that respected scholars could so persistently misunderstand the source of the Reformation thought that their own work claims

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<sup>800</sup> Siemon-Netto, Uwe., *The Fabricated Luther: Refuting Nazi Connections and Other Modern Myths*. Second Edition (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 53.



to react against? The answers might lie in part with some of the difficulties that are involved in interpreting Luther.

When it comes to understanding Luther's thought there were and still are a variety of obstacles that can make it difficult for scholars. One difficulty with interpreting Luther's thought was the lack of adequate scholarly resources on Luther until the middle of the nineteenth-century, and in the English language until the mid to late twentieth-century.

Given his prominent place in the history of Western Europe, it may be surprising that the scholarly study of Luther really only began with the work of a German historian Leopold Ranke. Feeling extremely dissatisfied with the inadequate resources available on Luther during the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 1817, Ranke, then a twenty-one year old German university student, began collecting Luther materials and studying the Reformer. Lohse comments about Ranke's work:

The discoveries and insights that developed out of his study of Luther at that time were incorporated into his *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation*. The work was published over twenty-one years later in 1839-47. It marks the beginning of a new era of historical study. It establishes a radically new basis for the study of the history of the Reformation as well as for the interpretation of Luther. Although Ranke was still somewhat influenced by the interpretation of Luther in Romanticism, no one else came close to his comprehension of Luther's motives in the controversy with Rome nor in his theology in general. Theologians needed quite a bit of time before they were able to assimilate Ranke's deep insights into Luther and to incorporate them into the basis of their own study of Luther.<sup>801</sup>

Ranke thus represented a significant improvement upon other scholarly approaches to Luther. Lohse also states that Ranke's work, to quote:

is the first example of an analysis of Luther and the Reformation that did not base its assumptions and concerns on particular philosophical presuppositions or on some other set of preconceived assumptions. Rather, Ranke sought to develop his image of Luther directly out of the sources. Ranke also represented a significant advance over the confessional interpretations of Luther. He saw Luther against the background and context of the history of the Reformation. Thus he was the first to recognize the religious significance of the Reformer on the scale of world history.<sup>802</sup>

A few years after Ranke began his work on Luther, the Erlangen edition of Luther's works began to be released. The first editions of these works were published from 1826 to 1857.

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<sup>801</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 218.

<sup>802</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 218.

Although it often had a problem of using inferior texts, nonetheless, as Lohse says: “The Erlangen Edition was a great advance at the time it was published.”<sup>803</sup> Also: “It was the first attempt at a complete edition of Luther’s works and the first edition to apply critical methods in editing the text.”<sup>804</sup>

English speakers had to wait even longer for good editions of Luther’s writings. The fifty-five volume *Luther’s Works* translates roughly 40% of Luther’s writing into English. It, however, only began to gradually be published in 1958. Hence, given the fact that good editions of Luther’s works were not readily available until the middle of the nineteenth-century, and in English even later, it is not surprising that there would be a tendency to misinterpret Luther.

A second difficulty with interpreting Luther has been the various and rather distorted views created about Luther by German intellectuals. Lohse writes: “There have, of course, been many one-sided interpretations of Luther and many that are of very questionable validity.”<sup>805</sup> Many German thinkers, whether in the church or outside of it, paid relatively little attention to Luther’s own writings, but instead tried to co-opt Luther into being the forerunner of whatever particular philosophical movement that they happened to like the best. Feuerbach even went so far as to claim that Luther had influenced the development of his own atheistic philosophy.<sup>806</sup>

Enlightenment thinkers tried to make Luther into a proto-enlightenment scholar.<sup>807</sup> Enlightenment thinkers downplayed Luther’s understandings of the covenant and the spiritual nature of baptism as the covenant entrance point; as a result his actual ideas were distorted. Kant,<sup>808</sup> and the Romanticists also tried to co-opt Luther.<sup>809</sup> German nationalists<sup>810</sup> also attempted to make Luther support their cause. Even today, various American Lutheran thinkers endeavour to bring Luther onside in their own critiques of their own government and culture.

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<sup>803</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 239.

<sup>804</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 217.

<sup>805</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 199.

<sup>806</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 222.

<sup>807</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 211, 214.

<sup>808</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 212.

<sup>809</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 213.

<sup>810</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther, An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 227.

While it is not the chief focus of this study it is worth noting that a large number of Luther scholars are hailing the modern Finnish study of Luther as one which has done much to liberate Luther from Enlightenment shackles. Robert Jenson, a prominent North American Luther scholar also salutes the Finns for their work in this regard. He writes: “I agree: leading scholars have distorted Luther’s theology by presuming that he must have been a proper Kantian like themselves; and the surprising system and teachings the Finns find in Luther are plainly there.”<sup>811</sup>

Yet in recent decades there have been other questionable interpretations of Luther. For instance, one past-president of a Lutheran seminary in North America suggested that Luther’s preaching of salvation by grace through faith should allow for the legalizing of certain street drugs.<sup>812</sup> Indeed, as the example above illustrates, some of the difficulties or at least complexities in interpreting Luther are fostered in part by various Lutheran church bodies, who between or even within them contain vastly different approaches to interpreting Luther’s writings.

A group of writings generally called “The Lutheran Confessions” are documents, many written by Luther, that historically have been viewed to have special importance within Lutheran Churches. Supposedly these have binding theological authority on all or almost all Lutheran Church bodies worldwide. The constitutions of these various Lutheran groups across the globe attest to this authority. Theologians such as Carl Braaten value this authority warning that: “A non-confessional Christianity is a contradiction in terms and cannot exist for long. It becomes a cut-flower Christianity, bound to wither and die under the heat of competing religious and ideological movements.”<sup>813</sup>

Yet in several pages of his *Principles of Lutheran Theology* Carl Braaten goes on to spell out five vastly different approaches to understanding the Lutheran Confessional documents by Lutherans today. Some of these approaches come close, it seems, to not according much practical authority to the Lutheran Confessions at all, relegating them to the status of merely being important historical symbols or cultural relics from the past, but not

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<sup>811</sup> Jenson, “Response” to ‘Why is Luther so Fascinating: Modern Finnish Luther Research,’” in *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, (eds.: Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21; Eriksson, “Modern Interpretations of Luther, 13.

<sup>812</sup> Hordern, William, *Living By Grace* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 43.

<sup>813</sup> Carl Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 27.

having much relevance or binding authority in modern life.<sup>814</sup> If this diversity of perspectives exists towards a document with binding theological authority, it is easy to understand how the diversity of perspectives can be even greater when it comes to the interpretation of the broader range of Luther's other writings. Given the wide variety of Luther interpretations, it is and was easy for a scholar to pick up a caricature of Luther from an earlier scholar, to adopt such a caricature uncritically and to pass it down in his writings to others.

A third difficulty with interpreting Luther has been the different cultural context of his day and ours. Not only is Luther writing in a period five hundred years separate from our own, but he writes and speaks as someone who grew up within a Saxon-German cultural milieu. One comment sometimes made about Luther is that he was incapable of making an understatement. According to Siemon-Netto, this is a characteristic common with other German Saxons even today. Saxony, the part of Germany that Luther came from, also has a cultural reputation for a style of communication that includes exaggeration and extravagant phrases, which Luther also shared. Growing up himself within Saxony, Siemon-Netto claims that when Saxons get into an argument their tendency is to "let fly" with their remarks, understanding that others will take them with a grain of salt. This cultural trait can be seen evident in the writings of a fellow Saxon and occasional opponent of Luther, Thomas Muntzer.

Like Luther, Muntzer was a Saxon. Like Luther, he had the Saxon penchant for rich hyperbole. Like Luther, he was endowed with the Saxon gift for creating ever-new derogatory labels for his adversaries. Like Luther, he understood the preacher's obligation 'to look at the common man's snout.'... In just one tract, Muntzer called Luther, 'Flatterer of Princes,' 'Father Pussyfoot,' 'Brother Soft-Life,' 'Malicious Raven,' 'Doctor Liar,' 'Ungodly Flesh at Wittenberg,' 'Virgin Martin,' 'the Chaste Babylonian Woman,' 'Flattering Scoundrel,' 'Doctor Ludibrii,' 'Cousin Steplightly,' 'Pope of Wittenberg,' 'Dear Flesh,' and 'Arch Devil.'<sup>815</sup>

Siemon-Netto is likely correct in his assessment of Saxon culture, particularly in the Middle Ages. One finds similar long lists of insults directed at Luther from the pen of John Eck. In just the first three pages of his *Enchiridion of Commonplaces* he describes Luther using such terms as: "heretic," "Philistine," "fanged beast," "dragon's head," "raging lion," "false

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<sup>814</sup> Carl Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 29-31.

<sup>815</sup> Siemon-Netto, *The Fabricated Luther*, 60.

apostle,” “vainest of men,” someone with “poisonous teaching,” and one of several individuals who has “exalted themselves as Lucifer and the noonday demon.”<sup>816</sup>

Finally, interpretations of Luther have been affected by the anti-German propaganda that has permeated the English-speaking world before, during and after the first and second world wars. There was a long-standing rivalry between England and Germany that went on for decades, predating the world wars and in many ways even causing them. This rivalry spilled over into the cultural and theological spheres also. Based on his research, Robert Kelly says that many of the popular American success literature books written at the end of the 1800’s contained evil characters from Germany or central Europe.<sup>817</sup> English-speaking theologians and church leaders around this time also spoke negatively about Luther. The effects of this propaganda exist at a certain level even today.

While not chiefly responding to the “New Perspective,” Dr. Siemon-Netto wrote his book *The Fabricated Luther*, to reply to the recent criticism of Luther in much of academia. In the English-speaking world, Siemon-Netto mentions that during and after the wars the Germans were seen a dubious people. Since Luther was their patron saint, Luther also became dubious. During the World War I, there was a very active propaganda campaign in English-speaking countries against all things German, even against German historical figures, like Charlemagne, who dated from the 800’s. Luther, of course, as a major German historical figure, was included in these attacks.

Siemon-Netto mentions two men in particular who were responsible for creating anti-German propaganda. Alfred Harmsworth, (later called Viscount Northcliffe) by 1914 owned 40% of the morning newspaper circulation in Britain, and 45% of the evening circulation.<sup>818</sup> He exercised a tremendous influence over British public opinion and the sensationalist anti-German tone of his newspapers prior to World War I has been described by some historians as being one of the main factors in bringing about the war.<sup>819</sup> Siemon-Netto also mentions a second man, Sir Robert Vansittart, who in his influential book, *Black Record: Germans Past*

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<sup>816</sup> Eck, John, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces*, 2-5.

<sup>817</sup> Robert Kelly, “Lectures: Justification and Sanctification,” 1995.

<sup>818</sup> Thompson, J. Lee, “Fleet Street Colossus,” 115, In *Parliamentary History* Volume 25, Part 1 2006.

<sup>819</sup> Bingham, Adrian , “Monitoring the popular press: an historical perspective,” *History and Policy*. May 2005.

*and Present*, argued that German people as a race were innately militaristic and had been so since the time of Charlemagne. Siemon-Netto writes:

But what of Vansittart?... What made this man of letters, this linguist, this career diplomat, suddenly descend to base racism to give an instant answer to one of history's most troubling problems? Why did Vansittart link virtually all Germans of all generations – including Charlemagne, Luther and Frederick the Great – to a genocide in the twentieth century? Why did he thus lower himself to the level of the Nazis, who justified the extermination of Jews, Gypsies, Poles and other with a corresponding rhetoric?... But Christabel Bielenberg gives us another idea: 'The British did not go to war willingly, unless they had worked up a good old hate.... During the First World War, it had been my Uncle Northcliffe's business to do the hate rousing.... I could not hate because I knew too much.'<sup>820</sup>

Then, during and after the World War II, the attacks on German historical figures and on the character of German people seemed more justifiable. After the war, American journalist Shirer, in his popular *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, continued these stereotypes. In his book he blamed Luther for the ascendancy of the Nazi government. Shirer bases his argument on the fact that during normal times Luther encouraged citizens to obey their governments and governing authorities. This is true. Yet, Shirer neglects to mention the several places where Luther advocates civil disobedience and even armed resistance to governments that perpetrate gross immoral acts.<sup>821</sup> Nevertheless the ideas of Shirer and his predecessors have at some level continued. When N.T. Wright uses such expressions as "stuffed and mounted"<sup>822</sup> to describe Luther, one wonders if Wright has somehow moved beyond the level of scholarly objectivity and unconsciously imbibed some of this anti-German thought.

A misrepresentation of Luther in this fashion is not just scholarly inappropriate, but also potentially dangerous. It is too easy to put the blame onto history or onto something or someone else, which then excuses us from doing our own soul-searching. Also, if one comes up with faulty explanations for things such as anti-Semitism or the Nazis' ruthless version of social Darwinism, there is less likelihood that we can learn from the lessons of history and more likelihood that we will repeat those mistakes in some manner in the future.

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<sup>820</sup> Siemon Netto, *The Fabricated Luther*, 145.

<sup>821</sup> F. Sherman, "Introduction to 'Dr. Martin Luther's Warning to His Dear German People,'" by Martin Luther in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 47. (trans. Martin Bertram; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 6.

<sup>822</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 128.

Nonetheless, given the several obstacles to finding accurate interpretations of Luther, it is therefore somewhat understandable that modern New Testament scholars also would make significant mistakes in their own reading of Luther.

Perhaps we should let Luther have the last word in this chapter. Whenever making any kind of inquiry, whether it is Luther research or another area, it is always tempting to focus on one's own opinions or viewpoints rather than those that are more objective. Luther speaks about this kind of temptation himself. While Luther is addressing the challenges of interpreting Deuteronomy in the following passage, the applications here are more universal:

This passage condemns not only outward representations of God, which He wanted to be forbidden to a simple and childish people, but especially inner ones, which are (as we have said above) opinions and speculations about God constructed out of ourselves without the voice of God. Here indeed the voice of His words alone is commended, and whatever is said or thought about God which is not that voice of His words is wholly godless and damnable. He wanted to have His will and His counsels delineated for us by His words alone, not by our thoughts and imagination. Therefore it is not what seems to you to please or displease God, no matter how holy or pious it appears to you (as the founder and confessors of religions and sects have supposed), that pleases or displeases God, but what He Himself by the voice of His Word designates as pleasing or displeasing to Him. For nobody but God Himself describes or indicates the will of God; therefore everyone errs in a godless manner if he tries this, since nobody knows the depths of God except the Spirit who is in God (1 Cor 2:11). Therefore it is impossible for men to think properly about God, speak about Him, or worship Him, without the Word of God. The affirmation stands: "You have heard His voice."<sup>823</sup>

## 8.8 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter we have examined the way in which Luther assessed the Medieval Catholic "pattern of religion" and the "pattern of religion," in Judaism. We have seen that there are significant discrepancies between the way in which Luther actually viewed these faiths and ways that New Perspective scholars perceive Luther to have approached these faiths. In particular, we have seen that Luther did think that there was grace within the Jewish covenant as it had been set up. We have also seen that Medieval Catholicism was a covenantal nomist faith. Since covenantal nomists know that one enters the covenant through grace, we have seen that Luther's main reaction to Medieval Catholicism was to assert that Christians do not

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<sup>823</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, AE 9:58

only “get into” the God’s covenant through grace, they also “stay in” God’s covenant through grace. We have also discovered that James Dunn misunderstands the main thrust of Luther’s challenge to Medieval Catholicism.

All of this causes tremendous problems for Dunn’s critique of the Reformation Pauline interpretation. Dunn’s critique is based on the premise that Medieval Catholicism was not covenantal nomist, which it was, and that Luther would not have thought that grace could be found in the Jewish covenant, which he did. However, Dunn’s and other New Perspective scholars’ challenges likely do apply to Bultmann and more recent scholars with similar views. New Perspectivists, though, mistakenly assume that Luther held similar views to modern Protestant Pauline scholars. This is not always the case.

In this Chapter we have also touched on a perplexing issue, namely why is it that New Perspective views on Luther’s thinking are so very divergent from what was actually the case? Various proposals were made which potentially explain these discrepancies.

At the same time, as we have seen, it is not only New Perspective scholars who can be faulted for misunderstanding Luther. Those scholars who claim to support Luther or who claim to stand within the Reformation paradigm have also often misunderstood him. We can hope that part of the contribution that New Perspective scholars will make to Pauline scholarship is to stimulate an even closer look at Luther’s own ideas, versus the way he has often been understood.

In responding to Dunn’s main argument against Reformation approaches to Paul, this Chapter has examined Luther’s approaches to Judaism and Medieval Catholicism. In the next chapter we further examine the New Perspective arguments by exploring Paul’s approach to Judaism.



# CHAPTER 9

## PAUL AND JUDAISM

The debate over the New Perspective has brought Paul's understanding of Judaism into view. Montefiore and Schoeps, forbearers of the New Perspective, have suggested that Paul misunderstood Judaism outright. Other scholars influenced by the New Perspective claim that no, it is Protestants who have misunderstood Paul. Others yet suggest that in order to understand Paul we also need to understand Judaism. This Chapter responds to this challenge and examines Paul's approaches to Judaism in the light of the New Perspective approach.

One issue then that comes to the fore in responding to Sanders is the definition of Judaism itself. In order to paint Judaism in broad strokes and describe it as grace-based, Sanders has to first argue that Judaism was a relatively unified movement that one could actually paint in broad strokes. Hence, Sanders claims that there was a "common Judaism" that existed in the first century. Most other modern scholars, however, claim that Judaism was more diverse than Sanders believes and not as well defined as he claims. On this matter, this study sides with the view that Judaism was a diverse movement. We further argue that Paul and the other New Testament writers were aware of this diversity but that he and they rejected the other interpretations of Judaism as inadequate. For one, Paul rejected the views on Judaism that he had once held as a Pharisee and he further rejected the views of his Jewish-Christian opponents at Galatia.

Although Judaism is at times critiqued in the New Testament, when one reads the New Testament closely one sees that when the topic of Judaism is brought up, New Testament authors are more often than not defining exactly what the proper practice of Judaism actually is. One sees this especially in the gospels, but even in Paul's writings. Furthermore, Christianity has often been portrayed as offering a grace-based response to the supposed legalism of Judaism. Yet when one examines the statements made about Judaism in the New Testament, one discovers something surprising. Paul and the other New Testament writers criticize other interpretations of Judaism, yes. Often, however, they criticize other approaches to Judaism not for being legalistic, but for being too lax and grace-based! In Galatians Paul states that a proper understanding of the Mosaic covenant would be to see it as rigorously

binding. Paul thus thinks that the Judaizers at Galatia are advocating too lax an approach to the Jewish covenant! In discussing Judaism then, he is not solely concerned with grace versus works.

Paul was not alone in adopting a rigorous approach to the covenant of Moses. The Old Testament prophets had just such an approach. One frequently also sees rigorous understandings of Judaism advocated in many of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings, where salvation through works or atonement through works is often held up as the standard. From the gospels it also appears that Jesus and John the Baptist advocated a rigorous approach to Judaism.

In Paul's writings, then, we see not one, but three critiques of Judaism. First, in opposition to his opponents, Paul has to define what constitutes true Judaism. To this end, Paul states that the covenant of Moses, if practised truly, is practised strictly (Galatians 3:10, 5:3; Romans 2:21-25). According to Paul, not all Jews grasp this. Second, Paul says that even in its most rigorous form, the covenant of Moses is inadequate to accomplish salvation (Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 3:21, 4:30-5:1). Third, like some other Jewish sects, such as the Essenes, Paul changes the definition of what constitutes Israel, the community of salvation. Just as the Qumranites believed that "Israel" was the sect that they belonged to, in Paul's thought, "Israel" is the sect that he, Paul, belonged to. The Israel of God, as he says in Galatians 6:16, or the true "circumcision," as he says in Philippians 3:3, are no longer those who follow the covenant of Moses. Rather, the community of salvation is made up of those who have received baptism and who follow Jesus Christ.

Hence, while Luther may not have captured every nuance of Paul's approach to Judaism, Luther captured the essence of Paul's approach. Paul believed that Judaism should be practised rigorously. Nevertheless, an exacting approach to the law in Paul's view was not sufficient to accomplish salvation. Instead the covenant of grace offered through Jesus allows the possibility of salvation. Finally, the church for Paul represents the true Israel. All of this Luther understands.

## **9.1 ARE NEW TESTAMENT APPROACHES TO JUDAISM SUSPECT?**

A large part of the New Perspective argument rests upon its interpretation of Judaism. In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (with a few exceptions) E.P. Sanders criticizes the

understandings of Judaism found among Christian scholars prior to himself. Certainly many of his critiques hit home. Sanders is no doubt correct in asserting that other scholars, such as F. Weber, have provided inaccurate and excessively legalistic understandings of Judaism. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, Sanders, building on the work of Montefiore, Schoeps and other Jewish scholars writing a few decades earlier, has done an effective job of demonstrating that first-century Judaism was more grace-based than many modern New Testament scholars authors had thought.

According to Sanders, and according to the Jewish Pauline scholars that Sanders refers to, there is more grace in Judaism than what Paul's letters suggest. In his works Sanders has also highlighted the writings of Jewish Pauline scholars who claim that Paul misunderstood Judaism. Again, Chapter 4 discussed how, over one hundred years ago, Montefiore had said that Paul had misunderstood Palestinian Judaism at least.<sup>824</sup>

However, Sanders criticizes previous Christian approaches towards Judaism for another reason. Sanders criticizes the logical pathway followed by Christian scholars in their evaluation of Judaism. Instead of starting with looking at Judaism itself, Christian scholars, in attempting to understand Judaism, have often begun with Paul. Paul's statements then become the lens through which Judaism is evaluated and understood. As Sanders says:

Despite this attempt to base the depiction of the Judaism which is placed in antithesis to Paul on an investigation of Jewish literature, one cannot avoid the suspicion that, in fact, Paul's own polemic against Judaism serves to define the Judaism which is then contrasted with Paul's thought.<sup>825</sup>

E.P. Sanders comes close to proposing that the traditional method of Christian scholarship should be reversed. Instead of starting with Paul and using Paul as the lens by which to understand Judaism, Christian scholars would do well to first try to understand Judaism on its own terms and then use their grasp of Judaism as a window through which to understand Paul.

Sanders in fact, does this in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. The first 428 pages summarize his findings with respect to Judaism, and only afterwards does he spend a further 125 pages examining Paul's thought in the light of his previous research. Other scholars,

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<sup>824</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 5.

<sup>825</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 4.

Albert Schweitzer being one of them, have had similar approaches. Yet in many ways Sanders goes further than those who came before him. His study of Judaism has been more extensive and his attempts to view Paul through a Jewish lens have resulted in more radical interpretations of Paul's thought.

Without a doubt much can be gained by Sanders' approach. From it new light has been shed upon Paul's thinking on various matters. At the very least, Sanders' findings are interesting. One example of the benefits of this Judaism-first interpretation is found in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* where Sanders sees the salvation by grace, but judgment by works themes that one finds in Paul, to be typically Jewish.<sup>826</sup> Elsewhere Sanders uses his Judaism-first approach to comment on the longstanding debate over whether Paul endorses predestination or free will. Sanders points out that first-century Jewish thinkers asserted both and did not see a contradiction between these two viewpoints. Likewise, says Sanders, Paul, a former Pharisee, asserted both providence and individual free will. Paul similarly did not see a need to resolve the differences between these two viewpoints.<sup>827</sup> Paul is not being inconsistent, he is merely following an approach common to other Jewish thinkers of his time. As Sanders says:

Jews who combined God's providence and human free will did not work them out philosophically, just as they did not worry about combining monotheism and dualism. They did not see the need to solve the problem of the incompatibility between God's providence and human free will, and they simply asserted both. One statement would apply to one case, another to another. Thus, for example, confessions that everything is in the hands of God come when people consider the whole sweep of history; statements of free will appear when they think of individual human behaviour.<sup>828</sup>

In any case, Sanders' realizations have shifted interpretations of Paul, and other scholars coming after Sanders have been influenced by his approach. Below (see § 9.7) we will examine some of Terry Donaldson's questions regarding Paul's approach to sin within the Jewish covenant compared to his approach to sin within the Christian covenant. Another critique of Paul's approach came with Heikki Räisänen's book *Paul and the Law*, published in English in 1983. Räisänen here claims that Paul is inconsistent with his arguments.<sup>829</sup>

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<sup>826</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 517.

<sup>827</sup> Sanders, E.P., *Judaism: practice and belief, 63 BCE-66 CE*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 418-419.

<sup>828</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 251.

<sup>829</sup> Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 4, 6, 11, 28.

Räisänen also claims that, by speaking about the law as if the Jews had made it a way of salvation, Paul misrepresented Judaism.<sup>830</sup> In these and other works written by scholars influenced by the New Perspective, suspicions have been raised regarding Paul's depiction of Judaism. Thus New Perspective scholars and their forbears entered the debate as to whether or not Paul misunderstood Judaism.

As stated in Chapter 5, Sanders and other New Perspective scholars, however, are not as forthright as Räisänen in stating that Paul misunderstood Judaism. New Perspective scholars are more likely to claim that Christian scholars in recent centuries have misunderstood Paul. Yet even in their attempts to defend Paul, New Perspective scholars raise questions about Paul's approach. For instance, in his own writings Sanders also, in a more subtle fashion, casts doubt upon New Testament portrayals of Judaism. In his *Judaism* Sanders states:

Christian tradition represented Jesus as criticizing them for obeying insignificant rules and shirking 'the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith' (Matt. 23.23). According to Mark 7 Jesus accused the Pharisees of following 'the tradition of the elders' in order to avoid keeping the commandments of God (7.9). Throughout the early chapters of the synoptic gospels the Pharisees (and scribes) are depicted as harassing Jesus over what we now regard as trivia, such as allowing his disciples to pluck grain on the sabbath (Mark 2.24). Another way of putting this sort of accusation was to say that the Pharisees observed only the externals of the law, such as washing cups, while being spiritually dead within; that is they were hypocrites (Matt. 23.25)... I doubt that these particular passages are actually words of Jesus, but for the present point it does not matter. The accusations were made by someone. Were they true?<sup>831</sup>

In the same book Sanders challenges John's description of Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple. Sanders writes: "The improbability of John's account will be further seen if we focus on his statement that Jesus drove out cattle as well as sheep and goats. The Bible never requires an ordinary individual to sacrifice a bovine."<sup>832</sup>

It appears that Sanders may be mistaken. The Greek word for cattle in John 2:14 is βοαϑ, which is the accusative plural form of a word which in the nominative singular is βουϑ. In the LXX version of Leviticus 1:2-3, and Numbers 28:11, and 29:2 βουϑ is referred to as a

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<sup>830</sup> Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 176-184; Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old*, 175-176.

<sup>831</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 445.

<sup>832</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 88.

sacrificial animal.<sup>833</sup> In any case, in saying what he does Sanders reveals his somewhat suspicious take on the New Testament's understanding of Judaism.

In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Sanders also throws some doubt on Paul's approach to Judaism. Near the book's beginning Sanders states that he proceeds along the following philosophy. He writes:

What is needed, in other words, is to compare Paul on his own terms with Judaism on its own terms, a comparison not of one-line essences or of separate motifs, but of a whole religion with a whole religion. It is this task which we wish to undertake here, and which now needs to be methodologically described.<sup>834</sup>

Of course it is commendable to try to hear Judaism on its own terms. Sanders has raised a loud cry in that regard and he has done a very valuable service to New Testament scholarship by doing so. However, while there are obvious benefits to Sanders' approach, there are weaknesses as well. At the very least one can say that he has a bias. With the possible exception of the Luke-Acts manuscript, the New Testament was written by Jews who had opinions about and direct experience of first-century Judaism. Yet implicit in the above quote is a criticism of Paul's understanding of Judaism. Sanders states that Judaism has to be understood on its own terms, it cannot be viewed through the lens of Paul's description of it. Also implicit in the above quote is Sander's viewpoint that Paul is no longer a practitioner of Judaism. Paul is part of a separate religion now and his religion needs to be compared with the religion of the Jews as something distinct from it.

Sanders may be quite correct or at least partially correct in taking this approach. But it is worth pointing out that if we agree with Sanders' approach, we are left with an internal contradiction in the logic of the New Perspective scholars and their predecessors. On the one hand, Davies, Schweitzer and others have argued that Paul should be viewed as a Jewish thinker. In trying to demonstrate links between Paul's thinking and first-century Judaism Sanders is essentially also placing Paul in the same camp. Yet, while agreeing that Paul is very Jewish, Sanders also casts doubt on Paul's own interpretations of Judaism. J. Julius Scott comments on this aspect of Sanders' work: "Finally, those who would deny the presence of a legalistic view of religion in at least some intertestamental Jewish quarters tend

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<sup>833</sup> This insight arose in part from conversations with Prof. Vincent Erikson and Dr. Paul Knudtson.

<sup>834</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 12.

to discount the one source which has the best claim to reflect the views of average Jews, the New Testament.”<sup>835</sup>

Echoing the complaint above, one has to ask what is wrong with the notion of Paul being able to offer an opinion as to what constitutes Judaism? After all, Paul, unlike modern scholars, was a first-century Jew. Paul also claims to be an expert on the topic [see Section 9.5]. It seems contradictory to on the one hand to go to great lengths to demonstrate how Jewish Paul is, and then secondly deny that he, as a Jewish leader and former Pharisee, can offer a valid opinion of Jewish religion. One might be tempted to ask if Sanders has provided enough evidence to treat the New Testament views on Judaism less credibly than previous scholars.

Is it useful to do what Sanders has done and attempt to understand Judaism on its own terms as a means to understanding Paul? Absolutely. Yet is it fair or wise to shut Paul out of the discussion as to what constitutes the essence of proper Judaism? Likely not.

## **9.2 WHAT WAS PAUL RESPONDING TO? ARE THE NEW PERSPECTIVE IDEAS CREDIBLE?**

While some scholars like Montefiore raise doubts about Paul’s interpretation of Judaism, various New Perspective scholars say that it is not Paul who misunderstood Judaism, but we who have misunderstood Paul. For instance, as we have seen in Chapter 5, James Dunn has suggested that Paul was chiefly concerned with eliminating the barriers created by the Jew-Gentile ethnic divide within Christian communities. In Chapter 2 we also saw Dunn has also suggested that the phrase “works of the law” in Paul’s thought chiefly focuses on the ceremonial or ritual aspects of the Jewish law, not on its ethical aspects. Also, in *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, Sanders writes concerning his opinion that scholars have misinterpreted Galatians:

We have become so sensitive to the theological issue of grace and merit that we often lose sight of the actual subject of the dispute. Many scholars who view the opposing missionaries as Jewish Christians nevertheless see Galatians 3 as Paul’s rebuttal of Judaism. But the quality and character of Judaism are not in view. It is only the

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<sup>835</sup> Scott, J. Julius Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 275.

question of how one becomes a true son of Abraham, that is, enters the people of God.<sup>836</sup>

There are difficulties with Sanders' statement which become clear if one tries to say something similar in a more familiar setting. If one was to say, "I am not criticizing Anglicanism, only the fact that Anglicans embrace infant baptism." Or if one is to say, "I am not criticizing Baptist theology or the Baptist denomination overall, just their insistence that baptism cannot take place in infancy." It is obvious in both cases that the statements ring hollow. A religious group's understanding of the covenant entry point is rather central to the theology of that religious group overall.

Yet, before we look more closely at what Paul might have been responding to in his letters and whether or not he might have misunderstood Judaism, it is worth asking whether New Perspective views on the theology of Paul's opponents in Galatia are credible. In this Section we will explore some of the difficulties with some of the New Perspective answers. Understanding these issues is key to arriving at a proper interpretation of Paul and to further assessing if Luther correctly interpreted Paul.

Undoubtedly, Paul did not want ethnic divisions within his churches. However, there are some difficulties in claiming that this was Paul's central concern. For instance, if the central issue for Paul was eliminating ethnic divisions within the church so that the Gentile and Jewish communities could have fellowship and meals together, then why would Paul have been distraught that Gentiles were becoming circumcised in Galatia? Seyoon Kim mentions this very problem with Dunn's arguments. If the Galatian Gentiles did not mind doing the works of the law, why was Paul so upset about them doing them?<sup>837</sup> After all, if a single community was what Paul wanted, then the Galatian Judaizers had very ably managed to accomplish this goal. If every male in the church received circumcision, then there would be no issues regarding a divided table fellowship. Paul's overall aim of achieving a single community of believers without an ethnic divide running through the middle of it would have been achieved, just by everyone adopting Jewish ceremonial laws rather than everyone ceasing to follow Jewish ceremonial laws.

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<sup>836</sup> Sanders, E. P. *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 19.

<sup>837</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 62.



Also, if Paul's main goal was to achieve ecclesiastical unity then the Judaizers had something rather compelling about their case. Supposedly today, when different sects of Jews gather for joint worship events, in order to foster unity, one of the common practices is to follow the practice of the strictest group present. Doing so ensures that all people can participate. If the gathered group chooses to adopt the rules of the most liberal sect, the Reformed, then attempting to conduct worship in that manner would automatically exclude the more traditional sects, the Orthodox and Conservative. Hence, to include everyone, the decision is that, at least for the duration of that event, the strictest approach to the law will be followed. It would have made sense for this line of reasoning to apply with Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first century also. Attempts by Judaizers to make the Gentiles conform to the Jewish law might have been viewed as the most inclusive approach.

Furthermore, following from what we have seen above, one of the weaknesses of thinking that Paul's main goal was to eliminate ethnic boundaries within the Christian church was that Paul's opponents might have used this very same argument to advance their goals. The Judaizers could have approached the Gentile Christians in Galatia and said, "Christians should all be one, as Jesus had said, and we wish to have a single unified Christian community where everyone can eat and have fellowship together without worrying about the problems of ethnic divisions. Therefore, in the interests of unity, each of you should become Jews and follow the Torah. Doing this will allow us to have a single community without being bothered by ethnic differences. In addition, some further benefits will come your way if you become circumcised, you will become not merely Christians, but children of Abraham and inheritors of the covenant promises."

If Paul's central aim was to create a unified community made up of diverse ethnic elements he might have opted for the Judaizing approach himself. Of course, however, Paul does not approve of this. He becomes furious that the Gentiles have adopted circumcision. Moreover, at the very real risk of creating divisions within the Galatian community himself he speaks rather harshly about the Judaizing party among them. Dunn does not provide a convincing argument, simply because Paul's opponents in Galatia could have used the exact same argument to drive home their point. Sanders inadvertently also provides a further argument against the idea that ethnic divisions alone might have been the motivating factor behind Paul's theology. Stendahl argues that the early church fathers "correctly" understood

what Paul was actually writing about: the ability of Gentiles to join the Christian church without needing to follow the Jewish ceremonial laws. Stendahl writes that it, (and I quote):

was not until Augustine, more than three hundred years after Paul, that a man was found who seemed to see, so to say, what made Paul ‘tick’, and who discerned the center of gravity in Pauline theology: justification. Now the reason for this strange state of affairs is that the early church seems to have felt that Paul spoke about what he actually spoke about, i.e. the relationship between Jews and Gentiles—and that was no problem during those centuries.<sup>838</sup>

However, in effect, Sanders suggests that not all early Christians had this view of Paul’s thought. At least one section of James, he states, was written to refute what he calls a misunderstanding of Paul’s ideas:

Moreover, James explicitly takes issue with an aspect of Paul’s teaching: ‘a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.’ (James 2:14). In this section the author cites the case of Abraham, apparently alluding to chapter 4 in Paul’s letter to the Romans. (James, I hasten to add, misconstrued Paul’s emphasis on faith as excluding works. Paul steadfastly believed in good works).<sup>839</sup>

If Sanders is correct and the passage in James 2:14 is written to refute Paul or a misunderstanding of Paul, then this passage causes huge difficulties for Stendahl’s thesis as well as Dunn’s. This passage supplies indirect evidence for how Paul’s teaching was understood by at least some early Christians in the first century AD. Stendahl claims that the early Christians understood that Paul was writing about how it was that Gentiles can get into God’s covenant without following the Jewish food laws etc. James, however, indicates that this was not universally the case. At least one community of early Christians, those surrounding the author of the Book of James, thought that Paul was writing about what the Protestants and Luther thought that Paul was writing about, that is, how does one get into heaven, is it by faith or good deeds? The author of James just did not like the juxtaposition of faith versus good deeds. James gives evidence for how early some Christians understood Paul’s teaching and it lets us know that Stendahl is not correct in assuming that *all* the early Christians interpreted Paul as finding a way for Gentiles to enter the covenant without following the Jewish ceremonial law.

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<sup>838</sup> Stendahl, K., *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 16.

<sup>839</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Apostle’s Life, Letters, and Thought*, 148.

Similarly, Sanders' point causes difficulties for Dunn's claim that Paul was chiefly preaching against the use of the Jewish ceremonial laws, the laws that kept Jews and Gentiles separate from each other. Again, in the James passage above, "works" are not interpreted to be chiefly concerned with the ceremonial aspects of the law, but the moral aspects. Clearly, a certain sector of the early Christian community interpreted Paul to be teaching about what the Reformers thought he was teaching about.

No one really knows what arguments Paul's opponents in Galatia were providing, and there has been much speculation on this front. However, the New Perspective scholars may very well have, by accident, discovered the rationale or at least part of it for Paul's opponents in Galatia, but likely not for Paul. Church unity alone through the elimination of ethnic differences cannot be Paul's chief motivation for what he writes in Galatians and Romans. There must have been other motivations.

The question then remains what arguments might Paul have been responding to? The answer to this might have to do with the diverse nature of first-century Judaism.

### **9.3 JUDAISM: DIVERSE?**

According to the contemporary Jewish scholar Shaye Cohen, one of the problems with Christian scholars' analyses of Judaism is that they erroneously assume that first-century Judaism was much more theologically and ritually unified than it actually was. As a result, scholars make sweeping generalizations such as: "Judaism was legalistic," or "Judaism is grace-based." In this respect Sanders and Bultmann share something in common. They may disagree on the nature of Judaism, but both seem to think that Judaism was a unified enough movement that general statements about it can be made. Sanders, in fact, talks about a phenomenon which he calls "common Judaism,"<sup>840</sup> and it is on the basis of his evaluation of "common Judaism" that he describes Judaism as being "grace-based" or "covenantal nomist."

Although he is not directly responding to the New Perspective, Cohen repeatedly points out the fact that Judaism is and was more diverse and less definable, theologically, at

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<sup>840</sup> Sanders, E. P., *Judaism, practice and belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE*, ix, 10, 11, 91, 195, 236, 261, 262, 448, 450-451.

least, than Christianity is and was. In his book, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Cohen is at pains to point out that Judaism was not then, nor is it now, a monolithic whole. Cohen writes:

What is 'Judaism'? Is it the religious behavior of all people who call themselves and are known to others as Jews, Israelites, and Hebrews? Or is it an ideal set of beliefs and practices? . . . If the former, Judaism is a relativistic construct of human beings, and no variety of Judaism is any more 'correct' or 'authentic' than any other. . . . If the latter, Judaism is a body of absolute truths revealed by God and/or sanctioned by tradition, and those interpretations of Judaism which more nearly approximate these absolute truths are truer and more authentic than those which do not. . . . Another objection to the term 'orthodoxy' is that it introduces a meaningless concept into ancient Judaism. The church councils of the fourth century prescribed the acceptable limits of Christian practice and belief, defined by the canon, established creeds, and anathematized sects and heresies. In other words, these councils defined 'orthodoxy.' . . . Judaism, by contrast, has never had either a pope or church councils, and without these there is no objective criterion for the determination of 'orthodoxy.' The temple was the central authority against which the sects defined themselves, but the high priests lacked sufficient power to be able to state which forms of Judaism were 'orthodox' or to exclude from the temple those Jews whose practices they condemned. After the destruction of the temple in 70 C. E., the rabbinic movement gradually assumed the role of central authority, but that process took several centuries, and the rabbis were never unified sufficiently to elect a pope or to convene synods....The word 'orthodox' was not applied to a variety of Judaism until the nineteenth century, when the opponents of reform organized themselves under the banner of 'orthodox and Torah-true Judaism.'<sup>841</sup>

Because of the focus on law-observance as opposed to theology, and because of the lack of central organization, it was difficult to define Judaism. Cohen maintains that this was an issue not only in antiquity, but even today. In fact, the answer to the question, "What is Judaism?" is still, at some level, obscure.

Also, as opposed to Montefiore, Cohen argues that there was no such thing as a pure Judaism of Palestine versus the Hellenized Judaism of the diaspora. All forms of Judaism, from Judea and from elsewhere, were Hellenized to some extent.<sup>842</sup> Greek was widely spoken in Palestine.<sup>843</sup> Cohen states that books, like *Judith*, which were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, still follow Greek literary conventions.<sup>844</sup> Even the chief judicial body

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<sup>841</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 135-136.

<sup>842</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 36-37, 41.

<sup>843</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 39-40.

<sup>844</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 43.

in Judaism was known by a Greek name, the *Synedrion*, or Sanhedrin.<sup>845</sup> The question then, says Cohen, was not whether to Hellenize, but *where* and *how far*.<sup>846</sup>

Not only were the cultural influences upon Judaism diverse, theologically Judaism was not by any means unified. Josephus describes the differing approaches to free will within Judaism. The Sadducees allowed for free will, the Essenes were more deterministic and the Pharisees were in between.<sup>847</sup>

Cohen states that attempts to analyze the theology of Judaism are difficult because, unlike Christianity and Islam,<sup>848</sup> Judaism is not a creedal religion. In this respect Judaism was similar to the pagan religions of antiquity which focused more on correct ritual action than on belief. Also, Judaism's defining documents are not chiefly theological in nature and in this sense offer a much broader and wider scope for theological belief than a *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a "Westminster Catechism," or *Calvin's Institutes* or a *Book of Concord*. It was only during the Middle Ages, says Cohen, that in response to the challenges from Christianity and Islam, Maimonides created some creeds for Judaism as well.<sup>849</sup> Cohen writes: "Although 'theology' figures prominently in the literature that is extant from the period between the Maccabees to the Mishnah, Judaism was defined more by its practices than its beliefs." Again Cohen writes:

Christianity is a creedal religion, and Christian sectarianism too is creedal. The vast majority of the sectarian debates of early Christianity centered on theological questions ... Judaism, however, was not (and in a large measure, is not) a creedal religion. The 'cutting edge' of ancient Jewish sectarianism was not theology but law.<sup>850</sup>

Not only was Jewish theology not uniform, there was also no Jewish equivalent to a uniform ecclesiastical structure. Synagogues were very individual and haphazard in structure, theme, theology and organization. Cohen writes:

There was no United Synagogue of Antiquity that enforced standards on all the member congregations ... it is most unlikely that any single group or office controlled all the synagogues of antiquity.... Perhaps the rabbis after 70 consolidated their power over some of the synagogues in the land of Israel, but since synagogues were in the

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<sup>845</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 45.

<sup>846</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 45.

<sup>847</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 110.

<sup>848</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 61-62.

<sup>849</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 62, 103.

<sup>850</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 128.

hands of local communities, and sometimes in the hands of local individuals, the rabbis certainly did not have the means to establish rapid and effective control overall the synagogues of the Roman world.<sup>851</sup>

Because of the lack of central synagogue authority Cohen also speculates that it was unlikely that the curse against the heretics at the Council at Jamnia would have succeeded in expelling Christians from the synagogues everywhere since there was no central organization to enforce uniform procedure everywhere.<sup>852</sup> Both Cohen and Stemberger, in his update of Strack's book, further state that it took the rabbis several centuries to fully exert their influence over the Jewish communities around the world.<sup>853</sup> Cohen writes:

In 70 C.E. the temple was destroyed.... The Jewish community ... no longer had a recognized social elite...and the Jews of the diaspora no longer had a centre that bound them together. This was the vacuum the rabbis tried to fill. Ultimately they succeeded, but victory was gained only after a struggle.... The exact date of the triumph is hard to determine, but it was not earlier than the seventh century C.E.<sup>854</sup>

Along the same lines Cohen adds: "Both Palestine and the diaspora must have seen a large variety of people who were called *didaskalos* or *rabbi* by their followers (cf. Jn 1:38). Not all of them were Pharisees or members of that select fraternity which produced the Mishnah and related works, and not all of them taught the same interpretation of Judaism."<sup>855</sup> It used to be, says Cohen, that scholars thought that the meeting of Jewish rabbis at Jamnia after the destruction of the temple resulted in the canonization of the Old Testament. However, because of the disorganized nature of Judaism in this period and afterwards, scholars no longer argue that this is the case.<sup>856</sup>

Jacob Neusner, in his forward to G. Stemberger's recent revision of H.L. Strack's classic volume *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, agrees with Cohen in stating that first century Judaism was difficult to define. First century Jews could not be grouped together into a single normative set of beliefs or single normative believing body. This fact then changes how we read the Scriptures. Neusner writes: "But if there was no one Judaism, but

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<sup>851</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 114-115.

<sup>852</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 227.

<sup>853</sup> Strack H. L. & Stemberger. G., *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>854</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 221.

<sup>855</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 122-123.

<sup>856</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishna*, 186.

only Judaisms, then the exegesis of the Christian canon, as much as of the Judaic one, requires substantial revision.<sup>857</sup>

Moreover, the question really is whether Judaism can be easily classified at all. After all, Christianity is not so easily classified either. Attempts to make blanket generalizations about Christian thought often have erroneous results. Certain Christians believe in sacraments, others do not. Eastern Christians understand salvation differently than Western Christians. Furthermore, there are vast theological differences within a single Christian denomination or grouping. These differences exist even though many of these groups have supposedly unifying church structures or unifying theological statements. Judaism is no less complex; in fact, it might be even more complex and less classifiable than Christianity.

Some Christian scholars have recognized the diversity present in first century Judaism. Although he does not approach the subject in near the same detail, even before Cohen and Neusner, Raymond E. Brown stated that: “Judaism was far from monolithic.”<sup>858</sup> Strack and Stemberger speak about the “many layered nature of Palestinian Judaism in the rabbinic period.”<sup>859</sup>

On this front, however, Sanders is not in step with these other scholars. In order to defend his thesis that “covenantal nomism” provides an accurate description of first-century Jewish theology, Sanders has to assume that there was a certain level of commonality among the various diverse approaches to Judaism. In his book *Judaism, practice and belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE*, Sanders argues that there was a set of shared beliefs which all Jews, regardless of sect or persuasion held in common. Sanders calls this “common Judaism.”<sup>860</sup> He writes:

One of the main ambitions of this book is to encourage readers to see common. Judaism and common Jews as devoted to the law.... Pharisees shared common Judaism, not only the general spirit of zeal for God and his law, but also obedience to the commandments in everyday life. They did not invent common Judaism, nor did other people share it because of the Pharisees’ influence. On some points the Pharisees were distinctive.<sup>861</sup>

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<sup>857</sup> Jacob Neusner, forward to *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, by H. L. Strack & G. Stemberger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), ix.

<sup>858</sup> Brown, Raymond E., *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel According to John, Volume 1*, LIX. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.), 1966.

<sup>859</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 55.

<sup>860</sup> Sanders, E. P., *Judaism, practice and belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE*, ix, 10, 11, 91, 195, 236, 261, 262, 448, 450-451.

<sup>861</sup> Sanders, E. P., *Judaism, practice and belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE*, 450-451.

Sanders' attempts to advance a "common Judaism" have been challenged by a number of scholars. One of them is J. Julius Scott Jr. who writes:

Sanders supports his case by a careful magisterial study.... An adequate response to him would entail an equally thorough investigation and analysis of these sources. There are, however, some general reasons to question his conclusion. First, the conglomerate nature of intertestamental Judaism causes us to raise our eyebrows at any claim that one view encompassed all. There was no normative position in this period. Second, as Moore points out, the rabbinic writings give evidence of a merit motive as well as of higher motives for law keeping.... These evidences that fear of punishment and hope of reward motivated law keeping did not emerge in the post-A.D. 70 period out of nothing. They had earlier roots.... Fourth, this kind of legalistic thought is found in some intertestamental writings.<sup>862</sup>

Later on the same author adds: "When we take cognizance of both the religious views which the New Testament writers took pains to oppose and various statements in intertestamental and rabbinic writings, we see a picture very different from that proposed by Sanders."<sup>863</sup> In addition to the four varieties of Palestinian Judaism described by Josephus, Scott is able to identify other varieties of Judaism that existed in the Diaspora.<sup>864</sup>

The kind of magisterial review of Jewish sources that Scott alludes to above has likely been completed more recently. The book *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* is a compilation of articles by various scholars who have examined in detail various parts of Jewish literature from roughly 200 BCE to 200 CE. As the subtitle suggests, one of the central themes of this book is to state that there was a variety of theological approaches within first-century Judaism. In particular, Sanders' claims that there was a "common Judaism" from 63 BCE to 66 CE,<sup>865</sup> and that covenantal nomism is the best description of the pattern of religion of this "common Judaism," is carefully examined. In the end the findings of the scholars, taken together, demonstrate that first-century Judaism was much more diverse than Sanders allows and that his "covenantal nomism" does not adequately fit all varieties of Judaism during that time.

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<sup>862</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 274.

<sup>863</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 276.

<sup>864</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 229-231.

<sup>865</sup> D A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions" Pages 505-548 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Carson, O'Brien, Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 538.



Carson, in addition to Peter O'Brien and Mark Seifrid, edited the contributions that make up the afore-mentioned book. In summarizing the contributions of the various authors, Carson claims that Sanders has overemphasized the grace-based nature of Judaism. As one example of this, in his summary of the article *Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature* by Philip Alexander, Carson says:

Modern attempts to synthesize a Tannaitic theology may be usefully placed into three groups. Older entries like that of F. Weber's *System der altsynagogalen palastinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud* (2nd ed. 1880) were permeated by a deep anti-Jewish animus, and were especially insistent that Judaism is characterized by legalistic works-righteousness. More recently there has been an array of works that have culminated in Sanders's seminal tome. These works have been much more informed than the earlier studies, and certainly more sympathetic to Tannaitic Judaism. But they are not without weakness. Alexander argues that all of the writers in this group have either been Christians of liberal Protestant background, or Jews influenced by liberal Protestant ideas. All seem tacitly to regard it as axiomatic that a religion of works-righteousness is inferior to a religion of grace. Weber had accused Judaism of legalistic works-righteousness. They set out to defend it against this charge, but nowhere does any of them radically question the premise that there is something wrong with a religion of works righteousness.... Where Weber overemphasized law, they may be overemphasizing grace. Now, however, there is a rising third group, best exemplified by the work of Fredrich Avemarie. This 'highly competent and subtle analysis of the rabbinic texts' argues for the inconsistency of these texts: salvation can be either through law or through grace.<sup>866</sup>

Carson argues that while Sanders is not wrong to state that some first-century Jews held to a covenantal nomist approach, Sanders cannot succeed in claiming that this approach was universally true throughout first-century Judaism. As Carson writes: "[It] is not that Sanders is wrong everywhere, but he is wrong when he tries to establish that his category is right everywhere."<sup>867</sup> Many Jewish writings from around the time of Jesus and Paul emphasized a works-based covenant which is more legalistic than Sanders' covenantal nomism allows. However, at least one book, the *Testament of Moses*, depicts a Judaism which is more grace-focused than covenantal nomism would allow for either. In the *Testament of Moses* one enters the Jewish covenant through grace and one stays-in the covenant through grace as well.<sup>868</sup> Sanders' attempt to find uniformity in first-century Judaism thus runs into difficulty.

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<sup>866</sup> Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions," 526.

<sup>867</sup> Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions," 543.

<sup>868</sup> Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions," 520.

Carson writes: “Second Temple Judaism reflects patterns of belief and religion too diverse to subsume under one label. The results are messy.”<sup>869</sup>

By pointing out the diversity that existed within first-century Judaism, the scholars who have contributed towards *Justification and Variegated Nomism* describe a Judaism which is essentially in harmony with Cohen’s description. In light of these findings even a New Perspective scholar, James Dunn, admits that Sanders overstated the elements of grace within Judaism. Dunn writes:

A case can certainly be made that Sanders overreacted in his polemical response to the traditional Christian portrayal of rabbinic Judaism. In asserting a dynamic interaction between covenant and law (“covenantal nomism”) he may have focused too closely on the covenant dimension and underplayed the nomistic dimension (*covenantal nomism*). Second Temple and rabbinic writings may well be less consistent than Sanders argued. The point, however, is that by focusing on the covenant dimension so intensively Sanders was bringing to the foreground a balance that had previously been ignored (*nomism*) or correcting a previous imbalance (*covenantal nomism*). He is certainly not to be countered by retreating back into the older Judaism equals law portrayal. Both factors (covenant and law) must be given weight, as well as Paul’s own dependence on Israel’s understanding of divine righteousness. The dynamic between the two is different between different Jewish writings—as it is between different Christian writings. But that there is such a dynamic cannot and should not be disputed.<sup>870</sup>

Even prior to the publication of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Scott, in his 1995 book *Jewish Backgrounds to the New Testament*, speaks about a scholarly consensus concerning intertestamental Judaism. Part of this consensus centers around the fact that Judaism was a diverse movement.<sup>871</sup> He states that most scholars now agree that even Josephus’ four-fold division of Judaism is inadequate to cover all of Judaism’s intricacies.

Although Cohen does not make this observation himself, it is obvious that the observation that first-century Judaism was hard to define sheds light on the debates surrounding the New Perspective. Can one effectively defend Sanders’ thesis that Judaism was grace-based, or Bultmann’s contention that it was legalistic, when it is difficult to define exactly what Judaism was? Furthermore, quite apart from the respect which Sanders laudably encourages to be offered towards the Jewish community, it is another matter whether Sanders

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<sup>869</sup> D A. Carson, “Introduction” Pages 1-6 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Carson, O’Brien, Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 5.

<sup>870</sup> Dunn, “New Perspective View,” 183.

<sup>871</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds to the Old Testament*, 20-21, 195-196, 228, 229-231.

correctly depicts Judaism. In his article within *Justification and variegated nomism*, Roland Deines states that “A lot of what Sanders calls ‘Common Judaism’ can thus be labeled in a wider sense as pharisaic influenced Judaism.”<sup>872</sup> It seems that many modern scholars, even New Perspective scholars such as James Dunn, are admitting that Sanders has overstated both Judaism’s grace-based nature as well as its uniformity. Cohen’s thesis appears to have won out.

More importantly, as Neusner has said, the fact of first-century Judaism’s vast diversity offers significant insights into the way that Judaism is treated both within Paul’s letters and in other parts of the New Testament.<sup>873</sup> The New Testament writers are not just critiquing Judaism; some of the time they are also attempting to define Judaism and how it should be practiced. When one understands this, the statements made about Judaism in the New Testament become clearer. All of this helps us assess whether Paul misunderstood Judaism and whether Luther misunderstood Paul.

#### **9.4 JUDAISM AS UNDERSTOOD IN THE GOSPELS**

In the previous Section we examined the conclusions of Cohen, Brown, Neusner, Scott, and others concerning Judaism’s theological diversity. These scholars adhere to this perspective in opposition to Bultmann who seemed to treat Judaism as unified enough to describe it as legalistic, and Sanders who claims that Judaism was at least unified enough to describe factors which existed as part of a covenantal nomist “common Judaism.” Scott claimed that a scholarly consensus had arisen agreeing that first-century Judaism was diverse. If we can assume that this scholarly consensus is correct, then starting from this point we see what light this idea sheds upon the New Testament’s statements about Judaism, and ultimately on Paul’s statements about Judaism.

Later on in this Chapter we argue that Paul understood that the Judaism of his day was diverse. He also understood that this very diversity was confusing for the congregations with which he was in contact. As a result, before Paul offers his critique of Judaism and Judaizing

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<sup>872</sup> Roland Deines, “The Pharisees Between ‘Judaisms’ and ‘Common Judaism,’” Pages 443-504 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Carson, O’Brien, Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 494.

<sup>873</sup> Jacob Neusner, forward to *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, by H. L. Strack & G. Stemberger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), ix.

Christians in a book like Galatians, he first has to offer a definition of what he is critiquing. When Paul defines Judaism, he explains that in his understanding, the covenant given under Moses should be followed in a very rigorous fashion by those who wish to adhere to it.

However, before we look at Paul's approach to Judaism in detail, it is worth asking if similar approaches to Judaism can be found in other New Testament books. Are other New Testament writers attempting to not only critique Judaism, but also define what proper Judaism actually is? Furthermore, when the other New Testament writers do this, do they argue that the Jewish covenant in their understanding should be followed in a rigorous fashion? To this end, we will examine the approach to Judaism found in the gospels.

"Old Perspective" Protestant scholars such as Bultmann and those of his generation have classed Judaism as being legalistic. Further, Bultmann claims that Jesus was attacking Jewish legalism. In his *Primitive Christianity* Bultmann states:

The preaching of Jesus must be considered within the framework of Judaism. Jesus was not a 'Christian' but a Jew, and his preaching is couched in the thought forms and imagery of Judaism, even where it is critical of traditional Jewish piety.... It is in fact a tremendous protest against contemporary Jewish legalism, thus renewing under changed conditions the protest of the ancient prophets against the official Hebrew religion.<sup>874</sup>

Moltmann also appears to be influenced by Bultmann's views on this matter, claiming that Jesus had a message of grace in opposition to the Judaism of the prophets, Pharisees, and Zealots.<sup>875</sup>

Yet when one examines the New Testament one finds that the challenges to Judaism in the New Testament cannot be narrowed down to one issue alone. In fact, there were several challenges directed towards Judaism in the New Testament and not all of these critiques center around the issue of grace versus legalism. This is especially apparent in the gospels.

In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Sanders argues that when Bultmann attempted to portray Judaism as legalistic he was mistaken. This study similarly argues that Bultmann was mistaken when he states that Jesus' chief concern was to attack a rigorous approach to the Jewish covenant. The New Testament certainly reacts against first-century Judaism, but if we

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<sup>874</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 71-72.

<sup>875</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 170, 203-205.

read the New Testament in the light of Cohen's findings we discover that the reaction against Judaism was more complex than Bultmann allows.

One could perhaps say that overall there are at least three general critiques made towards Judaism in the New Testament. There is first the critique made from within the Jewish covenant, which can be called the pre-Easter critique. The New Testament writers are often attempting to establish, first, the proper understanding of Judaism and the proper practice of the Torah. Secondly there is the post-Easter critique. In addition to arguing about the proper approach to Judaism, the New Testament writers attempt to understand the relevance or lack of relevance that the Torah holds for the Christian community after Easter and after Pentecost. Finally, the third critique derives from the second. If the Messiah has come, what has his arrival done to the definition of those who now are considered to be the people of God?

Regardless of the specific range of issues there is certainly a gulf in understanding between the earliest Christians and other Jewish sects. Some scholars have suggested that the critical attitudes that one finds among the earliest Christians towards groups such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees might stem from possible links with the Essene community. In his article in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Roland Deines points out some similarities between the Essenes and the early Christians.<sup>876</sup> Raymond E. Brown says that there are at least some parallels between the Qumran community and John's Gospel,<sup>877</sup> and John A. T. Robinson suggests that John the Baptist possibly received some training and influence from the Essene community.<sup>878</sup> Robinson points out as well that several scholars state that the Gospel of John also shares similar theological vocabulary to what one finds in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>879</sup> The Essenes were noted for having one of the stricter versions of Judaism.<sup>880</sup> Also, the Essene community at times had an antagonistic relationship with other Jewish sects. If there were links between the Christian community and the Essene community, as Robinson thinks, it perhaps explains some of the antagonism that one finds between John the Baptist and Jesus on the one hand, and the Pharisees and Sadducees on the

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<sup>876</sup> Roland Deines, "The Pharisees Between 'Judaisms' and 'Common Judaism,'" 502.

<sup>877</sup> Brown, Raymond E., *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel According to John, Volume I*, LXII-LXIV.

<sup>878</sup> Robinson, John, A.T., *The Priority of John* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 41.

<sup>879</sup> Robinson, *The Priority of John*, 78.

<sup>880</sup> Roland Deines, "The Pharisees Between 'Judaisms' and 'Common Judaism,'" 497.

other. In any case, whether there were links between John the Baptist and the Essenes or not, in the gospels the Essenes are not mentioned, but one very often finds Jesus and John the Baptist sparring with the Pharisees over what constitutes a proper definition and understanding of the correct practice of Judaism itself. These ongoing disputes are illustrative of the critique from within.

One of the main challenges which the gospels offer to the Pharisees and Sadducees is over the matter of physical descent from Abraham. Does descent from Abraham on its own qualify one to be a covenant-member in good-standing, or is something else needed in addition?

In the grace-based Palestinian Judaism that Sanders describes, physical descent from Abraham is tremendously important for determining the one's status before God. As we have already mentioned, Sanders states that "getting-in" or election comes to Jews at birth through their descent from Abraham. In his most recent book Sanders refers to the following passage in the Mishnah: "All Israelites have a share in the world to come, for it is written. *Thy people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the world of my hands that I may be glorified.* And these are they that have no share in the world to come ... " (*m. Sanh.* 10.1).<sup>881</sup>

Of course, the Mishnah records not just the statement made above, but the lengthy discussions that rabbis through the years had made about that statement. In representing itself in this fashion, the Mishnah claimed to represent ancient traditions within Judaism that predated the Mishnah's own final composition.<sup>882</sup> Many scholars do in fact think that the Mishnah does represent older Jewish traditions.<sup>883</sup>

As a result, although there were at least one hundred years between the writing of the gospels and the writing of the Mishnah, Sanders at least, along with many others, claims that "the early rabbis were the intellectual heirs of the Pharisees."<sup>884</sup> Furthermore, Sanders states that the above passage goes back to the first century or earlier and thus gives evidence for the grace-based nature of Palestinian Judaism. The above passage again demonstrates that

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<sup>881</sup> Danby, Herbert trans. *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 397 (emphasis added).

<sup>882</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 10, 447. "I propose, here as elsewhere the rabbis were the spiritual heirs of the Pharisees."

<sup>883</sup> Brown, Raymond E., *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel According to John, Volume I*, LXI. See also Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 43; See also Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 63.

<sup>884</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought*, 45.

although, yes, the Rabbis thought that one could lose one's place in the world to come through sin, the default option for any descendant of Abraham who is a member of Israel was to be saved. Sanders, along with many others, claims that this kind of thinking illustrates the essential doctrine of the Pharisees during the New Testament period.<sup>885</sup>

One finds support for this in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. In his article Philip Alexander writes:

Sin does not ultimately break the bond between Israel and God. There is no final rejection of the people. A polemical (possibly anti-Christian) intent may lie behind this, but it is also entirely in keeping with the general thrust of rabbinic teaching. The rabbis may be here thinking primarily as lawyers. The covenant is a fact: Israel and God entered into it at Sinai. This fact can never be altered; there is no going back. This is not to say, however, that all Israel will finally be saved, whatever they do. Early rabbinic sources regularly categorize certain groups of Jews as excluded from the world to come. The most important text is m. Sanh. 10: . . . The broad categories of sin which exclude from the world to come are heresy, witchcraft and blasphemy.... The Tannaitic sources do not speculate on the proportions of the saved to the damned. However, . . . the impression one gets is that they expected most of Israel in the end to share in the world to come. One way or the other the covenant would be fulfilled.<sup>886</sup>

The belief that descent from Abraham was sufficient to accomplish salvation in most cases persisted after the New Testament period. As Richard Bauckham says in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*: "Though it is a much later text, it is worth comparing the Medieval Hebrew *Story of Daniel* according to which, at the end of history, the three patriarchs will stand at the three entrances to Gehenna and ask God to remember his covenants with them. In response God will be merciful to all Israelite sinners and none of them will be sent to Gehenna."<sup>887</sup>

If, as is likely, the Pharisees of Jesus' day believed that descent from Abraham was usually sufficient to accomplish entrance into the age to come, then it is interesting to note that the theologies of the Mishnah passage that we just referred to above and John's

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<sup>885</sup> In a conversation in the summer of 2014 with Rabbi Yisroel Miller of the Orthodox synagogue in Calgary, Canada, he too referred to this Mishnah passage as the one that articulates first century Jewish opinions on salvation.

<sup>886</sup> Philip Alexander, "Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature," Pages 261-302 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Carson, O'Brien, Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 296.

<sup>887</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Apocalypses," Pages 135-188 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Carson, O'Brien, Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 159.

statement to the Pharisees and Sadducees recorded in Matthew 3:9-10 seem to be opposed to each other. “And do not even begin to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you that God is able out of these stones to raise-up children to Abraham. Already the axe has been placed next to the tree-roots. Therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (translation B.A. Eriksson).

While Pharisaic teaching, as indicated by the Mishnah, states that with a few exceptions those who were descended from Abraham would be saved, John the Baptist’s teaching, as represented by Luke and Matthew, states the opposite. It is not physical descent primarily, but one’s deeds which qualify one to escape judgment. It seems that John is directly responding to the kind of theology that later was written down in the Mishnah. Furthermore, regardless as to whether the Mishnah accurately represents Pharisaic teaching or not, what is clear is that John thinks that the Pharisees and Sadducees were *too lax* in their approach to the Jewish covenant, *not too legalistic!* The writers of these gospels depict a John the Baptist who claims that true Judaism is of a much stricter variety than what the Pharisees and Sadducees understand it to be.

Sanders agrees that Matthew offers a critique of reliance upon election as a means of salvation. In *Judaism*, Sanders writes: “Finally, we note the criticism of the Jews for holding to the election and relying on it in Matt. 3:9, where John the Baptist is said to have warned Israel not to have confidence in their descent from Abraham.”<sup>888</sup>

The same theme is picked up in John’s gospel, a separate tradition from the Synoptics. This time the challenge comes from Jesus. In John 8:31-41,<sup>889</sup> John describes a scene where Jesus is arguing with a group of Jews who are again possibly Pharisees. In this scene, once more, Jesus’ audience claims that their standing before God rests on their physical descent

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<sup>888</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 264.

<sup>889</sup> <sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”<sup>33</sup>They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’” <sup>34</sup>I answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup>The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. <sup>36</sup>So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup>I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. <sup>38</sup>I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.” <sup>39</sup>They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,<sup>40</sup>but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. <sup>41</sup>You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father – even God.” (John 8:31-41 ESV).



from Abraham. Jesus responds that physical descent from Abraham is not enough to secure a good standing in God's covenant. Instead, behaviour is important.

It is worth noting also that Jesus asserts the same opinion elsewhere. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, for instance, the rich man, a descendant of Abraham, ends up in hell. In this parable there is no indication in the parable that this rich man would have done one of the acts such as blasphemy or witchcraft or heresy that the Mishnah says excluded one, as a Jew, from being part of the age to come. The rich man was merely indifferent to the needs of the poor man on his doorstep. According to the Mishnaic understanding, the rich man should not have ended up in torment, but in Jesus' parable he did. Jesus here then is advocating a more rigorous approach to Moses' covenant than the Mishnah. According to Jesus, physical descent from Abraham alone cannot bring about salvation.

The Swedish biblical scholar Goran Larsson also argues that Jesus advocated a rigorous approach to law observance. Larsson writes:

According to the common Christian interpretation, Jesus cancels the law of revenge and replaces it with the law of love. Such an understanding contradicts Jesus' own words about "the law" twenty verses before (Matt 5:17-18), which have been accurately characterized by a Jewish scholar in the following significant way: "In all Rabbinic literature I know of no more equivocal, fiery acknowledgement of Israel's holy scripture than this opening to the Instruction on the Mount. Moreover, even a superficial comparison with the other commandments that Jesus quotes makes it obvious that he does not cancel them but rather focuses on their deepest significance. In Matthew 5:21 and 27, for example, he stresses that sin against the commandments begins in the heart, exactly in accordance with the "ten words" and their traditional Jewish understanding. Since Jesus does not cancel the commandments in the previous cases but rather confirms their validity, it is safe to assume that this is the case even in Matthew 5:38-39. The Greek text does not really state a "but" between Jesus' biblical quote ("You have heard that it was said") and his exposition of the quote ("But I say to you"). A more adequate translation, which does justice to the Greek syntax, should rather say. "And I even say to you." In this respect virtually all translations are misleading, probably reflecting the common prejudice that Jesus speaks against "the law."<sup>890</sup>

Most of the time it seems that Jesus' version of Judaism is stricter than what the scribes and Pharisees practiced. Jesus, for instance, wants the law not just to be obeyed externally, but also to be followed internally. In the Sermon on the Mount he argues: adultery should not

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<sup>890</sup> Larsson, Göran. *Bound For Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 168.

only be avoided but lustful thoughts as well; murder not just steered away from, but angry and contemptuous thoughts about others too. Larsson also writes about this as follows:

Second, we have to differentiate between the outward judicial aspect of a law and its inner, ethical implications. There is certainly a difference between a law code and a sermon, between the most minimal aspect of a law in strict legal terms and its maximal consequences for people who want to love the Lord with all their hearts and their neighbor as themselves. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus focuses on the latter aspect.<sup>891</sup>

New Testament professor at Emory University, Luke Timothy Johnson, adds an explanation as to how Jesus interprets the law:

Second, Jesus does not cite other authorities to support his own interpretation as the essential protocol in Talmudic circles would dictate. He assumes a direct and unique authority to interpret: “Amen, I say to you.” He claims direct knowledge of the original intent of Torah and, therefore, of God’s mind. How does the Messiah interpret Torah? He radicalizes it in three ways. In the case of murder and adultery (5:21-30), he demands an *interior disposition* corresponding to outer action. For the prohibitions of swearing and divorce (5:31-37), he demands an *absolute adherence* rather than a mitigating casuistry (though cf. 19:9). In matters of human relationships (5:38-47) he demands a *response that goes beyond* the letter of the commandment. These antitheses serve to assert Jesus’ authority to interpret for the kingdom.<sup>892</sup>

Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus often echoes John’s concerns that the Pharisees are too lax not too legalistic, or at the very least they are legalistic about the wrong things. Jesus makes statements such as: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:20; NIV). In addition, Larsson writes about Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin (namely things which were not even directly commanded), and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matt 23:23). [The continuation makes it clear, however, that not even here is it a matter of one aspect stressed at the expense of the other]: “these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.”<sup>893</sup>

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<sup>891</sup> Larsson, *Bound For Freedom, The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 169.

<sup>892</sup> Timothy-Johnson, Luke, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1999), 201. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>893</sup> Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 194-195.

Even in the places where Jesus appears to break a commandment, it can be argued that Jesus is not setting aside the law but stating which commandments take priority over others in certain select cases. New Testament professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Dale C. Allison Jr., in his article *Jesus and the Torah*, mentions that the rabbis would regularly debate amongst each other as to the proper course of action should various commandments conflict. Allison writes:

In a less anxious setting, the rabbis debated at leisure the tensions between the various commandments and which have priority of obedience over others. What do you do, for example, when your father implores you to do something that desecrates the Sabbath? Do you dishonor your father or do you dishonor the Sabbath? Do you circumcise a male infant on the eighth day if that day is the Sabbath? Which commandment should you break? Sometimes imperatives cannot be harmonized and the rabbis knew this fact.<sup>894</sup>

Allison argues that Jesus follows this approach to the law even when he appears to be breaking the law. Allison writes:

So it is with Jesus. Jesus nowhere extols breaking the Sabbath, but he breaks it if doing so restores a human body to wholeness or feeds the hungry. Parents should be honoured, as the Decalogue enjoins and as Jesus repeats in Mark 7 and 10, but if showing such honor hinders hearkening to the call to discipleship, then it must slide. Compassion prevails over the Sabbath, discipleship outweighs filial obligation.<sup>895</sup>

Again, Allison writes:

In both these episodes, Jesus puts one commandment before another. He is not rejecting a rule; he is acknowledging exceptions to a rule, even as his Pharisaic opponents do in Mark 7 when they put Corban before honoring parents. In other words, Jesus recognizes that two commandments may sometimes conflict with each other, in which case one must choose between them. This, in and of itself, implicitly concedes that the Law is not perfect, or at least not perfectly applicable.<sup>896</sup>

In describing Jesus' approach to the Law, Johnson argues that in general Jesus was not attacking Judaism per se. Rather, Jesus attacked the religion of the Pharisees. Among other issues that Jesus had with the Pharisees, he saw them emphasizing lighter rather than weightier aspects of the law.<sup>897</sup> In this sense then Jesus also criticizes the Pharisees for

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<sup>894</sup> Allison, Dale C., "Jesus and the *Torah*," Pages 75-96, in *The Law in Holy Scripture* (ed. Charles Gieschen: St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 89.

<sup>895</sup> Allison "Jesus and the *Torah*," 89.

<sup>896</sup> Allison "Jesus and the *Torah*," 85.

<sup>897</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 199.

offering a version of Judaism which is too “man-made.” Pharisaic Judaism focused excessively on rabbinical interpretations of the laws rather than the essence of the law (Mt 15:9).

Jesus does not just criticize the Pharisees for adding to the law in a way that could work to their benefit. He criticizes them for adding to it in any fashion. One could argue that Jesus was being more faithful to the Torah than his opponents when he made this accusation. According to Deuteronomy 4:2 one does not only violate God’s law when one breaks a commandment, but one violates God’s law when one adds to it also.

In his book, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, Scott speaks about the tendency to add to the law on the part of some Jewish leaders.<sup>898</sup> In addition, in several places Sanders also states that the Pharisees and other Jews added to the Torah.<sup>899</sup>

One of the main distinguishing marks of the Pharisaic party was commitment to ‘the traditions of the elders’ as supplementing or amending biblical law. Josephus explains that the Pharisees had passed on to people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses, for which reason they are rejected by the Sadducean group.<sup>900</sup>

Sanders says that Philo followed the same practice: “He [Philo] and other Diaspora Jews made up new readily observable, purity rites, so that they could feel pure.”<sup>901</sup> In his article in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Roland Deines cites Hannah Harrington who states that while both the Essenes and the Pharisees added to the law the Essenes generally made the laws more strict and the Pharisees less strict.<sup>902</sup>

The New Testament reports the importance that the Pharisees attached to “traditions” that add to the law. On two occasions Jesus explicitly confronted them in their practice. The two traditions that Jesus challenges are: handwashing, which is not a biblical requirement (Mk 7:1-8), and the practice of clearing property or goods *korban* (Mk 7:11). A man could declare something *korban*, “an offering”, dedicated to God, but maintain the use of it during his own life. Jesus is said to rebuke the Pharisees for abusing this device by using it to shelter goods or money from other claims or retaining it for their own use (Mk 7:12).

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<sup>898</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 170-171.

<sup>899</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 223, 230.

<sup>900</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 421-422.

<sup>901</sup> Sanders *Judaism*, 218.

<sup>902</sup> Roland Deines, “The Pharisees Between ‘Judaisms’ and ‘Common Judaism’,” 497.

Matthew's gospel goes even further, portraying the scribes and Pharisees as essentially ignorant of the true nature of the Torah. Johnson writes: "The scribes and Pharisees, we are to infer, do not understand the very Torah to which they cling, for they do not recognize its full expression in the words and deeds of Jesus. They are told by him, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' for I came not to call the righteous but sinners."<sup>903</sup> As opposed to this, Jesus tried to establish his own definition of what authentic Judaism actually was. Again Johnson writes:

The polemic is not, consequently, an attack by Jesus on the Jewish people generally, much less an expression of anti-Semitism. It is rather, an attack on the Jewish leaders of Matthew's own day: The polemic thus establishes distance and distinction between rivals who claim to be an authentic realization of Judaism, God's people. Some of the polemic, furthermore, such as the charge of saying but not doing, (23:3,13) is standard for disputes between ancient philosophical schools.<sup>904</sup>

Thus, Jesus in the gospels appears to be advancing his own definition of what constitutes proper Judaism. It is not surprising that Jesus and John the Baptist as represented by the gospels would make such statements, if, as Cohen and Neusner argue, there was no standard definition of Judaism in the first century. Given that situation, it is only to be expected that the leaders of the nascent Christian community would offer a definition of what they considered to be "true" Judaism.

Matthew's gospel portrays Jesus as the ultimate and definitive interpreter of the Torah. Matthew shows a Messiah who offers his interpretation of the Torah both through his words and his deeds.<sup>905</sup> Greek, like Spanish or Slovak, is language where personal pronouns are not normally used. Instead, the verb forms are specific enough that the personal pronoun is understood without being included in the statement. As a result, one does not normally use words such as "I" in the phrase "I am going," or "he" in the phrase, "he is going," one can simply say, "am going" and it is understood that "I" is the subject doing the action. In languages like these, when one includes an unnecessary personal pronoun in a statement, it has the effect of adding emphasis to the statement. This is exactly what Jesus does in several places in the Sermon on the Mount. His inclusion of personal pronouns in the Sermon on the

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<sup>903</sup> Luke Timothy-Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 201.

<sup>904</sup> Luke Timothy-Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 198.

<sup>905</sup> Luke Timothy-Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 202.

Mount makes it emphatic. By doing this, Jesus is again stating that his new interpretation of the law is the correct and definitive one.

Furthermore, the fact that Jesus would offer a definite interpretation of the Torah is not by any means strange. Many Jews during the first century and before expected that when the Messiah came he would in fact offer a new and definitive interpretation of the Torah.<sup>906</sup>

Johnson writes: “Jesus’ interpretations assert God himself as the only adequate and ultimate norm for the kingdom (5:48). For the Matthean community, then, Torah meant the words of Scripture as interpreted by Jesus Messiah.”<sup>907</sup> Again Johnson writes:

How has Jesus come to fulfill and accomplish Torah? Matthew has already shown us how Torah as witness is being brought to completion by the deeds and words of Jesus. But the term “fulfill” in this place also bears the sense of “reveal.” By his teaching, Jesus will show the true and “full” meaning of God’s Torah. The proper understanding of “these commandments” here is critical. The keeping of them will make people lesser or greater in the kingdom. We know that the kingdom in question is precisely that announced by Jesus. The phrase, “these commandments,” then does not refer to the Torah taken alone or to the Torah as interpreted by the Pharisaic tradition but *to the Torah as it is interpreted by Jesus Messiah*. Remember Jesus’ final commission: “teaching them all that I have commanded you” (28:20).<sup>908</sup>

The Pharisees identified wisdom with the study of the Torah. Johnson goes on to suggest various passages where Jesus makes himself equivalent to wisdom.<sup>909</sup> Johnson concludes his assessment of Jesus’ approach to the Torah with this: “Finally, the *Shekinah* was said to dwell among even two or three who studied Torah together. We heard Jesus tell his community in 18:20: ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.’ In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is teacher of Torah, fulfillment of Torah, and the very personification of Torah.”<sup>910</sup>

Further evidence for the fact that Jesus showed respect for the Mosaic covenant and was attempting to offer what he understood to be a proper interpretation of it, can be found in Jesus’ hermeneutical practice. It appears as if to some extent Jesus (and later Paul) followed rabbinic systems of argumentation and Scriptural analysis. Scott has developed his own

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<sup>906</sup> Luke Timothy-Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 199.

<sup>907</sup> Luke Timothy-Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 201.

<sup>908</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 200. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>909</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 203.

<sup>910</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 204.

analysis of how Jesus used rabbinic hermeneutical systems.<sup>911</sup> However, the following description in this thesis comes from what can be deduced when examining Strack and Stemberger's discussion of rabbinic systems of argumentation and interpretation.

Strack and Stemberger write: "The rabbis' treatment of Scripture may often seem arbitrary, but it is in fact controlled by certain rules (*middot*). Over time, rabbinic tradition summarized these in groups: the 7 rules of Hillel, 13 of Ishmael, and 32 of R. Eliezer (ben Yose ha-Gelili)."<sup>912</sup> They go on to say that "The seven *middot* of Hillel were not invented by Hillel but constitute a collation of the main types of argument in use at that time."<sup>913</sup> If we can agree with the premise that Hillel merely collected and did not invent commonly held rules, then, since Hillel is thought to have died around the year 10 CE, it is likely that Jesus would have been familiar with at least some of these rules. In fact, one can see that many of Jesus' and some of Paul's arguments fall within the patterns described by Hillel. The legend that Hillel was a teacher of Jesus is almost certainly false.<sup>914</sup> The fact, however, that such a legend existed could be an indication of Hillel-like patterns of argument that one finds in the statements attributed to Jesus.

The first of Hillel's rules or *middot* is *Qal wa-homer*, or the principle of working from the less significant matter to the more significant matter (and *vice versa*).<sup>915</sup> Jesus uses this approach when responding to the accusation that it was improper to heal on the Sabbath. His response was to argue that if his opponents would certainly rescue their own donkeys from wells in the event that those animals had fallen in on the Sabbath day, why not then heal a human (Mt 12:9-13)? Jesus uses the same approach when counseling his followers not to worry about their own future welfare. If God takes care of the sparrows he will certainly take care of the followers of Jesus (Mt 6:25-34).

The second rule, *Gezerah shawah*, involved arguing from the basis of an analogy. The rabbis counsel against using this approach too freely. They state that its use must be supported by tradition.<sup>916</sup> The comparison Jesus makes between the kingdom of heaven and a

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<sup>911</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 129-131.

<sup>912</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 18.

<sup>913</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 18.

<sup>914</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 71.

<sup>915</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 21.

<sup>916</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 21.

grain of mustard seed likely falls into this category (Matthew 13:31-32). In addition, Jesus' several "I am" statements, such as when he claims to be the "bread of life," (John 6:35) or "the light of the world," (John 8:12) make use of this approach. In Galatians 4:24-31 Paul states outright that he is using allegory in this fashion when he compares his gospel to God's covenant with Isaac and the covenant of Mt. Sinai to the covenant God made with Ishmael.

*Binyan ab mi-katub ehad*, is the third rule.<sup>917</sup> It is literally means the "founding of a family".<sup>918</sup> Strack and Stemberger state that: "By means of this exegetical norm, a specific stipulation found in only one of a group of topically related biblical passages is applied to them all."<sup>919</sup> *Binyan ab mi-shne ketubim* is the fourth rule.<sup>920</sup> Strack and Stemberger state that it "is the expression for the same kind of derivation based on two biblical passages."<sup>921</sup> The Apostle Paul appears to make use of these two kinds of argumentation in Galatians 3:6 and 3:11 when he takes the two passages in the Old Testament where faith and righteousness are linked, Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4, and uses them to establish the principle that righteousness arises from faith as opposed to the "works of the law."

Jesus seems to be following these two principles in Matthew 22:36-40. In these verses he links the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, in Deuteronomy 6:5, with the command to love your neighbour as yourself in Leviticus 19:18.

The fifth rule is *Kelal u-ferat u-ferat u-kelal*, where one qualifies the particular by the general and the general by the particular.<sup>922</sup> Jesus makes use of this approach in Matthew 23:16-22 when he chastises the Pharisees for swearing by the gold in the temple and not by the temple itself, and for swearing by the gift on the altar and not the altar itself. Jesus is in essence stating that the Pharisees are applying the principle of *Kelal u-ferat u-ferat u-kelal* improperly and that his own application of this principle makes more sense.

The sixth rule, *Ke yo se bo be-maqom aher* is the principle of reasoning from deduction.<sup>923</sup> Jesus makes use of this approach in Luke 11:14-23 when he responds to the Pharisees' accusation that he casts out demons by the prince of demons. Another example of

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<sup>917</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 22.

<sup>918</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 22.

<sup>919</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 22.

<sup>920</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 22.

<sup>921</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 22.

<sup>922</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 22.

<sup>923</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 22-23.



this approach is shown in Luke 20:37-40 and Matthew 21:31-32 where Jesus starts with the passage: “I am ... the God of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Jacob” (Ex 3:6; ESV), and from this he deduces that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive and thus that the dead are raised. Paul likely makes use of this approach in Galatians 3:15-18. Here he argues that since God’s covenant and promise to Abraham were made before the giving of the law to Moses, then the ability to remain within the covenant of Abraham is not dependent upon the keeping of Moses’ law.

The seventh and final rule of Hillel is *dabal ha-lamed me-inyano*.<sup>924</sup> In this approach to interpretation the interpreter bases his or her Scriptural interpretation on the surrounding Bible passages; the context around which the Bible passage he or she is interpreting is found. Jesus uses this approach when discussing divorce in Matthew 19:1-9. Jesus states: “from the beginning it was not so” (Matt 19:8; ESV). Jesus claims that his prohibition of divorce takes precedence over Moses’s more lenient attitude because of where it is in the Bible that marriage is first established. Jesus points out that marriage was first set up by God along with the other acts of creation, “in the beginning.” The implication is that because the Torah through Moses was given later, and further along in Scripture, the original intent of God in the act of creation takes precedence over the Torah.

Why does Jesus’ method of Scriptural interpretation matter? The fact that Jesus appears to use Rabbinic methods of Scriptural interpretation yet again demonstrates that Jesus was not attempting to set aside the law, nor was he attempting to set aside Judaism, rather he was arguing for proper interpretations of both. If Jesus would have been attempting to abrogate the law, he would have had no reason to argue that his interpretation of the law was correct, or defend his approach using Rabbinic reasoning. Even statements that Jesus makes such as “My yoke is humble and my burden is light,” (Matt 11:28-30), do not abrogate the law. There still is a yoke and a burden. Jesus just says that his interpretation is the better one.

As we have seen above, the traditions recounted by the Gospels and Luke-Acts portray a Jesus and a John the Baptist who also adhered to an exacting understanding of the Jewish covenant. Yet, one might also ask what a study of the approaches to Judaism in the gospels has to do with Paul. After all, most scholars think that Paul’s letters were written at least two

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<sup>924</sup> Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 23.

decades before the gospels were written down. If this was the case can one really claim that the approaches to Judaism found in the gospels really represent a parallel to Paul's own approaches? In response to this it is worth noting that since John the Baptist's criticisms of the Pharisees in Matthew 3 are echoed in Luke 3, many scholars place these texts within the Q material. Assuming that Q was in fact a document that existed in some fashion, and secondly, assuming that the theories of many current Q scholars on the early origins of the Q document are correct,<sup>925</sup> it thus would be difficult to claim that this passage could have a late origin.<sup>926</sup> Even if the gospels and Acts are written after Paul's letters, the traditions inside those books regarding law observance speak to the earliest pre-Easter version of the Jesus community, where all followers of Jesus and John the Baptist saw themselves as still under Moses' covenant. As well, most scholars think that the gospel of John was compiled late in the first century. Hence, in both the Q material, which is deemed to be early, and in John's gospel written down long after Paul was dead, we see similar theological positions. Both Q and John display concerns with the Pharisaic view that physical descent from Abraham alone qualified one for eternal life. It would appear that the gospels testify to the fact that Paul was not alone in arriving at a rigorous definition of Judaism.

In this Chapter we argue that the New Testament's writers responded to the fact of Judaism's diversity by attempting to define their own understandings of the Jewish covenant. Hence many of the statements about Judaism in the New Testament are not really focused on the issue of grace versus works at all. Rather, they are attempts to define what Judaism is, in the face of the confusing diversity of practice among Jews in the first century.

Jesus, as portrayed in the gospels, understood that there were a variety of interpretations of Judaism in his day. He too then responds to this diversity by advancing his own interpretation of how correct Judaism should be practiced. The Jesus and John the Baptist portrayed in the gospels would have agreed with Sanders in stating that Palestinian Judaism, as it was practised, was often very grace-based. "All Israel has a share in the life to come," is a gracious and inclusive statement. Yet in the view of Jesus and John the Baptist,

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<sup>925</sup> Bultmann, Rudolph, *Theology of the New Testament, Volume 1*, 42.

<sup>926</sup> Koester, Helmut, *Ancient Christian Gospels, Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990), 87. John Kloppenborg wrote a book entitled: *The Q-Thomas Reader*. Koester here refers to John Kloppenborg who argues that the bulk of the Q material was written down within 10-20 years of Jesus death.

this is precisely the problem. Jesus and John the Baptist and the Synoptic gospel writers do not regard the kind of Judaism as advocated by the Pharisees as valid and authentic. The religion of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes is too lenient, too lax. According to Jesus and John the Baptist, all Israel does not have a share in the life to come. Real Judaism demands more.

As stated before, as opposed to the Judaism commonly practiced in Palestine, Jesus advances his own interpretation. In his definition Jesus says at least three things about the law. First it should be practiced rigorously. Physical descent from Abraham alone does not make one a covenant-member in good standing; behaviour also matters. Second, when it comes to understanding what is involved in proper behaviour God looks not only upon the outward act, but also on the inner attitude. Jesus opts for a maximal interpretation of the law rather than a minimal interpretation of the law. Third, Jesus, like the Pharisees, acknowledges that occasionally laws conflict with each other. When this is the case, the exceptions to the law or the priorities of certain laws versus others need to be followed in the way that Jesus himself demonstrates.

As mentioned above, in this thesis we argue that Judaism is critiqued at least twice and likely three times in the New Testament. First there is a critique from within, an attempt by the nascent Christian community to define what in their opinion constitutes the proper approach to Judaism. Then there is a second critique, the critique from without. This second critique represents the attempt by the nascent Christian community to explain why Judaism, even if practiced properly, is not adequate, post-Easter. The third critique concerns the definition of the people of God, post-Easter. For the most part the gospel texts focus on the critique from within. However, the Luke-Acts manuscript contains both critiques. John the Baptist chides the Pharisees in Luke 3, offering a critique from within. Again, John argues that true Judaism is much more exacting than what the Pharisees practice and that physical descent from Abraham does not automatically entitle one to escape the judgment or inherit life in the age to come. Yet the post-Easter critique, the critique from without is offered in the Luke-Acts manuscript in Acts 15:10-11. Here the Law is described as being a burden too great for either the disciples or their ancestors to have carried or carry. In the next section we begin examining Paul's letters. All three critiques appear within Paul's writings as well.

## 9.5 RIGOROUS JUDAISM: PAUL'S CRITIQUE FROM WITHIN

An attempt to understand Paul's views of Judaism in effect responds to one of the essential elements of the New Perspective. The New Perspective was launched by Sanders' claim that Judaism was a grace-based covenant. As James Dunn has said, "Old Perspective" scholars used to think that Paul was reacting to a legalistic Judaism in the same way that Luther was reacting to a legalistic Catholicism. According to Dunn, Sanders' claim that Judaism was grace-based overturned the "Old Perspective" paradigm. However, modern scholars have discerned that Judaism was neither legalistic, as Bultmann had thought, nor grace-based as Sanders has claimed, but diverse in its outlook. This discovery affects how we understand Paul's reaction to the Jewish covenant. Paul's reaction is not one dimensional, but multi-layered.

What we have discussed so far gives some background to Paul's critique of Judaism. As expressed earlier, Cohen, Neusner, Scott and others argue that the Judaism of the first century was not theologically nor organizationally unified. The New Testament writers were aware of Judaism's diversity and they reacted to it by attempting to advance their own interpretations of what constituted "correct" Judaism. As we have seen, this is apparent in the gospels.

Paul, too, was aware of Judaism's diversity. Paul chose to critique Judaism and argue for the superiority of the covenant of Jesus over and against the covenant of Moses. However, given Judaism's diversity, Paul had a problem. How does one challenge something so diverse? It was not enough then for Paul to critique Judaism; he first had to identify the kind of Judaism that he was actually critiquing. Thus first, before offering his appraisal of Judaism, Paul had to relay his interpretation of what he considered to be a proper understanding of the Mosaic covenant. Once he had defined Judaism then he could offer his counter arguments.

Similar to what we have seen above, Paul offers three critiques of Judaism in his letters. He gives first a critique from within, a definition of true Judaism. To this he later adds the critique from without, the post-Easter critique. Building on these two critiques, in his letters he finally redefines who it is who belongs to the people of God.

Paul's need to define Judaism before critiquing it is apparent in several of his letters. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 4:6 Paul states that he does not go beyond what was written.

He says that his approach is “by the book” so to speak. This can possibly be construed as a subtle attack on what Sanders describes: the tendency of people like the Pharisees or Philo to add to the law.<sup>927</sup> Regardless of what he is responding to, it is clear that Paul here states that his theology is more faithful than that of others. Philippians also contains several challenges to Jews and Judaizing Christians.

Yet Paul’s attempts to define “proper” Judaism are especially apparent in Galatians and Romans. The correct understanding of both Judaism and law-observance is, in part, what is at issue in Galatians. Paul’s audience appears to be confused as to what the implications of circumcision actually are. As a result he needs to discuss what true Judaism involves.

To buttress his case, Paul trots out his credentials. Paul claimed to be an expert when it came to Judaism. He states that he advanced in it faster than many others his age (Gal 1:14). He claims that he was more zealous for the traditions of his ancestors than most others (Gal 1:14). He mentions that he was so zealous that he had been a persecutor of the church (Gal 1:13, 23). He also talks about receiving divine visions which had informed his theology (Gal 1:11-12, 15-16).

The credentials Paul boasts about in Galatians are mentioned in Acts and Paul’s other writings. Elsewhere he states that when he had been a Pharisee he practiced a form of Judaism which was more demanding than most of his peers (Phil 3:4-6). Acts relates that Paul was a leader in launching a persecution of the church and that he was given authority by the Jerusalem chief priests to harass the Christians in Damascus. Scholars have debated how accurate Acts actually is as a biography of Paul. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Acts supports the idea that Paul was a leader amongst the Jewish people and was trusted by other leaders to lead a delegation to Damascus.

In any case, based on his previous authority as a leader among the Pharisees, Paul advances his approach to Judaism. He claims that Judaism, if it is to be properly practiced, is much more exacting than what was being advocated by his Judaizing opponents. In Galatians Paul says: “Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law” (Gal 5:3; NRSV).

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<sup>927</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 218, 421-422.

In Galatians 6:12-13 Paul complains that those who are advocating circumcision in Galatia do not themselves keep the law. From this it appears as if Paul's opponents in Galatia had told the Galatians that if they were to be circumcised they would *not* have to obey the entire law. This accounts for the confusion about the Jewish covenant that Paul thinks that he needs to rectify.

Paul clarifies that if the Galatians get circumcised, they in fact will remove themselves from the covenant offered through Christ. In addition, they will put themselves under the covenant of Moses and they will then be obliged to fully follow the complete Torah. "Listen, I Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law" (Gal 5:2-3; NRSV). This is similar to what one finds in Romans 7:1-4 where Paul says that we have died to the law through the body of Christ. In stating this, Paul is essentially saying that the covenant of the law is incompatible with that of Christ.

Philippians 3:2-3 echoes the same sentiments. Here Paul upholds the Christian faith as being superior to those who practice circumcision, whom he calls "those who mutilate the flesh" (Phil 3:2; ESV).

Granted, in Corinthians, Paul does not seem to be concerned with those who were Jews before they became Christians, but rather is concerned with those who seek circumcision after they become Christians (1 Cor 7:17-20). Nevertheless, for these Gentiles he again warns that the Torah and the covenant of Christ are incompatible. In 2 Corinthians 3:14-18 Paul states:

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (ESV).

Romans maintains a similar approach when it comes to Paul's definition of "true" Judaism. In Romans 2 Paul insists on a more demanding approach to the Mosaic covenant than what he thinks is often adopted by other Jews. Paul says: "You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must

not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law” (Rom 2:21-23; ESV).

Other parts of Romans echo Paul’s strict definition of Judaism that he offers in Galatians. In Romans 2:25 (ESV) Paul says: “For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law. But if you break the law your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.” The above passage is in keeping with what Paul says in Galatians 5, when he states that if a man gets circumcised then he must keep all of the law.

In some ways the Romans passage above not only echoes the strict version of Judaism in Galatians 5, it even offers a yet stricter version. If a man is circumcised he has already “gotten in,” and as Sanders says, “getting into” the Jewish covenant takes place through grace. However, Paul seems to say something different. Since, according to Paul, violations of the law cause a person’s circumcision to become uncircumcision, and since this happens so easily and readily, then Paul seems to suggest that for all intents and purposes it is almost as if the “getting in” symbolized by circumcision, no longer takes place by grace but happens through works. It is interesting that here and elsewhere Paul does not mention any possibilities of atonement within the Jewish covenant.

Whether Paul has picked up this rigorous interpretation of Judaism from intertestamental sources or from the Old Testament prophets, or his own reflections, or from the visions he claims to have experienced or from what he had heard about Jesus or John the Baptist, we do not know. Most scholars claim that the gospels were written down after Paul’s letters were written, but of course the gospels are based on earlier traditions, although it is a matter of debate as to how old the traditions are on which they are based. Still, from whatever his source, we can see that Paul thinks that true Judaism is exacting. Paul states that anyone who is circumcised is obligated to follow the entire law.

If Paul was to have misunderstood Judaism in the way that some scholars have suggested, he would likely not have been aware of the rabbinic grace-based understanding of Judaism. This is in fact what Montefiore thinks. Montefiore, of course, claims that Paul had only been exposed to versions of Judaism common in the diaspora and not the Judaism of Palestine. However, if one looks at the statements Paul makes to refute the arguments of his opponents in Galatia, it is quite clear that Paul knows about the kind of grace-based Judaism

that Sanders and Montefiore talk about. It is just, again, that Paul does not regard this kind of Judaism as being an accurate or appropriate representation of the Mosaic covenant.

Certainly, Sanders agrees that Paul denies the Jewish doctrine of the election. Sanders writes:

Although he seems not to have perceived that his gospel and his missionary activity imply a break with Judaism. There are, nevertheless, two points at which the break is clearly perceptible. One is the traditional Jewish doctrine of election, which Paul denies. He appeals, to be sure, to God's covenant with Abraham, and thus his language is often appropriate to understanding the church as "true Israel." But his argument that the covenant 'skips' from Abraham to Christ, and now includes those in Christ, but not Jews by descent, is in fact a flat denial of the election of Israel. The second point at which the break is especially clear is his insistence that it is through faith in Christ, not by accepting the law, that one enters the people of God. Thus he denies two pillars common to all forms of Judaism: the election of Israel and faithfulness to the Mosaic law.<sup>928</sup>

In the next section we explore at least one possible form of the doctrine of the election which Paul perhaps was challenging.

## **9.6 THE VIEWS OF SOME OF PAUL'S OPPONENTS**

Historically, when church leaders have articulated their theologies, most of the time their perspectives have been voiced in response to problems, controversies or other troubling viewpoints. Wright claims that the New Perspective itself is largely a reaction to Bultmann. Paul mentions several opposing theologies in his letters and certainly, some of the time at least, Paul was reacting against adversarial theologies also. Thus in order to understand Paul better it is helpful to attempt to discern the viewpoints of his opponents. After all, in arriving at their interpretations of Paul, New Perspective scholars have in essence included the theology of Paul's opponents into the formulation of their arguments. New Perspective scholars maintain that, in opposition to the Judaizers, Paul was attempting to create a single church community without ethnic divisions. In saying this, they presume that Paul was responding to a group who did not want ethnic divisions erased within the church, or at least who wanted them erased by having everyone become Jewish. What then can we say about the theology of Paul's opponents?

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<sup>928</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 207-208.



In the previous Section we have seen that Paul defined Judaism in a rigorous fashion. It seems, that when he does this, Paul is not reacting to a legalistic Judaism, rather, frequently Paul is responding to a kind of grace-based Judaism. As we have just seen, Sanders agrees that Paul rejects the Jewish doctrine of the election. Knowing this then leads us to ask the question. Could it have also been the case that Paul rejected the form of this doctrine that was later expounded in *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1 where physical descent from Abraham was regarded as essentially being sufficient for salvation? Could Paul also, like John the Baptist in Matthew 3 and Jesus in John 8, have been responding to the notion that descent from Abraham brought one into the covenant and essentially kept one there?

The parallel could be completely accidental, and it is impossible to prove exactly what kind of views Paul's opponents had in Galatia. However, we do know that other Christian communities writing either around the same time as Paul or afterwards were also responding to idea that descent from Abraham virtually guaranteed salvation. Also, it is interesting to see that many of Paul's arguments could reflect an attempt on his part to respond to a Christianized version of the Pharisaic view that descent from Abraham would allow one to enter the age to come.

To begin with, again, like Jesus and John the Baptist, Paul does not accuse his opponents or his fellow Jews of having too legalistic an interpretation of the Jewish covenant. Rather, he accuses them of misunderstanding the nature of Judaism and making it not strict enough. Paul's statement in Romans 2:5-10 also seems to echo Jesus' and John the Baptist's warning that salvation involves more than just physical descent from Abraham.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom 2:5-10; NASB).

The statement above has a much different tone than the teaching that all Israel has a share in the age to come. Furthermore, when one looks at how Paul responds to his opponents in Galatians it seems more than possible that they were advancing a kind of Christianized version of the same kind of perspectives later found in *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1. Paul's opponents

in Galatia could have been stating that circumcision was necessary because circumcision made one a descendant of Abraham. They could have further said that, once one had become one of Abraham's descendants, then strict Torah obedience was not necessary because virtually everyone who is a descendant of Abraham will enter the age to come and be saved. If Paul's opponents were arguing this viewpoint, this would account for several of Paul's counter-arguments. It would account for Paul maintaining that circumcision required one to obey the entire law. This would respond to the less demanding Judaism of his opponents who believed that physical descent from Abraham would allow for entrance into the age to come. It would also account for Paul's efforts to explain that Christian baptism and not circumcision made one a descendant of Abraham (Gal 3:27-29). Paul further states that one does not enter the covenant through the law, that is, circumcision (Gal 1:6-9; 2:14-18; 3:2-3, 13, 19, 21, 23-25; 4:24-25; 5:1-6; 6:15). It further accounts for Paul's concern to make Abraham important because he was a model of one who had faith, not because he physically sired a nation, or helped initiate a covenant based on the law (Gal 3:6-7, 14; 4:24-25, 29). Also, since those advocating the grace-based Judaism approach think that virtually all of those who are Abraham's physical descendants will be saved, an attempt by Paul to challenge this idea would account for Paul's insistence in Galatians 5:19-21 that yes, certain kinds of sinful behaviour could cause one to fall away from the covenant.

Outside of Galatians, Paul also expresses concern about people claiming descent from Abraham as sufficient for salvation or covenant membership. In Philippians 3 Paul states that followers of Jesus are the "true circumcision," and he stresses again that physical ethnic descent from Abraham alone does not give one confidence in front of God. In 2 Corinthians 11:18-23 (ESV) he states:

Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.... But whatever anyone else dares to boast of – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one – I am talking like a madman – with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.

Here again, in this passage above, we see Paul downplaying physical descent from Abraham as being important in God's scheme of salvation.

In addition, it is obvious that the matter of physical descendant from Abraham was important for Paul's opponents. Sanders claims that most scholars think that Paul's opponents were Jewish-Christian missionaries.<sup>929</sup> Sanders, himself thinks that they were at least Christian missionaries,<sup>930</sup> and they had introduced Abraham into the argument.<sup>931</sup> Similarly, Terry Donaldson states that in his opinion, Abraham is present in Romans and Galatians because Paul's opponents used Abraham for their arguments first.<sup>932</sup> Donaldson writes:

Paul's fundamental claim is that uncircumcized Gentile believers enjoy full and legitimate status before God (which he refers to as righteousness) on the basis of their faith. He has to defend this claim in a situation where others are defining legitimacy and righteousness in terms of Abraham's seed' (Gen 17), and thus are positing circumcision as a prerequisite for Gentiles. Because of the concurrence of faith, righteousness and Gentiles in the biblical story of Abraham, he develops the faith/works argument as a means of turning Abraham into a witness for the defence.<sup>933</sup>

Regardless of whether this in fact was the viewpoint of his Galatian opponents, it is virtually certain that Paul would have encountered the kind of grace-based Judaism later expounded in *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1. If the gospel writers had encountered this viewpoint, and if we see this viewpoint represented in the relatively early Q documents as well as the later gospel of John, then Paul the educated Pharisee would almost certainly have encountered it also.

Consequently, instead of explaining Paul's statements about Judaism by claiming that Paul misunderstood it, the evidence points toward the likelihood that Paul was aware of the type of grace-based Judaism talked about by Sanders. Paul, however, rejected this approach to Judaism as being inadequate. Paul then gives his explanation or definition of what (in his opinion) real Judaism actually happens to be.

If Cohen and Neusner are correct and there was no universally accepted standard definition of true Judaism in the first century, then religious leaders such as Paul were free to advance and defend their own conceptions of Judaism. Not only would Paul have been free to do so, the congregations that Paul ministered to would have demanded that he give his opinion on these important matters. Also, if Paul had been, as he states in Galatians and

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<sup>929</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 19, 48 note 6.

<sup>930</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 46-47.

<sup>931</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 18, 48 note 5.

<sup>932</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 125.

<sup>933</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 126.

Philippians, an early prodigy and relatively advanced in Judaism, and if Paul had, as Acts 22:3 states, been a disciple of Gamaliel, then no doubt Paul would feel that he was properly qualified to advance his own definition of Judaism.

It is easy to speculate about the viewpoint of Paul's opponents in Galatia. Romans, however is more complicated. In some of his other letters, which were written earlier than Romans, Paul has tried to respond to alternate theologies or to those whom he considers to be false teachers or false brethren. For instance, we see that in 2 Corinthians 11:3-6, in similar fashion to Galatians, Paul complains about other gospels and other teachers. The fact that Paul so often complains about such adversarial theologies suggests that he might even have had enemies that followed him around, or at the very least he might have faced common problems in his various churches. No doubt, his previous negative experiences in dealing with adversaries explain why Paul might have been worried that something similar could happen in Rome.

Sanders has similar opinions regarding Paul's motivations for writing what he did in Romans. In *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* he writes:

The basic question is this: does Paul have in view problems in Rome about which he has some information, or is the setting of Romans to be understood in the context of Paul's own ministry, with the controversies in Galatia and Corinth behind him and the meeting with the Jerusalem apostles before him? A second, though related, problem is whether he sees himself as debating with non-Christian Jews, or whether his arguments about the law are still directed, at least in his own mind, to other Christians. The dialogue character of Romans is generally recognized, but with whom does Paul see himself in dialogue? I am on the whole persuaded by those who, following the lead of T.W. Manson, view Romans as primarily coming out of Paul's own situation. It is especially telling that in the long debate about Jew and Gentile in Romans 1-11 there is no direct reference to problems in the community in Rome.<sup>934</sup>

In any case, in Romans, Paul likely wrote what he wrote in part because he anticipated a diverse set of attacks on his ministry and ideas. In response to the potential accusations of his opponents, Paul needed to present to the Roman church an account of what he actually taught concerning his gospel and concerning his stance on the Torah.

Some of these potential attacks are easy to discern. No doubt one of them was the slander which he mentions in Romans 3:8: "And why not say (as some people slander us by

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<sup>934</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 30-31.

saying that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come?’” Second, Paul also likely anticipated having his gospel attacked in the same way it was attacked in Galatia by Judaizing Christians. With regards to this last group, one can ask again whether Paul’s arguments were responding to a grace-based Judaism which maintained that physical descent from Abraham was sufficient to attain eternal salvation. Third, as the authors of *Paul and Variegated Nomism* stress, Judaism was diverse and there were Jewish groups that advocated a rigorous path in order to achieve salvation. Paul responds to this group as well.<sup>935</sup>

As we read through Romans, we see how Paul responds to each of these potential attacks. For instance, in Romans 6:1-2,12-23 and Romans 8:5-8, and Romans 12-14, Paul responds to the slander that he advocates morally lax behavior. In many other places in his writings Paul also stresses the need for strict moral behavior. Some of these passages include 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:13-4:8; Philippians 2:12-18, 3:17-4:1. In 2 Corinthians 12:19-21, for instance, Paul gives warnings similar to what we heard in Galatians 5, where he states that those who do the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul, then, more than adequately responds to the slander that he mentions in Romans 3:8.

As for the second argument that we have mentioned, in several places in Romans, including Romans 9, Paul directly confronts the notion that physical descent from Abraham brings admittance into the covenant and gives eventual assurance of salvation. In Romans 1-3, Paul makes the situations of Jews and Gentiles equal before God in that they are both trapped in sin. In writing this, Paul, like John the Baptist and Jesus in the gospels, refutes the idea that physical descent from Abraham will somehow give the Jewish people an edge when it comes to being judged by God. Paul makes this idea most explicit in Romans 3:9-11: “What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no not one, no one understands, no one seeks for God” (ESV).

It is not surprising that shortly after denouncing the idea that being an ethnic Jew (or that physical descent from Abraham) alone will benefit the Jewish people when it comes to God’s judgment, Paul turns to the matter of Abraham. Where does he fit in God’s scheme of salvation? Contrary to the approach that physical descent from Abraham guarantees

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<sup>935</sup> We will discuss Paul’s response to this viewpoint in Section 9.8 below.

salvation, in Romans 4 Paul makes it clear that while Abraham is a spiritual ancestor he is an ancestor not only of the circumcised (the Jews), but those who are uncircumcised yet have the same faith that he did. This is most clear in Romans 4:9-12 (ESV):

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.... He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

This passage echoes what Paul says in Galatians 3:7 where he claims that those who have faith are the true descendants of Abraham. In Galatians 5:11-12, Paul states that the covenant of circumcision is incompatible with the cross. This would be the case if physical descent from Abraham (as signified by circumcision) guaranteed salvation. There would be no need for a cross if physical descent from Abraham equaled salvation. At the same time, if the cross is necessary (which Paul thinks it is) then obviously physical descent from Abraham is not adequate to accomplish salvation.

Paul also responds to the idea that virtually all of Abraham's descendants will enter the age to come. Paul stresses that not all of Abraham's descendants will be saved. In Romans 9:7-8 (NRSV) he states: "And not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants but 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants."

Furthermore, after stating that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise, Paul goes on to follow Hillel's second interpretive rule *Gezerah shawah* and reason from analogy. Paul supplies the analogies of Isaac being a child of the promise and Jacob being a child of the promise, as opposed to Esau who was not. Paul states that as in the past, some of the physical descendants of Abraham were not inheritors of the covenant, therefore the same situation exists today. Paul adds in Romans 9:27 that as only a remnant was saved in the past, the same will be true in these days also. Although, no doubt, Paul is aware that in his analogy the word "saved" has shifted its meaning from physical life in Isaiah to spiritual life in the way he uses it, Paul still thinks that the same principle applies.

Paul returns to the same idea later on in Romans 15:8-13 where he argues that the extension of the blessings of God to the Gentiles actually confirms the promises given to the patriarchs. In addition, at the conclusion of the letter, in Romans 16:25-26, Paul says that there was a revelation, a mystery which had been kept secret but is now uncovered. This now uncovered secret, which was prophesied, is that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles to bring them into the obedience of faith. Including the Gentiles as part of God's people was, it seems, part of God's plan all along.

Again, as in Galatians, in Romans it is impossible to say for sure which arguments Paul is attempting to refute or to ward off. However, we do know several things. First, most scholars claim that the Mishnah records many of the viewpoints held by the Pharisees during the first century BCE, prior to the destruction of the temple. As we saw above, Sanders himself cites what it says in *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1 as being evidence for the grace-based nature of first century Judaism. Second, Sanders is likely correct in stating that the views expressed in *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1 were present during the first-century because (as Sanders states) we see those same views reflected in Matthew 3, Luke 3 and John 8, passages that reflect both an early tradition (that of Q) and a late tradition, (that of John) during the first-century. Thus Sanders can claim that a certain section of Judaism, at least, expressed itself with a grace-based theology during the first century. Third, this grace-based Judaism was not lauded by the early Christian community but attacked, certainly by the writers of Matthew, Luke and John. Paul too, in opposition to a rather lax expression of Judaism in Galatia, affirms that real Judaism is strict and rigorous. Fourth, while it is impossible to say for sure that Paul's opponents in Galatia and his potential opponents in Rome advocated theologies similar to that later expressed in *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1, there is at least a good possibility that this is the case. We do know from both the early and late references to this kind of theology in Q and in John's gospel that Christians throughout the first century were concerned by the thinking that physical descent from Abraham would virtually guarantee salvation. Also, regardless of whether Paul's opponents espoused similar views, Paul's letters very effectively refute the notion that physical descent from Abraham (symbolized by circumcision) would allow one be saved. Fifth, regardless of the views of his opponents, Paul is responding to a lax approach to Judaism and in response to this he articulates a rigorous and legalistic definition of the Torah covenant, a definition he himself also reacts against.

All of this affects our response to the New Perspective reading of Paul. New Perspective scholars have suggested that since first-century Judaism was grace-based Paul could not have been reacting to it in the same way that the Reformers thought that he did. We have seen though that Paul's letters do show him reacting against a rigorous and legalistic version of Judaism (as we will see in Section 9.8 below). However, this legalistic version of Judaism is not one that he necessarily sees as emanating from the mouths of his opponents! It is rather, a version of Judaism which he himself has posited and then attacks. It is also a version of Judaism which is in harmony with what is expressed in the gospels. In the next section we examine whether or not Paul's rigorous approach to Judaism finds support in other writings also, outside of the gospels.

### **9.7 DOES PAUL HAVE PRECEDENTS? JUDAISM AND SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE APOCRYPHA AND OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA**

We have established that in their challenges to the Reformation approaches to Paul, some New Perspective scholars or their forerunners have also raised issues about Paul's views of Judaism. We have also attempted to respond to some of these challenges in this Chapter, and thus far we have stated (to summarize) that when looking at Paul's interpretation of Judaism, the question that one has to ask is not, "Does Paul misunderstand Judaism?" Rather, one should be asking the question, "How does Paul define Judaism, and can his definition be defended or at least explained?" We have also argued that Paul defines Judaism in a strict fashion. We have also seen that in this regard there are parallel teachings in the gospels. The gospel writers depict Jesus and John the Baptist as emphasizing again, in opposition to the Pharisees (in Matthew), or to the public in general (in Luke), that the covenant in Judaism is a demanding covenant. Furthermore, as with Paul, the gospels claim that physical descent from Abraham alone is not sufficient to guarantee the salvation of the Jewish people. Paul also emphasizes that being an ethnic Jew does not qualify one to be a spiritual descendant of Abraham. In Romans, Philippians, and Galatians, Paul states that Abraham's true descendants are those who have faith in Jesus.

If one is Jewish, one might understandably claim that Paul commits the fallacy of "straw man", defining his opponents' views in a certain way and then critiquing his own



definition. Thus in this section we ask the following questions: Can Paul's views on Judaism be defended? Was Paul alone or was he the first in stating that Judaism should be practiced rigorously? We have already examined the potential parallels to Paul's thought found in the gospels. Yet despite the possible early origins of the Q material, it is likely that the gospels were written after Paul's letters. Can the roots of Paul's ideas about the rigorous nature of Moses' covenant be found in the Old Testament or in intertestamental literature, or is Paul unique in making his claims? We will examine this issue briefly below.

As stated earlier, while Carson and his colleagues have demonstrated that at times Sanders is correct in using covenantal nomism as a description of Judaism, Sander's covenantal nomism does not fit everywhere as a description of the theological diversity present within first-century Judaism. The contributors to *Justification and Variegated Nomism* have supplied many examples of how intertestamental Judaism was more legalistic than Sanders allows.<sup>936</sup> The following examples further demonstrate this.

Richard Bauckham writes an essay in *Justification and Variegated Nomism* in which he examines Jewish apocalypses and their approaches to "getting in" and "staying in." In this essay, he writes: "As *2 Baruch*'s discussion of apostates and proselytes (41-42) shows, the notion of salvation as the reward for the good works of the righteous does not imply a nice calculation of merit and reward, but it does make salvation dependent on adherence to God and his Law."<sup>937</sup> Earlier on, in the same essay Bauckham also wrote:

At first sight, *2 Enoch* 41:2 suggests total perfectionism; someone who avoids being sent to hell is one who 'has not sinned before the face of the Lord.' This appears to justify Andersen's note that *2 Enoch* 'does not admit the possibility of any remedy for sin through repentance and reparation from the human side, let alone compassion and forgiveness from the divine side.... for certain sins there is explicitly said to be no possibility of repentance or forgiveness: murder and other forms of serious harm against a person, and failure to fulfill a vow made to God. It is likely that for more minor sins, repentance (and sacrifice) obtain forgiveness if repentance takes place in this life. What is truly remarkable is that *2 Enoch* (a work of 72 chapters) has no

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<sup>936</sup> Daniel Falk, "Prayers and Psalms," Pages 7-56 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Carson, O'Brien, Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 31-33; Craig A. Evans, "Scripture-Based Stories in the Pseudopigrapha," Pages 57-72 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Carson, O'Brien, Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 69.

<sup>937</sup> Bauckham, "Apocalypses," 182.

reference whatever to the mercy of God. As Andersen justifiably puts it: “A blessed afterlife is strictly a reward for right ethical conduct.”<sup>938</sup>

In his essay assessing *Scripture-Based Stories in the Pseudepigrapha* in the same volume, Craig Evans states:

Even Christianity’s understanding of atonement, in that all that is required is repentance, confession of sin, and faith in God’s provision in Christ, is in some important ways anticipated in these writings. However, elements are present in some of the writings reviewed above that still reflect a works-righteousness understanding of justification, with which the Apostle Paul sharply disagreed (as seen especially in his letters to the churches in Galatia and Rome). Obedience to the Law appears to be the requirement for Aseneth to become a member of the people of God, while repentance and self-effacing acts on the part of Adam and Eve carry a measure of hope, but no assurance of God’s acceptance.<sup>939</sup>

In addition to the examples that Carson and his colleagues have supplied regarding this issue, other passages deserve examination. Several other intertestamental books also articulate more exacting interpretations of the covenant. *4 Ezra* 9:28-27 says that salvation comes through the keeping of the law. *4 Ezra* 13:23 says that salvation is based upon works plus faith. *4 Ezra* 13:38 states that the Messiah will destroy the ungodly by means of the law. *4 Ezra* says the following:

For this reason, therefore, those who live on earth shall be tormented, because though they had understanding, they committed iniquity; and though they received the commandments, they did not keep them; and though they obtained the law, they dealt unfaithfully with what they received. What, then, will they have to say in the judgment, or how will they answer in the last times? . . . If [a person] is one of those who have shown scorn and have not kept the way of the Most High, who have despised his law and hated those who fear God—such spirits shall not enter into habitations, but shall immediately wander about in torments, always grieving and sad, in seven ways. . . . Now this is the order of those who have kept the ways of the Most High, when they shall be separated from their mortal body. During the time that they lived in it, they laboriously served the Most High, and withstood danger every hour so that they might keep the law of the Lawgiver perfectly. Therefore this is the teaching concerning them: First of all, they shall see with great joy the glory of him who receives them, for they shall have rest in seven orders. . . . The seventh order, which is greater than all that has been mentioned, because they shall rejoice with boldness, and shall be confident without confusion, and shall be glad without fear, for they press forward to see the face of him whom they served in life and from whom they are to receive their reward when glorified. This is the order of the souls of the righteous, as henceforth is announced;

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<sup>938</sup> Bauckham, “Apocalypses,” 155-56.

<sup>939</sup> Evans, “Scripture-Based Stories in the Pseudopigrapha,” 72.

and they previously mentioned are the ways of torment that those who would not give heed shall suffer hereafter (4 *Ezra* 7:72-73, 78-80, 88-91, 98-99; NRSV).

As one can see, this passage above discusses the punishments of the law-breakers and the rewards of those who are saved because of their efforts to keep the law. Clearly the writer of 4 *Ezra* intends that a rigorous approach to the law and obedience to God should be followed.

Similar ideas, however, show up elsewhere in Jewish literature of the period. *Enoch* 38 has a reference to salvation by works. 2 *Baruch* 51:7 also talks about salvation by works, as does the *Psalms of Solomon* 3:12.<sup>940</sup> Later on, in the *Psalms of Solomon* 14:1-10, one finds the following statement:

The Lord is faithful to those who truly love him, to those who endure his discipline, to those who live in the righteousness of his commandments, in the Law, which he has commanded for our life. The Lord's devout shall live by it forever; the Lord's paradise, the trees of life, are his devout ones. Their planting is firmly rooted forever, they shall not be uprooted as long as the heavens shall last. For Israel is the portion and inheritance of God. But not so are sinners and criminals, who love (to spend) the day in sharing their sin. Their enjoyment is brief and decaying, and they do not remember God. For the ways of men are known before him always, and he knows the secrets of the heart before they happen. Therefore their inheritance is Hades, and darkness and destruction; and they will not be found on the day of mercy for the righteous. But *the devout of the Lord will inherit life in happiness.*<sup>941</sup>

If these intertestamental writings advance the notion that salvation takes place through works, it is reasonable to assume that at least a segment (perhaps a large segment) of the first-century Jewish population believed that this was the case.

Furthermore, the works-based side of some interpretations of Judaism becomes evident when one looks at the way atonement for sin is treated in some of the intertestamental literature. There are many places in the intertestamental literature which speak of means of atonement based on human deeds. The *Book of Tobit* is one of these. *Tobit* 12:8-9a (NRSV) says: "Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin." Human action in atoning for sin is endorsed a second time in *Tobit*: "If you turn to him with all your heart

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<sup>940</sup> Charlesworth, James H., (ed.) *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Volume II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 655.

<sup>941</sup> Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Volume II*, 663-664.

and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will no longer hide his face from you” (*Tobit* 13:6; NRSV).

In addition to *Tobit*, *4 Maccabees* says: “Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs” (*4 Macc* 6:28-29; NRSV). Chapter 17 of the same book contains the following statement: “And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been mistreated” (*4 Macc* 17:22 NRSV).

*Sirach* also emphasizes human action as being necessary to atone for sin (*Sirach* 3:14; NRSV). *Sirach* 3:30 says: “As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin,” (NRSV). *Sirach* 35:5 states: “To keep from wickedness is pleasing to the Lord, and to forsake unrighteousness is an atonement,” (NRSV).

The Community Rule of the Dead Sea Scrolls also holds up human action as being efficacious in atoning for sin: “They shall preserve the faith in the Land with steadfastness and meekness and shall atone for sin by the practice of justice and by suffering the sorrows of affliction.”<sup>942</sup> Later on the same document adds: “They shall atone for guilty rebellion and for sins of unfaithfulness that they may obtain loving-kindness for the Land without the flesh of holocausts and the fat of sacrifice. And prayer rightly offered shall be as an acceptable fragrance of righteousness, and perfection of way as a delectable free-will offering.”<sup>943</sup>

Although our study of these matters is not exhaustive, we have seen examples of places within intertestamental Jewish literature where legalism is arguably present. These passages demonstrate viewpoints stating that in order to enter the age to come (or as Christians would term it, “be saved”) Jews were expected to keep the law rigorously. Other passages indicate that Jews could be expected to atone for their sins through specific actions of their own. With passages such as these present in intertestamental literature, it is easy to see how Paul could have defended his view that in Judaism salvation is based on works.

However, New Perspective scholar Terry Donaldson raises several issues about Paul’s representation of Judaism and atonement within Judaism, as well as the ways this has been

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<sup>942</sup> Vermes, Geza (Editor), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English: Second Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 85.

<sup>943</sup> Vermes, Geza (Editor), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English: Second Edition*, 87.

interpreted by Christian scholars. Two of Donaldson's concerns run as follows: first, Donaldson states that Paul almost has a double standard in his thinking. Donaldson says that in Paul's thought, individual failings on the part of Jews render the Jewish covenant invalid. Yet Paul does not seem to attach this same standard to the Christian covenant. The Christian covenant, for instance, is not rendered null and void by the failures of the Christians in Corinth.<sup>944</sup> Donaldson writes: "Why is one sin just an isolated disciplinary case while the other is a fundamental systemic flaw?"<sup>945</sup> In a related point, Donaldson states that Christian scholars who have interpreted Paul do not seem to properly understand the place of the temple within Judaism. The temple's chief role was to provide a means for atonement within the Jewish covenant. Perfect law obedience was never expected within Judaism, claims Donaldson, and the temple's existence bears witness to that fact.<sup>946</sup>

It is possible, though, to respond to Donaldson's concerns. Paul has reasons for not treating sin within the Jewish covenant in the same way he treats sin within the Christian covenant. This appears to be the case for at least five reasons.

First, Paul, like other Jewish sectarians, places less emphasis on the temple. Cohen states that what the various sects of Judaism had in common in the second temple period was a criticism of the priesthood which consequently led to a reduction of emphasis on the temple. "Most sects seem to have argued that the priests were corrupt and that the temple was polluted, or, at least, unworthy of the exclusiveness and importance it claimed. Each sect presented itself as the true temple and its adherents as the true priests, because only the sect knew how to serve God properly."<sup>947</sup> Again Cohen writes "When the great rebellion of 66-70 C.E. broke out, the revolutionaries vented their anger as much, if not more, against the high priests as against the Romans. They appointed a new high priest to take the place of the one appointed by their enemies."<sup>948</sup> Cohen writes:

But the newfound importance of the temple could not hide several difficult problems. Built by a Davidic king, authorized by a prophet, and authenticated through miraculous manifestation of God ... the first temple was the splendid achievement of a splendid reign. The second temple, by contrast, although authorized by the prophets Haggai and

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<sup>944</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 139.

<sup>945</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 139.

<sup>946</sup> Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 137.

<sup>947</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 24.

<sup>948</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 105.

Zechariah, was built by a gentile king and was never authenticated by an overt sign of divine favor.... In the second century B.C.E., the temple's problematic status was revealed to all. The high priests were corrupted and the temple was profaned by a gentile monarch. Even after it was regained and purified by pious Jews, there was no prophet to approve their work and no miracle to assure them that the temple was once again the abode of God. The Maccabees installed themselves as high priests although they were not of the high priestly line. When the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 63 BCE. they entered the sacred precincts, polluting them with their presence. Herod the Great rebuilt the temple magnificently, but his detractors viewed him as a "half-Jew." He completely debased the high-priesthood, appointing men who had even less claim than the Maccabees to be the legitimate successors of Aaron.... How could the Jews be sure that the institution and the people who claimed to mediate between them and God were really authorized to do so? The sects argued that the temple and the priests did not find favor in God's eyes.... Either explicitly or implicitly, the sect sees itself and its authority figures as replacements for the temple and its priests. This self-perception is well attested at Qumran and in early Christianity.<sup>949</sup>

Paul was not alone among Jews in criticizing the temple. The *Sibyllines* contains criticisms of the temple (*Sib. Or.* 4:24-30). Sanders also writes about the fact that in certain circumstances the temple could be replaced. The law allowed that each year, on Passover, every person's house temporarily becomes a temple where Passover lambs can be sacrificed.<sup>950</sup> Even if this was a temporary measure it shows that the temple at some level was superfluous. Sanders also writes that the tendency during Herod's reign and afterwards to appoint neither Zadokites nor Hasmoneans to be chief priests tended to at least somewhat debase the view of the temple in the eyes of the people.<sup>951</sup> Sanders also writes that the Mishnah does not pay as much attention to the temple or the priests as Josephus did.<sup>952</sup> As time passed it appeared that the temple faded in importance. That the temple could fade in importance so easily demonstrates that it was not as central to the Jewish faith as one might have thought.

In fact, Scott states that the shift away from making the temple and its ceremonies central to the Jewish faith began with the exile to Babylon. The exile taught the Jewish people that ethical behaviour mattered more to God than temple ceremonies did. As a result, the return from exile began an epoch in which there was a marked shift in Jewish religion.

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<sup>949</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 131-132.

<sup>950</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 134.

<sup>951</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 327.

<sup>952</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 178.

Temple ceremonies, though still maintained, were seen to be less important than previously, and general observance of the law held greater importance than before.<sup>953</sup>

It seems then that Paul had similar attitudes towards the temple as those held by other Jewish sects in the same time period. Cohen states: “Sectarianism requires an evil reality against which to rail and protest, something that can serve as a focal point of its separatist energies. The chief focal point of ancient Jewish sectarianism was the temple.”<sup>954</sup> Paul might have picked up this critical attitude towards the temple not just from his fellow Christians but from his previous Pharisaic associations. Cohen indicates that the Pharisees too, like other sects, did not regard the temple highly. Cohen writes about the response of the rabbis towards the temple’s destruction in 70 AD:

Why was the rabbinic response so moderate, so restrained? Why so little so late? Apparently because the piety of the second temple Judaism had prepared the rabbis for a temple-less world. If the ancestors of the rabbis were Pharisees, and if the Pharisees were a sect, then the rabbis certainly would have been prepared to live without a temple, because even when the temple was standing, sects had a very ambivalent attitude towards it. But the sects were merely the extreme representatives of the democratization of Judaism, which affected sectarians and non-sectarians alike.<sup>955</sup>

The fact that Paul downplays the ceremonies and the sacrificial system in his works perhaps indicates that even as a Pharisee he did not put much faith in it.

If Cohen’s understandings of first-century Judaism are correct, it is not hard to explain why Paul did not place much emphasis upon the temple in his letters. Paul was one of the leaders of a Jewish sect. The Sadducees controlled the temple; the various Jewish sects did not.

Second, the inability of the sacrificial system under the Torah to atone for deliberate sins might explain why Paul appears to have a double standard when it comes to sins committed within the Christian covenant as opposed to those committed within the Jewish covenant. Although it is true, as Donaldson says, that the purpose of the temple was to provide atonement for sin, what Donaldson does not mention is that the sacrificial system under the Torah covenant did not make atonement for sins which were committed

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<sup>953</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 122-123, 136.

<sup>954</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 226.

<sup>955</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 218.

deliberately. In an email sent on November 2, 2017 Orthodox Rabbi, Dr. Yisroel Miller of Calgary stated that this is the view of Orthodox Judaism even today.

Larsson would agree pointing out that even if the sacrificial system was followed completely, there were limits to its effectiveness. Again, the sacrificial system was instituted to atone for accidental sins, not deliberate ones. Larsson writes:

The same theology surfaces in Psalm 51, ascribed to King David after the sin with Bathsheba. In that situation there was no room for any sacrifices: “For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased” (Ps 51:16). Why? Certainly, sacrifices in general had not been cancelled, since these were indeed ordained by God. One thing, however, we may never forget: there were no sin offerings for wilful sins. We know this from the sacrificial laws in the book of Leviticus, where the word for “sin” in connection with the sin offerings consistently refers to unintentional sins. “When anyone sins unwittingly. . . , he shall offer for the sin”—this phrase is reiterated again and again (see esp. Lv 4). So what should they do, those who had sinned wilfully? They must offer the sacrifice of the heart through repentance. There existed no sacrificial replacement for repentance. Before offering sacrifices, the relationship with God had to be restored.<sup>956</sup>

Because the sacrifices did not atone for deliberate sins, the Old Testament prophets continually warn their listeners not to place too much reliance upon the sacrifices as a means of atonement. Isaiah 1:11-20, 27; 27:9 disparage the sacrificial system as a means of atonement. Instead of sacrifices, real repentance is upheld. The same sort of message is found elsewhere in the Old Testament. In Zechariah 7 hypocritical fasting is condemned. Amos 5:21-27 likewise disparages the feasts and sacrifices and instead asks for a change in behaviour. Isaiah 58 similarly upholds a change in lifestyle rather than fasting and praying as a means of bringing about reconciliation with God. Isaiah 66:1-4 states that acts of worship and ritual without personal change are not useful. Jeremiah 11:14-15 states that “sacrificial flesh” cannot avert the doom coming on Israel. The sacrificial system is critiqued in Hosea 6:6. In Jeremiah 7:10 the prophet also warns his listeners to not think that the sacrificial system gives one a license to commit sin. 1 Samuel 3:14 says that the sins of Eli’s sons cannot be atoned for through sacrifice or offering.

Sanders also agrees that the law has a different response to intentional and unintentional sin. Sanders writes:

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<sup>956</sup> Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 194.



There a distinction is made between the person who ‘commits a breach of faith and sins unwittingly in any of the holy things of the Lord’ (5:15) and the one who ‘sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbour’ (6:1). In these lines we see the differentiations between the unwitting and intentional transgression, and between sins against God (the holy things of the Lord) and those against both God and the neighbour (against the Lord by deceiving the neighbour). . . . While inadvertent transgression against God requires an added fifth, the Bible considers intentional transgression against God to be punishable by death (e.g. in the case of the sabbath, Num. 15:32-36) or by ‘cutting off’ – extirpation of the person and his or her descendants from the people of Israel.<sup>957</sup>

However, Sanders says that this approach to sin softened with the passage of time. He writes again:

Many rabbis, living after the time when ‘holy things’ were a live issue, reversed the order of severity. Sins against God alone—such as taking the name of the Lord in vain, which the Bible specifies as not being forgivable (Ex. 20:7) – were sometimes regarded as the more easily atoned for, requiring only repentance and restitution. This was not a uniform doctrine, but it was a noticeable tendency.<sup>958</sup>

Thus the Old Testament prophets regularly warn that the existence of the sacrificial system should not give Jews a license to sin or a license to avoid repentance. The frequent complaints found in the prophets against the misuse of the sacrificial system indicate that many Israelites were in fact incorrectly treating the sacrificial system as a way to atone for wilfully committed sins. In their comments about the sacrificial system, it appears that the prophets were attempting to correct this attitude.

The aforementioned Old Testament warnings against placing too much faith in sacrifices bring up a third issue with the centrality of temple worship. 2 Samuel 7:5-7 records that the temple’s existence was not initially requested by God. According to the words of Nathan the prophet, God was rather dubious about the whole temple project in the first place. There is a New Testament echo of this viewpoint in John 4 where Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, that the “hour is now coming when you will worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:21 NRSV).<sup>959</sup> Jesus then goes on to explain that God wants worshippers who worship him in spirit and in truth. While it is debatable whether Paul was aware of the tradition expressed in John 4, he would have certainly been aware of Nathan’s

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<sup>957</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 192-193.

<sup>958</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 193.

<sup>959</sup> Conversation with V.E. Eriksson. December 31, 2017.

words to King David. Ultimately, God did not view the temple as being that necessary.

Wright provides a potential fourth reason for Paul's neglect of the temple in his own works. The Old Testament shows that Solomon's temple was filled by the Spirit of God at the time of its consecration (1 Kgs 9:1-3; 2 Chr 7:1-3). However, the Scriptures record that the second temple was never filled with the Spirit of God in the way that the first was. This fact was of great concern to the Jews in the intertestamental period. Wright says, though, that since the Christian community was filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church, as the community of believers, becomes the new temple.<sup>960</sup>

Wright's views are supported by various passages in Paul's letters and this suggests that Paul shared the New Testament belief that Christ has replaced the temple as a means of atonement. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul talks about the Christian community being the new temple and Jesus being the only foundation for that temple. Jesus and the community that he created have thus replaced the old Jerusalem temple.

In this respect, Paul's understanding that the Christian community has replaced the temple is in some ways similar to how the Essene community talked about themselves. They too, thought that their community had replaced the temple. Sanders writes:

The sectarians were neither the first nor the last Jews to find themselves forced to do without the rites of the Jerusalem Temple, which God had appointed for atonement; the path they chose was a natural one, and it would be followed by others. 'Community as temple', for example, is a theme known from Paul (II Cor. 6.16; cf. I Cor. 3.16). 'Atonement without sacrifice' is common in rabbinic literature. The priestly founders of this sect had to think seriously about the loss of the sacrificial system, and they came up with a good solution: prayer and obedience to the law.<sup>961</sup>

Finally, there is a fifth reason why Paul might not perceive sin under the Torah covenant to be as forgivable as sin under the new Christian covenant. In Paul's view the covenant of Moses was always intended to be temporary and it is now obsolete (Gal 3:19-20; 23-29). Rabbi Silver states that the doing away with the Torah was even anticipated by the Jews themselves. "All commandments are abolished in the age to come."<sup>962</sup> Since Paul knows that the Messiah has come, consequently, the Torah covenant is obsolete and has been done away

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<sup>960</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 545.

<sup>961</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 377.

<sup>962</sup> Abba Hillel David Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel, From the First through the Seventeenth Centuries* (Boston: The MacMillan Company, 1959), 9 Note 20.

with. The Torah covenant set up the temple as a place where sacrifices for sins were made. There are other means of atonement under the Torah as well. For instance, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, was also set up by the Torah covenant. However, if the Torah covenant is no longer valid then the temple and these other means would no longer be effective in atoning for sin.

Sanders expresses the situation this way: “In and of itself ‘on account of transgressions’ can mean either ‘to produce transgressions’ or ‘to deal with transgressions’” The simplest reading of [Galatians] 3:19a is that the law deals with transgressions until the coming of Christ (‘the seed’).”<sup>963</sup> If Sanders’ reading of this passage is correct and “the law deals with transgressions until the coming of Christ,” then after the Christ has come, obviously the law would no longer deal with transgressions. The Torah covenant would thus no longer have a means to atone for sin. As a result, if one wants to submit oneself to the Torah covenant after Christ, then with no functioning means of atonement, perfect law obedience would of course be required.

According to this logic, if the Messiah has come, then sins committed by those under the Torah covenant would in fact demonstrate that this covenant is not valid. The obsolete covenant has no functioning means of atonement. Sins committed by Christians, however, would be viewed differently since in the Christian covenant there is still a functioning means of atonement.

In this Section we have seen that Paul’s rigorous approach to Judaism is defensible. Paul was not alone in saying that Judaism, as properly practiced, should be practiced in a legalistic and exacting manner. In addition to what we find in the gospel texts, there are many places in the Old Testament where a rigorous approach to the covenant is upheld. Furthermore, while its witness is more varied, one can find numerous examples in intertestamental literature that uphold the notion that Judaism should be practiced strictly. Finally, in Paul’s thinking, if the Torah covenant is obsolete now that the Messiah has come, then those still under this covenant have even more need to be absolutely perfect in their law obedience.

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<sup>963</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 66.

## 9.8 PAUL'S CRITIQUE OF JUDAISM FROM WITHOUT

We have seen in the sections above that Judaism was a diverse religious movement. This created some difficulties for Paul and the other New Testament writers in making a response to Judaism. As we have said, before Paul can expound on the nature of the Christian covenant he first has to explain his own understanding of Judaism. We have also discussed how Paul likely knew about the more grace-based approaches to Judaism. Paul, though, like Jesus and John the Baptist, rejects these as being inadequate. Paul defines true Judaism as being strict and rigorous. We have also seen how Paul had precedents, in the Old Testament prophets and in some of the intertestamental literature, for his demanding approach to Judaism.

In his letters, however, Paul is not content to state that Judaism is strict. He has a further critique of the Jewish covenant. Once Paul defines Judaism in this rigorous manner he then talks about the limitations of the Judaism that he has just defined. Even a strict practice of Judaism is not sufficient, says Paul.

Paul likely has two target audiences in mind when he explains the failings of strict Judaism. First, as we have noted above, Judaism was diverse, and in addition to the more grace-based approaches to Judaism which Paul attacks in Galatians, there were also Jewish groups who did advocate strict obedience to the covenant. In writing what he does regarding the limitations of even a strict approach to Judaism Paul might be responding to these Jewish groups. Paul likely had this group in mind when he writes Romans 9:32-10:2. Here he states that some Jews are pursuing God's covenant as if it was lived out by works and not by faith and that they have a zeal for God but one which is not enlightened. Second, by writing this, Paul is attempting to warn Gentile Christians away from the desire to become circumcised and begin following the Jewish laws. Scott comments on some of Paul's probable goals in advancing his critique of Jewish legalism:

We immediately think of Paul and his constant fight against the concept of salvation earned by keeping the law. The proponents of the new perspective on Paul argue that, recognizing Judaism as a religion of grace, he did not condemn the law as such, but the barrier the law had erected between Jewish and Gentile believers and all attempts to impose it upon Gentile Christians. Yet, we must point out, Paul himself says that Israel "did not strive for [righteousness] on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works" (Rom. 9:32). He also insists that we are not justified, "by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law" (Gal. 2:16).

Evidences of such sentiments in Paul could be multiplied. Obviously he was convinced that some Jews were seeking justification through works.<sup>964</sup>

Paul's challenge to Jewish legalism amounts to the second critique that Paul lodges against Judaism, the critique from without. Paul states that proper Judaism, in its fully rigorous form, is impossible to keep (Rom 3:9-20). This second critique of Judaism, Paul's claim that even the most rigorous law obedience will not save, essentially amounts to the Reformation or "old perspective" approach to Paul. Since the Reformation approach has been well explained elsewhere, we will only touch on it briefly here.

There are many passages within Paul's letters that support this Reformation reading. For instance, there have been debates about the precise meaning of Romans 7:14-25 and who Paul is speaking about when he uses the word "I". Nevertheless, whoever it is that Paul intends to represent as speaking in this passage, it is clear that in this section Paul is demonstrating that the attempts to pursue righteousness as if it was by the law do not succeed, and that those attempting to do so need to be rescued by Jesus Christ.

In other ways as well, Paul speaks negatively about attempts to pursue righteousness as if it was by the law. In Romans 5:20, 7:5-6, 7:8, Paul states that because sin takes advantage of the law, the law, in effect, causes trespasses to increase. In Romans 7:6 Paul even states that the law held us captive. This is similar to what one finds in 1 Corinthians 15:56 where it says: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:56; NRSV).

In Romans 9-11 Paul mourns the fact that most of his fellow Jews have not seen fit to become Christians. Paul understands that the chief reason that the Jews rejected Jesus is because of God's decision that this would in fact be the case. However, Paul supplies a second reason for the Jewish inability to join the Christian covenant. His fellow Jews, he says, have a zeal for God but they have pursued a relationship with God not by faith, but as if it can be obtained by works (Rom 9:30-10:3).

Consequently, when he compares his new life as a Christian to his old life following the law, he describes following the law as "rubbish" (Phil 3:8). He describes those who

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<sup>964</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 275.

advocate circumcision as dogs, evildoers and mutilators of the flesh (Phil 3:2). Paul also describes the law as bringing about slavery upon its adherents (Gal 4:8-10, 5:1).

Paul also describes the law as not life-giving (2 Cor 3). Paul states that Gentile Christians who later get circumcised after becoming Christians cut themselves off from Christ (Gal 5:2). Paul further states that Torah adherence brings a curse upon those who were under Christ and then turn towards an alternate “gospel”, (Gal 1:6-9). Circumcision and the cross are incompatible with each other (Gal 6:13-15). One cannot seek salvation by both.

In Galatians he even hints that the law was given through two mediators, angels and Moses (Gal 1:8; 3:19-20, 4:3, 8-9). In saying this Paul is arguing that the law is an inferior covenant. It is not as good a covenant as one which comes from God directly without mediators.

Instead of circumcision and Torah obedience, Paul replaces them with baptism into the covenant of Jesus and faith. Those who are baptized into Christ enter the covenant by becoming Abraham’s descendants (Gal 3:27-29). They also, through baptism join the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 3:27-28) and because they are part of Christ’s body they participate vicariously in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6:1-11). Schweitzer is correct in claiming that the basis for much of Paul’s ethical teaching arises from his conviction that Christians are part of Christ’s body. Some examples of this can be found in Romans 6:12-23 and 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. Furthermore, since being circumcised cuts one off from Christ, then circumcision, instead of allowing one to become part of the Abrahamic covenant, actually cuts one off from it.

Paul states that one cannot be saved through works of the law. In Romans 3:20, 3:28 and Galatians 2:16 Paul states that people are saved by faith and not by works of the law. In Galatians 3:2 Paul tells the Galatians that the fact that they received the Holy Spirit through faith and not by works of the law is proof that works of the law are not efficacious. Paul further states in Romans 11:6 that if salvation was by works it would not be by grace.

Paul states that the law was given only as a temporary measure (Gal 3:19) and as we have already mentioned, one of the difficulties that Paul found with Judaism, even if it was practiced rigorously, is that the Torah covenant is now obsolete. Paul rejects Torah Judaism, because it has been made obsolete by the life and ministry of Jesus (Gal 3:19-4:11). Its obsolescence could be the reason, that for Paul, those who subscribed to Judaism are under a

curse. Regardless, if this is the reason or not, Paul states that all who decide to try to follow the law but do not keep it are likewise cursed (Gal 3:10-14).

Scott states that within intertestamental Judaism, views on the way in which the Messiah would treat the law varied. Many Jews thought that when the Messiah would come he would at least clarify, explain or modify the Torah.<sup>965</sup> However, some voices within intertestamental Judaism held that when the Messiah came he would make the Torah law obsolete altogether and instead institute a new law.<sup>966</sup> Some scholars like Davies point to evidence suggesting that this view was even more common among Jews in the intertestamental period, but was suppressed after the rise of Christianity.<sup>967</sup> Paul appears to be agreeing with the Jews who held that when the Messiah comes the law will cease.<sup>968</sup> Paul obviously sees the Torah as being obsolete. As he writes in Romans 10:4: “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (NRSV). Scott suggests this explanation for Paul’s views:

Remembering the principle that one part of the law stands for the whole, consider also the implication of Galatians 5:2 “If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you.” Perhaps we could paraphrase this statement, “If you submit to ordinances of the law (for salvation), then you are acting as if the Messiah, who brings in the final age, has not come; the life and ministry of Jesus have no significance or benefit for you.” The Epistle to the Hebrews is even stronger. It argues that in Christ the old revelation—the leadership of Moses, the Levitical priesthood, sacrifices—has already given way to the new.<sup>969</sup>

Paul sometimes uses innovative and complex arguments to explain the obsolescence of the law. For instance he states that since death annuls a covenant made through the law (Rom 7:1-3), and since all who are baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death (Rom 6:3-11), then those who have been joined to the body of Christ have died to the law. In a sense then Christians have already died and been resurrected (Rom 6:4, 11). The law has no hold on those who are part of the body of Christ.

Paul’s reasoning above can perhaps explain why he states in Romans 3:31 that he upholds the law. The law, given by God, is still in force. Moreover, as he warns the

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<sup>965</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 327-331.

<sup>966</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 329-332.

<sup>967</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 330.

<sup>968</sup> Abba Hillel David Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel*, 9 Note 20.

<sup>969</sup> Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, 331.

Galatians, those who become circumcised, those who wish to subscribe to the Torah covenant will be obliged to follow all the law. They will have to live under the curse of the law and this curse is still living and active. However, he also states that those who have joined the body of Christ have joined Jesus' death and thus are no longer bound by the law. As opposed to righteousness under the law which must be earned, Paul instead talks about a righteousness that comes from God. This righteousness is a "free gift" (Rom 5:15-17). Paul supports this approach in other places in his writings. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 it says that Jesus died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. In Romans 3:24-25 (NRSV) it is clearly Jesus that is the new means of atonement: "They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith." In Philippians Paul discards the righteousness of one's own that might come from the law and instead he talks about God's righteousness being given to those who have faith:

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, 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 on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:4b-9; NIV).

In *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, Sanders reacts against the often-held position that Paul believed that the law was impossible to fulfill.<sup>970</sup> Over several pages Sanders argues that Paul *does not think* that the law was impossible to fulfill. Sanders writes:

These three considerations—the character of the terminological argument in favour of *Gentiles* being *righteoused* by *faith*, which is based on proof-texts; the fact that Paul states in his own words what he takes the proof-texts to mean; and the subordination of vv. 10-13 to v. 8—seem to me to be decisive against the view that the thrust and point of the argument are directed toward the conclusion that the law should not be accepted because no one can fulfill all of it. The argument seems to be clearly wrong that Paul, in Galatians 3, holds the view that *since* the law cannot be entirely fulfilled, *therefore* righteousness is by faith.<sup>971</sup>

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<sup>970</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 22-29.

<sup>971</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 22-23.



Sanders then goes on to discuss other passages where he states that Paul elsewhere as well does not believe that the law cannot be fulfilled. Sanders writes: “Meanwhile, what is important to note is that Paul does not cite human inability to fulfill the law in his principal arguments against his opponents, Galatians 3 and Romans 4, when he undertakes to prove that righteousness *cannot* be by the law.”<sup>972</sup> Sanders further argues that the view that everyone sins and that perfection is possible are both found in Jewish literature. Paul could have held both positions and not seen them as contradictory.<sup>973</sup>

However, rather curiously, Sanders almost reverses himself a few pages later when he discusses Romans 7. Sanders admits that here Paul does state that it is impossible to fulfill the law, but Sanders also argues that this is the only place where Paul says this. Sanders writes: “Rom. 7:14-25, then does not express existentially a view which Paul consistently maintains elsewhere. Its extreme presentation of human inability is unique in the Pauline corpus.”<sup>974</sup> Sanders is no doubt reacting to the scholars previous to himself and he raises a valid point, nonetheless in response to Sanders one might ask how many times Paul needs to express an opinion before we can admit that it is an opinion that he holds.

It seems that in Paul’s thought he thinks that his gospel is continuous with the Abrahamic covenant although not with the covenant given to Moses. For Paul, the Abrahamic covenant was not replaced by Jesus in the same way that the Mosaic covenant was. Paul claims that Jesus came to fulfill the promises given to Abraham and furthermore Jesus is Abraham’s sole descendant (Gal 3:16). Thus those who belong to Christ become Abraham’s offspring by virtue of their connection with Jesus. As he writes: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29; ESV).

In addition, Christians become Abraham’s descendants for a second reason. Since Abraham also had faith, then people of faith are the descendants of Abraham (Gal 3:7) and like Isaac are the children of promise (Gal 4:28). Those who remain under the law—the covenant of Sinai (Gal 4:25) – are figuratively the descendants of Ishmael and thus not truly part of the Abrahamic covenant.

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<sup>972</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 24-25.

<sup>973</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 24.

<sup>974</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 78.

Thus Paul states that although Moses' covenant is obsolete, Abraham's covenant still remains. At some level then Paul claims to be appealing to a more traditional, pre-Moses kind of Judaism. If Abraham could have a full covenant relationship with God, prior to the law, then we certainly can now, says Paul (Gal 3:8). Paul's gospel thus allows the Galatians to claim to be legitimate descendants of Abraham even more so than his Judaizing rivals.

The implications of this kind of thinking are huge. Paul and those who follow him can state that since Jesus brought about the true interpretation of God's initial covenant with Abraham, then in this sense the church becomes the "true Israel", because through Jesus Christians too become descendants of Abraham. This leads us to the next section, where we examine Paul's third critique of Judaism. In Paul's understanding, is the Christian church now the "Israel of God?"

## **9.9 PAUL'S THIRD CRITIQUE**

So far we have observed two of Paul's critiques of Judaism. First, Paul thinks that Torah Judaism was stricter than many Jews had thought. Second, Paul also quite likely argues that the Torah covenant became especially strict after Jesus has come because the old means of atonement had now become obsolete.

However, although Paul defines Judaism to be a rigorous covenant, as we saw in the previous section Paul also makes a division between Torah Judaism as rightly understood and the new gospel (Gal 2:3, 2:11-21, 3:2-5). Paul thus makes his second critique, arguing that even Judaism lived out in the most rigorous way possible is yet inadequate to accomplish salvation, since it is impossible to follow the law completely. Paul also quite likely agreed with those Jews of his day who held that if the Messiah came, the Torah would be done away with. In any case, Paul thinks that salvation now takes place by grace through faith. So again, it is not so much that Paul has misunderstood Judaism; rather he explains that Judaism is strict and then he critiques his own definition of what Judaism is.

Paul is not finished with his re-evaluation of Judaism. He now makes what can perhaps be considered to be a third critique of Judaism. He re-defines who it is who belongs to the group called "Israel."

Prior to Jesus the people who are called "Israel" were always the physical descendants of Abraham. However, Paul thinks that those who are part of the Christian community are

now Israel. Paul's redefinition of the term "Israel" follows logically from what Paul says about Abraham. If Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of those who believe (Rom 4:11-12), and if those who are baptized into Christ Jesus become descendants of Abraham, (Gal 3:27-29) and if becoming circumcised as a Gentile once one is part of the church cuts one out of the covenant through Jesus (Gal 5:2-5:4) then it only makes sense that those who have faith in Jesus are considered to be Abraham's offspring. Furthermore, Abraham's offspring are "Israel," the people of God.

Paul expresses the same viewpoint using different language in his other letters. In Philippians Paul calls those who follow Jesus the true circumcision (Phil. 3:3). In Colossians 2:11 the word "circumcision" is used as a term depicting what the Christians in Colossae had received. Paul describes the Christian community as being the true Israel in Romans 9:6-18 and Galatians 6:16. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 Paul makes an analogy, comparing the experiences of Christian believers with those of the Israelites passing through the wilderness with Moses and Joshua. Again, the sense that is given is that it is the modern Christian community that inherits the promises given to the patriarchs.

In Romans 9-11, again, Paul describes non-Christian Jews as being like branches that have been temporarily cut off from their root and Gentile Christians as branches who have been grafted into the root. The image he supplies thus seems to suggest that Gentile Christians are replacing their Jewish ancestors in the faith. The strongly implied notion is that it is Gentile Christians and Jewish believers who are "Israel" now. Paul insists, however, that this replacement will only be temporary and will take place only until the full number of Gentiles has entered the Christian covenant. Once that has happened the Jewish people will recognize Jesus as Messiah and be grafted back into their own covenant.

Such readings of Paul, suggesting that the Gentiles at least temporarily replace the Jews as being Israel, are controversial, especially after the events of World War II. Not all scholars agree that Paul would actually refer to the Church by the title "Israel" and it is only fair to supply the alternate opinion. In particular, E. De Witt Burton, Peter Richardson, Alan Segal, Lloyd Gaston and others have all challenged the traditional notion that the Church is "Israel" in the New Testament. Burton, Richardson, Gaston and Segal claim that Paul was not referring to the Christian Church when he says "Israel of God", but some group of ethnic

Jews.<sup>975</sup> Burton goes so far as to say that since during Pauline benedictions “grace and peace” is the norm not “peace and mercy”, probably the two words refer to different objects and thus Galatians 6:16 should be re-punctuated.<sup>976</sup> Burton explains further:

There is, in fact, no instance of his using Israel except of the Jewish nation or a part thereof ... in view of *tou theou*, not to the whole Jewish nation, but to the pious Israel, the remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11). . . . In this case the benediction falls into two distinct parts. In the first the apostle invokes peace upon those who recognize and act in accordance with the principle of v.15, and in distinction from them, the mercy of God through which they may obtain enlightenment and enter into peace, upon those within Israel who even though as yet unenlightened are the true Israel of God. Against the combined force of these two reasons the presence of *kai* after *eleos* is of little weight.<sup>977</sup>

Richardson, writing almost fifty years later, agrees with Burton:

The sentence must be re-punctuated, so that it reads: *eirene ep autous, kai eleos kai epi ton Israel tou theou*. “[may God give peace to all who will walk according to this criterion, and mercy also to his faithful people Israel].” ‘Peace’ is then applied to all who will walk according to the new possibilities of freedom and purity made available through the cross of Jesus; ‘mercy’ is wished upon some group which is called *Israel tou theou*.<sup>978</sup>

Richardson, in his *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, argues in more drawn out fashion that neither Paul nor anyone else in the New Testament called the Church “Israel”. Justin Martyr, he says, was the first person who used the word “Israel” to describe the Church. “In spite of the many attributes, characteristics, privileges and prerogatives of the latter which are applied to the former, the Church is not called Israel in the NT.”<sup>979</sup> He compares the split between Jews and Christians to the modern day differences between Communist China and the USSR, or the Anglican and Methodist split in the 18th century.<sup>980</sup> In these situations it took a few years for the reality of the division to sufficiently be felt so that the splinter group used a different title to define itself. Hence, although the groundwork was laid in the New Testament for a later split, at this early stage, he claims, there was still initially some

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<sup>975</sup> Gaston, Lloyd., *Paul and the Torah*, 6-7; Segal, Alan., *Paul the Convert*, 262; Eriksson, “The ‘Israel of God’ in Galatians,” 2; Burton, E. D. W., *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 257-8.

<sup>976</sup> Burton, E. D. W., *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 257-8.

<sup>977</sup> Burton, E. D. W., *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 358.

<sup>978</sup> Richardson, Peter, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 81.

<sup>979</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 7.

<sup>980</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 3.

continuity between the Church and ethnic Israel. The church had not yet developed enough of its own identity to claim the title “Israel” solely for itself.

Gaston, another scholar, agrees with Richardson’s thesis. He writes: “First, as Richardson has shown, Paul ... continues the biblical distinction between Jews and non-Jews, Israel and Gentiles.... Paul never uses a phrase like ‘new Israel’ or ‘spiritual Israel,’ and he never applies the name ‘Israel’ to the church.”<sup>981</sup>

Many scholars, however, disagree with this interpretation of Galatians 6:16.<sup>982</sup> With respect to the punctuation issue, many say that there is no problem that needs to be resolved. Several scholars, including Longenecker and Betz, have pointed out that in an early Jewish document, entitled the *Shemoneh Esreh*, there are benedictions very similar in form to the one that Paul uses in Galatians 6:16.<sup>983</sup> The nineteenth benediction in particular includes the request that God “grant peace, welfare, and blessing to Israel His people.”<sup>984</sup> Hence, since “peace and mercy” could very easily appear together in a benediction, these scholars argue that Galatians 6:16 could easily be punctuated in the traditional way and not in the ways that Burton, Richardson and others suggest.

Furthermore, with respect to the notions that Paul was not referring to the Church as Israel in Galatians 6:16 most scholars seem to disagree with this also. There is some variance, however, as to the extent to which they disagree. Some scholars will claim that while Paul usually does not use the term “Israel” to refer to the Christian Church, he at least does so in Galatians 6:16.<sup>985</sup> Gutbrod posits two times where Paul calls the Church Israel: Galatians 6:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:18.<sup>986</sup> Others however like Sanders,<sup>987</sup> will go further and say that there may be more times that Paul at least implies that the Church is “Israel”.

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<sup>981</sup> Gaston, Lloyd., *Paul and the Torah*, 7.

<sup>982</sup> Brown, Raymond E., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 473.

<sup>983</sup> Betz, Hans Dieter, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 321; Longenecker, Richard N., *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 298.

<sup>984</sup> Kohler, Kohler, K. "The Origin and Composition of the Eighteen Benedictions with a Translation of the Corresponding Essene Prayers in the Apostolic Constitutions"; Pages 52-90 in *Contributions to the Scientific Study of Jewish Liturgy*, 72.

<sup>985</sup> Jervis, L. Ann. *Galatians*, NIBC # 9 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 159; Eriksson, “The ‘Israel of God’ in Galatians,” 5; Longenecker, Richard N., *Galatians*, 297; Ziesler, John., *Pauline Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 69.

<sup>986</sup> Gutbrod, “Israel,” *TDNT*, 3:388.

<sup>987</sup> Sanders, E.P. *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 175.

The chief reason many scholars disagree with Richardson's and Burton's analysis of Galatians 6:16 is the overall message of the Galatians letter. As Longenecker says:

Yet all of the views that take 'the Israel of God' to refer to Jews and not Gentiles, while supportable by reference to Paul's wider usage (or non-usage) of terms and expressions, fail to take seriously enough the context of the Galatian letter itself. For in a letter where Paul is concerned to treat as indifferent the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile Christians and to argue for the equality of Gentile believers with Jewish believers, it is difficult to see him at the very end of that letter pronouncing a benediction (or benedictions) that would serve to separate groups within his churches – whether he means by 'the Israel of God' a believing Jewish remnant within the broader Church of both Jews and Gentiles, a non-Judaizing group of Jewish Christians in Galatia, or an eschatological Israel that is to be saved at the time of Christ's return.<sup>988</sup>

Sanders echoes these sentiments:

Gal 6:16 is part of the postscript, which summarizes the main thrust of the letter. We can hardly think that he now includes his opponents as receiving the same blessing as those who walk by the rule that circumcision does not matter. Secondly, a large part of the body of Galatians is devoted to the argument that those who have faith in Christ, and only they, are descendants of Abraham (3:6-29). It would not be much of a leap to call Christians the Israel of God. . . . even without understanding the phrase 'Israel of God' as referring to Christians as such, there is substantial evidence that Paul considered Christians to be 'true Israel.'<sup>989</sup>

Wright appears to try to take a middle ground between the two positions. Yet if one examines his arguments, in the end it seems that Wright defends this kind of replacement reading of Paul, that Jervis, Longenecker and Betz agree with. Wright comments:

We can insist both (a) that Paul's vision of justification and salvation remains rooted in the promises given to Abraham and his 'seed'. . . and (b) that this vision does not supplant ethnic Israel in favour of 'the church', but rather sees ethnic Israel and its election summed up gloriously in Israel's own Messiah and his death and resurrection, generating an Israel which is then defined once more, through and in relation to him precisely as Israel's Messiah. This will satisfy neither the ardent 'sweeping supersessionist' for whom nothing short of a new act without historical precedent will do, nor the ardent 'anti-supersessionist' for whom nothing will do short of a denial that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. Paul will not please either party, and neither shall we.<sup>990</sup>

Wright stops short of calling himself a supersessionist, meaning one who believes that the Christian Church has replaced Israel. Yet, if Wright redefines "Israel," as Jesus, and the

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<sup>988</sup> Longenecker, Richard N., *Galatians*, 298

<sup>989</sup> Sanders, E.P., *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 174.

<sup>990</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 912.

community that belongs to Jesus as “Israel,” then one has to ask if Wright is not merely espousing a supersessionist position under a different name? Wright thinks that, in effect, the church has replaced Israel.

Richardson however, foresees the challenges that will be directed at his thesis because of Galatians’ overall content. In anticipation of these arguments, he appeals to the rhetorical structure of Paul’s letter. Richardson claims that in most letters, including Galatians, the last paragraph of the letter sums up the letter’s main points and hence the conclusion would be by far the most important part.<sup>991</sup> He writes: “The conclusion may clarify the real purpose of the letter, and this legitimates an approach to the letter as a whole through the conclusion.”<sup>992</sup> Thus, claims Richardson, instead of letting the content of the letter inform our understanding of the conclusion, we would be better off to let the conclusion inform our understanding of the letter. If so, then Sanders’ and Longenecker’s objections would be invalid.

Hans Dieter Betz, known for his study of Greco-Roman rhetoric, takes another approach. In some respects he would probably agree with Richardson’s ideas about the conclusion’s role. Betz does admit that the conclusion to a letter can be used “to sum up its main points, or add concerns which have come to the mind of the sender after the completion of the letter.”<sup>993</sup> But for other reasons Betz disagrees with Richardson. Betz thinks that the phrase “Israel of God” means the Church.

Betz’s argument is very interesting. He claims that the conditional blessing in Galatians 6:16 corresponds to the conditional curse in Galatians 1:8-9, and that the two of them, the blessing and the curse function together to make Galatians a “magical letter.” For the readers of Paul’s day, a “magical letter” – framed between a curse and a blessing – enacts its blessing/curse upon the readers, as soon as the letter is read. By constructing his letter in this fashion, Paul has made his message much more powerful. Betz explains:

It means that as the carrier of a curse and blessing the letter becomes a ‘magical letter.’ This category is well known from ancient epistolography. In other words, Paul does not simply rely on the ‘art of persuasion’ and its system of rational argumentation, . . . He also introduces the dimension of magic, that is, the curse and the blessing, as inescapable instruments of the Spirit, in order to confront the Galatians with the choice

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<sup>991</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 74.

<sup>992</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 76; Eriksson, “The ‘Israel of God’ in Galatians,” 6.

<sup>993</sup> Betz, Hans Dieter, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, 312.

between salvation and condemnation. Reading the letter will automatically produce the ‘judgment.’<sup>994</sup>

If this is true it would also mean that Paul is not adding new ideas with his benediction which do not occur during the rest of the letter, as Richardson claims. Rather the content of the earlier Chapters – the curse and the benediction – are all linked together to create a single message. This fact then would rule out any possibility that the conditional blessing that Paul attaches to the end of the letter would include any of his Christian opponents or the non-believing Jews. The “Israel of God” would have to be the Church.

For these and other reasons it seems that Richardson has the weaker argument, at least with respect to Galatians 6:16. Perhaps other Christians only gradually came to describe the Church as Israel. Good sense, though, seems to dictate that Paul, when he says “Israel of God” does in fact mean the Christian Church.

In addition to Betz’s magical letter proposal there are several more reasons for disagreeing with Richardson. To begin with it does not take much thought to discover that, logically, Richardson’s argument about starting with the conclusion is itself weak. In his *Israel and the Apostolic Church*, he is chiefly attempting to discern the meaning of Galatians’ conclusion [*s.c.*, Gal 6:16]. It does not make logical sense then for him to turn around and use the conclusion, whose meaning itself remains unproven and is under contention, to discern the meaning of the entire book.

Furthermore, it seems that Sanders, Longenecker, Jervis and others in this regard have the stronger argument when they claim that “the Israel of God” has to be the Church.<sup>995</sup> Any other interpretation, which presumes that Paul would bless his opponents and not the Gentiles after trying so hard earlier to include the Gentiles, flies in the face of the plain sense of Galatians’ content.

Secondly, it is well known that Paul and other New Testament writers adopted many other titles for the Church which were the sole property of Israel in the Hebrew Old Testament and in the LXX. The very word church ἐκκλησία is an example of this. While it can have other uses the word, ἐκκλησία, is typically used to describe the people of Israel in the LXX. Yet, in the New Testament the same word is used to describe the Christian Church.

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<sup>994</sup> Betz, Hans Dieter, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, 25.

<sup>995</sup> Jervis, *Galatians*, 159; Eriksson, “The ‘Israel of God’ in Galatians,” 7.



Thus, if the church adopts ἐκκλησία (assembly = church) from the Israelites why would they not adopt the title “Israel” also?

Third, in order to explain and defend his ideas, Richardson posits a gradual evolution in Christian thinking towards the point where the Church eventually calls itself “Israel.” In this regard, he thinks that Paul is at the halfway point between Jesus and Justin Martyr.<sup>996</sup> He even proposes a gradual evolution in Paul’s own thinking on this matter, with a clear break with the Jews becoming more apparent to him towards the end of his life.<sup>997</sup> Yet this theory is based on Richardson’s own hypothetical dating system for Paul’s letters. Jervis has shown that dating schemes based on hypothetical evolutions in theological thought are questionable:

Such proposals necessarily rely on assumptions about how Paul’s thinking might have developed and often do not adequately take into account the fact that his letters are not primarily witnesses to a developing theological mind but are the apostle’s responses to distinctive circumstances. Differences in Paul’s statements. . . are largely attributable to the differences in the situations he is addressing. . . . And, as Knox has outlined, using theology to determine the order of Paul’s letters has produced a wide variety of chronological schemes.”<sup>998</sup>

Fourth, no one can dispute that Paul was a highly original thinker. There is no reason why Paul would not have arrived at the idea that the Church was the “Israel of God” before other Christians did. As apostle to the Gentiles, he likely would have thought through the place of the Christian Gentiles in God’s overall schema much earlier than others who were not so Gentile-focused. As well, Paul perceived himself as having received divine revelations, which, as he indicates in Galatians 1-2, caused a dramatic development in his own thought on this matter. It may have taken the rest of the Church a few decades to catch up. It is quite possible then that there was no gradual evolution in the Church’s thought. Rather it could have been that Paul’s radical new ideas about Gentile status may not have been accepted by the rest of the church until Justin Martyr.

Sanders thinks that Christians have made the requirements for joining the people of God the same for both Jews and Gentiles. This is something innovative that the Christians have done. Nonetheless, it is what they have done.<sup>999</sup>

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<sup>996</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 72.

<sup>997</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 157-8.

<sup>998</sup> Jervis, *Galatians*, 12.

<sup>999</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 29.

A comment of Richardson's leads to our fifth objection. Richardson makes the following statement while building on his idea that Paul's thinking on the relationship between the church and Israel went through a gradual development. Richardson is in the midst of saying that only late in Paul's life, after he loses his optimism that the Jews will convert and become Christians, does he gradually move towards calling the Church Israel: "Thus Paul distinguished between 'Jew' and 'Israel', a distinction in line with, but a development upon, late Judaism's distinction between one's own group (the godly remnant) and the rest [of the Jews]. Only after his optimism was abandoned could 'Israel' be applied to the Church."<sup>1000</sup>

In the above passage Richardson says that Paul, like other first century Jews, sees a distinction between his own sect—the Godly remnant, the true Israel—and the rest of the Jews. Richardson further implies that that this is a constant theme with Paul from Damascus onwards. Of course, however, Paul's sect is the Christian Church. Yet in the statement above Richardson says that Paul did not see the Christian Church as being the Godly remnant, "Israel", until late in his life. Here we see a problem in Richardson's thinking.

If Paul, like other first century Jews, distinguished between his own sect, the Godly remnant – "Israel", and the rest, but then if Paul only late in his life included the entire Christian Church as being the Godly remnant, then what did Paul actually think that the Church was for the bulk of his ministry – not the Godly remnant? If there are only two categories for Paul and other first century Jews, but only late in life does Paul fit the Church into one of them, then how does Paul think about the Church in the meantime? Richardson however cannot come up with a good explanation as to what Paul actually thought that the Church was in the meantime, when it is neither the Godly remnant Israel, nor the un-Godly group. Although Richardson suggests that Paul could be moving towards calling the church a *Tertium Genus*—a third category or third group, towards the end of his life,<sup>1001</sup> this still leaves the problem of an interim period in Paul's ministry when the Church is left undefined.

In contrast to Richardson, it seems that Paul goes out of his way to talk about the Gentiles as part of the old traditional covenant: members of Abraham's family (Gal 3:27-29), or shoots grafted into the olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:17-24), or stating that "we are the

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<sup>1000</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 201.

<sup>1001</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 153.

circumcision” (Phil 3:3). Although New and Old Perspective scholars debate the extent to which inclusion of the Gentiles was a focus for Paul, it is beyond argument that at least one of Paul’s main foci was the inclusion of the Gentiles as part of the covenant with Abraham. As we have seen above, even Luther claims that this is the case. Thus, if Paul is consistent with his idea of including the believing Gentiles as part of the covenant people, they would have to be, [by some mechanism] part of the ‘Godly remnant’ – either through grafting in or adoption or whatever, and if they are part of the remnant, they are thus Israel. As Sanders says: “The situation is quite clear even if the terminology is confusing. Paul thought that those who turned to the Lord (2 Cor 3:16) were the sole inheritors of the promises to Abraham (3:16, 29). Conceptually, then, those in Christ are ‘true Israel.’”<sup>1002</sup>

It seems then, that one must agree with Sanders, Jervis and Longenecker and state that Paul considers that all those who believe in Jesus Christ, both Gentiles and Jews, are “Israel.” We are led to this conclusion, first, because of the overall message of inclusiveness towards Gentiles which is found in Galatians. Second, to describe the Christian community Paul borrows other terms like ἐκκλησία, which were previously unique to Israel. Third, Richardson’s failure to explain exactly what Paul did think of the Church for most of his career, also leads us to conclude that for Paul the Christian Church is Israel. Fourth, to support his viewpoints Richardson needs to create several invented historical scenarios which are dubious. Richardson also comes up with hypothetical Pauline motives. To explain why Paul does not include the Gentiles in the benediction at the end, Richardson claims that Paul has last minute concerns that in Galatia the Gentiles will start boasting.<sup>1003</sup> Given the fairly solid evidence behind the other perspectives, Richardson’s hypothetical scenarios do not convince.

As we said in the previous section, Paul argues that his gospel, the new covenant under Jesus, is the true inheritance of Abraham’s faith. Since Abraham’s belief was regarded as righteousness (Rom 4:3), therefore those who believe like Abraham did are his real descendants (Rom 4:11-12).

Paul, however, still shows a great deal of concern for the ethnic Jewish people. In Romans 11:1-6 Paul states that those physically descended from Abraham are not completely

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<sup>1002</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 175.

<sup>1003</sup> Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 202.

cut off. However, as in previous years, only a remnant is saved, and these are chosen by grace. Paul also prophecies in Romans 11:11-32 that a certain number of the ethnic Jews will eventually receive Jesus as the Messiah and be “grafted in again,” but this will only happen once “the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25 NRSV).

Paul then makes what could be seen to be a curious statement, once all the Gentiles have come in then “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26 NRSV). This seems to echo the idea that Paul has been attacking. It is Paul’s opponents, those who espouse the earlier prototypes of *m. Sanhedrin* 10 after all, who claim that “all Israel will be saved.” In asserting this, Paul’s opponents claim that those who are descended physically from Abraham, or who have joined the covenant through circumcision, will be saved.

Paul, though, uses the same expression “all Israel will be saved,” but he uses it differently than his opponents or the Pharisees would have used it. Paul has just finished arguing that it is not those who are physically descended from Abraham who are necessarily part of “Israel” (Rom 9:6-8). Paul has also said that it is those who have faith who are Abraham’s true descendants, (Rom 4:11-17, 22-25) not necessarily those who are merely circumcised. Consequently, when Paul uses this expression, “all Israel will be saved,” he means it in either one of two ways. Paul is either talking about the ethnic Jews, but in the future. After all the Gentiles have come in, then the rest of the ethnic Jews will join the Christian covenant also. Or, Paul has expanded and changed the definition of the term “Israel.” Instead of meaning ethnic Jews, in Paul’s usage it could mean those who have faith, both ethnic Jews who have faith and Gentiles who have faith. The overall shape of the arguments presented in Romans where Paul is arguing for an inclusion of Gentiles into the covenant of Abraham strongly suggests the latter approach.

Whether or not the Christian church is the “Israel of God,” is important for an evaluation of the New Perspective. If the church is Israel, then Christians can begin to discuss concepts such as salvation history. However, as we saw earlier, Wright complains that modern Protestantism has forgotten about salvation history. Still, like many of Wright’s critiques, one can argue that this does not apply to Luther, since he also believed that God acts within history, both in the long run and the short run, to bring about his purposes.

## 9.10 CONCLUSION

Those in the New Perspective camp have followed a different approach to Paul than other scholars. Instead of trying to understand Judaism through the lens of Paul's writings they are more apt to attempt to come to grips with Paul through the lens of Judaism. New Perspective scholars start with Judaism, attempt to grasp it on its own terms first, and then use that window as a means to understand Paul. This approach has its benefits. However, it also arguably creates its own sets of biases as well. To begin with, it leads scholars to view Paul's or other New Testament statements about Judaism with some degree of suspicion. Thus, in order to evaluate the New Perspective and the New Perspective's views on Luther one has to evaluate whether Paul correctly understood Judaism.

According to scholars such as Neusner, Shaye Cohen, Scott, and the contributors to *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, most modern scholars now agree that Judaism was neither legalistic, as Bultmann had thought, nor grace-based, as Sanders claims. Rather, first-century Judaism was represented by a rather diverse set of beliefs, some more legalistic or grace-based than others.

In light of this diversity, Neusner challenges modern New Testament scholars to take the diversity of Judaism into account when interpreting the New Testament. This Chapter has attempted to do that. We have argued that Paul was aware of Judaism's diversity, and thus in order to critique Judaism and demonstrate Christianity's superiority to Judaism he had to come up with not a simple response but a multi-layered critique. We have thus seen that neither Paul nor the other New Testament writers offered a simple "grace versus works" or "faith versus legalism" critique. Rather, there are several critiques of Judaism offered in the New Testament.

To make his critique of Judaism, Paul first needed to articulate exactly what he was critiquing. If the definition of Judaism was still open in the first century, Paul was free to come up with his own definition of Judaism. This Paul did, and in doing so, he maintained that Torah Judaism is a rigorous and demanding faith. Paul was likely making this definition of Judaism in part because he disagreed with the more grace-based versions of Judaism which were current in his time. In arriving at his exacting, and one might say legalistic view of Judaism, Paul had precedents elsewhere. The Old Testament prophets and many strains of intertestamental Judaism aligned themselves with Paul's strict approach to the Jewish

covenant. Furthermore, the gospel writers portray Jesus and John the Baptist as also opposing the grace-based views of Judaism current in their circles. In particular the gospels take issue with the idea that almost all of those who are physically descended from Abraham will be saved, merely by virtue of their physical descent.

In addition, although it is impossible to exactly determine the theology of Paul's opponents in Galatia, it could very well have been that some of them also affirmed that mere physical descent from Abraham (represented by circumcision) gave one access to the age to come. In any case, whatever the opinions of Paul's opponents actually were, Paul's response in Galatians strongly speaks against this kind of theology.

Once Paul has defined Judaism in a rigorous and law-oriented fashion he continued with his second critique of Judaism. Even if the Jewish covenant was properly and rigorously followed, states Paul, still strict law obedience is not adequate to attain salvation. The Torah covenant has been made obsolete by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and God's covenant is now entered through baptism and belief in Jesus. Furthermore, since perfect law obedience was impossible, one could not have attained righteousness by striving to keep the Torah's laws anyhow. Instead Paul states that righteousness comes through faith in the Messiah, Jesus, as a gift from God.

Paul then makes a third critique of Judaism. It is the followers of the Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles, Paul says, who now make up "Israel." By rejecting their Messiah, the non-believing Jews have been temporarily removed from God's covenant. However, given that the calling of God is irrevocable (Rom 11:29) Paul states that the Jews *en masse* will eventually join the Christian church and recognize Jesus as the Messiah, once the full number of Gentiles has come in (Rom 11:25).

What we have just articulated encapsulates some of the chief aspects of Paul's approach to Judaism. Using this interpretation we can then evaluate Luther's approach to Paul. Paul first has to define what it is that he is critiquing and so he begins by stating that Judaism is a legalistic faith. This Luther understands. Luther and the Reformers understood that Paul was reacting against Jewish legalism. Although Luther thought that the Jewish covenant had not originally been intended to be legalistic, nonetheless he thought that Judaism like Catholicism had taken originally a basically grace-based covenant and turned it into a legalistic one. In this regard, Luther follows Paul's statements in Romans 9:30-10:4.

In his second critique of Judaism Paul reacts against this very legalism which he has just identified. As has been communicated widely elsewhere, Luther and the other Reformers have amply understood Paul's second critique of Judaism.

Finally, Luther understood Paul's third critique of Judaism. As we saw in Chapter 6, Luther warned that if Germans committed idolatry *en masse* God would expel them from Germany in the same way that God had expelled the Jews from Israel. By making a statement of this nature Luther demonstrated that in his mind modern Christians now make up the group called "Israel." Luther further understood that God will treat modern Christians in the same way that he has treated the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Thus Luther's and the Reformers' approaches to Paul can be defended.

However, the challenges raised by the New Perspective to the Reformation understanding of Paul have not yet been completely answered. In the next chapter we look at the some of remaining contributions of the New Perspective and how these may or may not cause difficulties for the Reformation approach to Paul.

## CHAPTER 10

### STAYING IN BY GRACE OR BY WORKS

In this study we have argued that the greatest challenges New Perspective scholars and their predecessors mount toward the traditional Reformation paradigm are not those that frequently garner the most attention. To review: Luther is not an antinomian as Sanders in effect at one point accuses him of being. Second, Luther also believed that Judaism, in God's original intent, was grace-based, consequently a grace-based approach to Judaism does not challenge Luther to the extent that many think. Third, Bruce Corley has shown that Luther did not equate the motives for his own conversion with that of Paul as James Dunn believes Luther did. Fourth, Luther too was a sacramentalist and as a result the participationist focus of Schweitzer's thinking does not challenge Luther's position. Luther also believed that sinning as a matter of personal policy could result in one severing oneself from the body of Christ. Since this is the case, in effect, for Luther as well, a set of ethical standards does arise from the need to remain within the body of Christ by at the very least consistently repenting of sin and throwing oneself on the mercy of Jesus. Fifth, as indicated above, Luther understood that part of Paul's motives for writing what he wrote was to eliminate the cultural and ritual barriers between Jews and Gentiles within the church. However, Luther just does not think that this was Paul's main focus. Hence, on several issues Luther's actual positions have been frequently misunderstood. In many cases New Perspective scholars and their forbearers are closer to Luther's positions than most of them realize. Finally, in certain cases, many New Perspective ideas do not in fact challenge Luther's position at all.

There are, however, other points that New Perspective scholars occasionally raise which have not attracted as much attention as those we have already looked at. Since Sanders, Wright and Dunn have often missed the nuances within Reformation thought, particularly within Luther's thought, paradoxically it is these side issues that they raise, and not the major ones, which perhaps offer more of a challenge to the Reformation paradigm than what we have examined so far. As a result, one cannot say that Luther escapes from the New Perspective entirely unscathed. The New Perspective does launch a serious challenge



towards Reformation thought. In particular, New Perspectivists at times downplay the role of grace and faith at the “staying in,” point of Paul’s pattern of religion.

This chiefly occurs in two distinct, but related, aspects of New Perspective thought. First, E.P. Sanders has suggested that, like the rabbis, Paul too thinks that on occasion supplemental human actions are required in order to atone for certain sins. Second, some New Perspective scholars or their forebears go beyond this and question whether the atoning work of Jesus on the cross applies to post-baptismal sin among Christians at all. In this Chapter we examine these two thrusts of New Perspective thought. We also examine whether or not one can find support for this New Perspective approach in Paul, or whether Protestant interpretations of Paul capture the essence of his thinking.

### **10.1 SUPPLEMENTAL HUMAN INVOLVEMENT IN ATONEMENT**

New Perspective scholars have stirred up discussion regarding the function of Jesus’ atonement. While they may not have intended to do so, Gaston and Gager, with their two covenant hypothesis, in effect have placed limits on the atoning work of Jesus and even its ultimate necessity. If there is one covenant for Jews and a second one for Gentiles, as Gaston and Gager think, then obviously Jesus’ atoning work would only apply to the Gentiles. It would not be necessary for the Jews. Yet from this starting point one might further ask, “If Jesus’ atoning work was not necessary for everyone then is it necessary really at all?”

Most New Perspective scholars, though, do not take matters this far. Yet by emphasizing the moral requirements for staying in, they nevertheless seem to take a step towards Medieval Catholic interpretations of Paul, whether they are consciously aware that they are making a move in this direction or not.

One issue that Sanders raises is whether, in Paul’s thought, humans can do anything to atone for their sins. Sanders maintains that Jewish writers were open to the possibility that humans could undertake some actions to make atonement for sins that they had committed. Sanders also thinks that this kind of understanding makes its way into Paul’s writings. In his book *Judaism, practice and belief, 63 BCE-66 CE*, Sanders says this:

The rabbis of the high period of theological interpretation of the Pentateuch ... discussed how to co-ordinate the various means of atonement within various transgressions. Precisely which sins were wiped out by each of the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement? Which sins, if any, require only repentance? Since God sends

punishment if sins are not voluntarily wiped out, how does it work? Are the degrees of punishment corresponding to the seriousness of sin? Such discussions as these *presuppose* that for every sin there is a means of atonement, and that this includes the one sin that, according to the Bible, cannot be forgiven. ‘You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name’ (Exodus 20.7, NRSV). This caused the rabbis a little trouble; that is, it called for their ingenuity. R. Eliezer says: it is impossible to say, ‘he will not acquit’, since [elsewhere the Bible] says, ‘and he will acquit’ (Ex. 34.7). . . .He acquits those who repent but does not acquit those who do not repent....‘Other rabbis made other proposals; they all agreed that even this sin could be forgiven. . . . There are no dissenting voices in rabbinic literature, only different ways of arriving at the same result. The general view that God will find a means of forgiving every transgression by a member of the “in” group, even heinous sins, can be found, again in Paul. The man who committed incest in the church at Corinth, he said, should be expelled; his body would be destroyed but his soul would be saved (1 Cor 5:5). This is the view that suffering and death atone, a view richly represented in second-century rabbinic literature.<sup>1004</sup>

If Sanders is correct, and if Paul really does believe that humans can perform certain deeds which atone for sin, then this might in fact mount a challenge to Luther and the Reformation position.

However, several problems would need to be clarified before one can claim that Sanders has indeed challenged Reformation thinking. First, the passage that Sanders has highlighted is vague. One must ask first, has Sanders correctly interpreted 1 Corinthians 5:5? Is this passage really talking about a situation where a man is being punished by God for his sin and that this punishment will atone for sin? Or is the passage describing a situation where Paul is requesting that the church excommunicate the individual in question, in the hopes that this action will force the man to come to his senses, repent, and then be saved?

Furthermore, one might state that 1 Corinthians 5:5 is at the very least a demand by Paul that the Corinthian church discipline the offending member. That much is clear. Since this is the case, is further punishment by God necessary? Can Paul really be talking about divine punishment here if he is requesting discipline by the church?

The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5:5 is also influenced by 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 Paul requests that the Corinthian church forgive and restore fellowship with a man that they had earlier shunned at Paul’s request. The man has now repented, says

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<sup>1004</sup> Sanders, *Judaism, practice and belief, 63 BCE-66 CE*, 416-417.

Paul, and needs to be forgiven. If the individual in 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 is the same person, this would suggest that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:5 was not so much thinking that divine punishment atones for sin, but rather he was encouraging the Corinthian church to take disciplinary action. In any case, no mention of divine punishment is made in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 regarding this man. These passages appear to be discussing disciplinary action within the Christian community, not so much atonement for sin before God.

However, a second question needs to be resolved regarding Sanders' interpretation of the passage. Sanders uses the word "atone" in his quote above. Among Protestants the English word "atone" is usually reserved to describe the actions of Jesus on the cross. Hence, in using the word "atone", Sanders, (unconsciously or not) uses an expression that suggests a clear break between his thinking and Protestant thought. The man is being punished for his sins in the same way that Jesus received punishment for human sin on the cross, with the same result. The penalty of offending sin is removed and the way is opened for a restoration of a relationship with God. At least, this is what Sanders seems to imply with his use of the word "atone."

Yet, one can argue that Sanders did not have to use the word "atone". He could have used several other phrases with different nuances that express similar concepts, such as "experiencing discipline from God," "receiving punishment for sin," or as the Medieval Catholics said, "making satisfaction for one's sin." Some of these other expressions would express a similar concept but do not drive such a large wedge between his own thinking and Protestant thought. For instance, as we have seen previously, Luther at times talked about people, reborn Christians even, receiving punishment from God on earth for their earthly sins. One thus can ask whether Sanders has used the correct term here to describe the idea that he is talking about. After all, there may be a difference between being punished for sin, or receiving discipline for sin, and making atonement for sin.

To illustrate this, let us attempt to articulate the potential differences between the concepts of receiving discipline from God for one's sins, and making atonement for sin. Let us further say that there are two different dimensions to human experience, dimensions that we might call "the vertical dimension" and "the horizontal dimension." The "vertical dimension" concerns the human relationship with God and the hopes for receiving eternal life after death. The second dimension, the horizontal dimension, primarily concerns our

relationships with other humans and our experience of daily life, positive or negative, while on earth.

One can thus argue that among Protestants, the word “atone” is usually reserved for the vertical dimension of our experience. Jesus atoned for humanity’s sins on the cross, and with the penalty for those sins removed, humanity is free to benefit from a restored relationship with God and free to contemplate the opportunity of eternal life. Because of the atonement, the possibility is open that humans can be numbered among the elect (if one can use that expression). However, it is obvious that even those who are numbered among the elect still sin while on earth, and thus they might experience some consequences for that sin. These consequences might be referred to as divine punishment or divine discipline. Discipline from God is something that chiefly concerns the horizontal dimension of one’s existence. God may visit discipline on an individual for several purposes: making sure that justice is done, or for teaching or edifying an individual, or for driving that person to repentance.

A biblical example of someone who received divine discipline might be Jacob. As Paul says, the Scriptures indicate that Jacob was chosen by God before he was born (Rom 9:10-13). Almost despite himself, Jacob was numbered among the elect throughout his life. Yet Jacob was not a perfect person. He cheated his brother Esau. Later on though, Jacob himself was cheated by his uncle Laban.

Many have argued that Laban’s actions were the punishment visited upon Jacob for the cheating of his brother Esau. Assuming that this is the case, how would one describe what took place here? Was the divine punishment visited by God upon Jacob vertical or horizontal in nature? In other words, by being cheated by Laban, was Jacob “atoning” (to use Sanders’ term) for his sins with Esau? Was Jacob’s relationship with God somehow restored because Jacob suffered at the hands of Laban? Or, was Jacob’s relationship with God intact all along, and was it the case that Jacob experienced hardship at the hands of Laban so that justice would be done and so that Jacob would learn that cheating someone is not appropriate and thus become a better person himself? God’s visit to Jacob at Bethel where Jacob witnessed the ladder ascending into heaven, would suggest that Jacob’s relationship with God was intact all along. The punishment that Jacob received must have taken place for other reasons.

One can also compare with this the punishments visited by God upon the Egyptians during the Exodus experience. The Exodus story does not seem to suggest that the ten

plagues took place for the sake of bringing the Egyptians into a relationship with God. They do not appear to have had an atoning quality about them. The Egyptians appear to be just as much outside God's covenant after the plagues as beforehand. The punishments then, must have occurred for other reasons, such as to force Pharaoh's hand or bring about justice for the Israelites.

Luther would have no problem talking about divine punishment in the latter sense given above. At the same time, other than repentance, Luther would reject talk of any kind of human act or divine punishment visited on a human that would somehow eliminate the penalty of sin to the extent that it restored a human relationship with God.<sup>1005</sup> This perhaps is the chief point of Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation." Luther's insistence that atonement for sin is done by Jesus alone, and not by humans remains an emphasis within Lutheranism to this day. As one example of this, in American theologian Carl Braaten's *Principles of Lutheran theology*, he expounds ten facets to the notion of salvation. These ten taken together leave no room for human involvement in making atonement for sin.<sup>1006</sup> Thus, if in 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul was speaking about "atonement" in the sense that we have explained it above, where the punishment from God upon a human restored the relationship between that human and God, then there truly would be a breach between Paul's theology and the Protestant interpretation of it. If Paul was talking about something else such as divine discipline or encouragement for a church to shun an individual then there is no breach between Paul's theology here, at least, and the Protestant view of it.

There is a third problem with Sanders' interpretation. If Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:5, is suggesting that divine punishment upon a human does atone for sin, how then does this thinking square with Paul's other statements such as in 1 Corinthians 15:3 that it was Jesus who died for our sins? Paul clearly was an original thinker. He obviously has different views of atonement than those expressed in the Old Testament or intertestamental Judaism. We have already mentioned Terry Donaldson's complaint that Paul does not mention the temple as a means of atonement. The rabbis might have believed in several means of atonement for sin, but does Paul? After all, as Braaten mentions, in many parts of the Old Testament concepts of salvation and the age to come have much more of a this-worldly focus and less of

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<sup>1005</sup> Forde, G., *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation*, 23-30.

<sup>1006</sup> Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 73-75.

an other-worldly focus.<sup>1007</sup> According to Braaten, the New Testament embraces more otherworldly and individualistic notions of salvation than the Old Testament. Since the notions of salvation and the age to come are different from the Old to the New Testaments it would not be much of a stretch to think that concepts surrounding the atonement, the means by which a human can participate in that age to come, are different also. Is it fair then to attempt to push rabbinic approaches towards atonement onto Paul? If Paul did think that humans could in some way add to the atoning work of Christ, or if Paul had a belief in several means of atonement, one would expect that the references to such ideas would be clear and that Paul would explain how this worked in relation to the larger atonement accomplished by Jesus on the cross. We do not seem to see this.

In any case, Sanders' interpretation of this passage is doubtful. First, he may not have correctly understood the passage. Sanders might be incorrectly imposing notions of atonement onto a passage that is really about church discipline. Second, Sanders' use of the word "atone" is questionable. Does this word really describe the concept that Sanders is trying to articulate? Third, if Paul really does think that God's punishment visited upon humans atones for sins, where are the other passages that relay such a concept?

However, before we completely shut the door on Sanders' interpretation, it is worth examining the somewhat similar viewpoints of Albert Schweitzer.

## **10.2 SCHWEITZER, SANDERS, WRIGHT AND STAYING IN BY GRACE**

As stated earlier, compared with traditional Protestant thought, New Perspective scholars downplay the role of grace at the "staying in" point of a Christian's pattern of religion. Westerholm recognizes this and he disputes the claim of some New Perspectivists that Paul endorses an anticipatory justification based on faith, and a final justification based on works.<sup>1008</sup> However, New Perspective scholars and their forbearers vary from each other regarding the extent to which grace is challenged in this regard. Albert Schweitzer takes the more definite position while N.T. Wright and E.P. Sanders are more tentative and nuanced.

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<sup>1007</sup> Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 69-71.

<sup>1008</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 84.

In the previous section we have also seen how Sanders raises the possibility that for Paul human suffering may make atonement for human sins.

Again as mentioned previously, Sanders suggests that a temporary punishment at the last judgment might erase or atone for the sins of those people who are otherwise faithful to God and thus allow them to enter heaven. Sanders says that this kind of thinking existed in pre-Christian Jewish quarters and the same kind of thinking finds its way into Paul's teaching. Sanders writes:

When Christian scholars discuss Judaism they usually think of reward and punishment 'soteriology': God rewards those who do good by giving them eternal life, but he condemns those who do evil.... This is a gross perversion of the evidence. In most discussions in the Jewish literature of our period, reward and punishment function within this world; life after death is not a major theme, and Christian scholars often impose soteriology on the material. Further, when Jews thought about salvation beyond this world, they did not suppose that fifty-one per cent of one's total deeds would determine the issue. God's grace always emerges as the most important point. Finally, repentance was comprehensive in scope.... In rabbinic parlance, a person who was completely wicked could repent at the end and be saved ... God had another way of wiping out the sins of people who were basically loyal to him: punishment. Paul shared a common view, that punishment in this world is adequate; one is not punished in both this world and in the world to come; there is no 'double jeopardy'. In theological language, suffering and death atone. People in Corinth who ate and drank unworthily became ill or died; they did not go to hell (1 Cor. 11.30). The man in the Corinthian church who committed incest deserved death, but his spirit would be saved (1 Cor. 5.1-5). The second-century rabbis elaborated on the point: one should worry about *not* suffering in this world, since it might mean that punishment was still in store. The righteous suffer in this world for their (few) sins. The idea that suffering was God's punishment or chastisement was very common in our period, as well as before and afterwards, and with this went the view that justice had been done when a person had suffered.... The punishment for sin was not damnation, but suffering and, at worst, death. If this did not work reward and punishment could be shifted to the world to come. Paul thought that Christians ('we') would all appear 'at the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he or she has done in the body' (2 Cor. 5.10).... Thus, speaking of himself and Apollos, he wrote that the work of a not-very-good apostle would be burned up and that the apostle himself would be saved 'only as through fire', that is singed (1 Cor. 3.15). In the same context, Paul claimed that he knew nothing that might count against himself at the judgment, but that God might think of something and, one presumes, punish him for it.... When the Lord comes, Paul continued, God will give each person an appropriate 'commendation' or 'approval' (1 Cor. 4.4f). In these cases reward is not heaven and punishment is not hell.

Paul is discussing people who will be saved, but they will be ‘commended’ or lightly punished at the judgment, depending on their deeds.<sup>1009</sup>

Sanders continues:

In the view of all Jews, including Paul, reward and punishment depend on deeds. Paul and the rabbis did not work these principles out in precisely the same way. The rabbis held that the punishment of the righteous is completed in this world, while their reward is delayed; Paul envisaged the possibility that the righteous would be slightly punished in the world to come. We find what was common by discovering the underlying principles, that God saves according to his mercy and the basic stance of the individual, but rewards and punishes according to his justice, thereby taking account of particular good and bad deeds.<sup>1010</sup>

Wright’s views are somewhat aligned with Sanders. Justification, says Wright, is really about covenant membership and not about salvation from sin.<sup>1011</sup> Wright explains: “it is clear that Paul’s whole argument is about membership in the single family, sharing the same-table fellowship, not primarily about the way in which sins are dealt with and the sinner rescued from them.”<sup>1012</sup> In this regard, Wright would agree with Sanders, who as we noted above, sees justification as applying to the “getting in” and not the “staying in,” aspects of Christian life. We have mentioned that Wright points out that in Galatians there is almost no mention of sin and none of death.<sup>1013</sup> Wright claims that the Protestant preoccupation with seeing justification as chiefly concerned with the preparing of people for salvation after they leave this life is reductionist and almost Gnostic.<sup>1014</sup>

In his evaluation of Wright’s thought, Piper agrees that Wright downplays grace at the staying in point. Piper also states that this is why he intended that the title of his book: *The Future of Justification*, would have a double meaning. It is the future aspect of justification, in other words the “staying in” part of the covenant, which comes into question when evaluating Wright’s work.<sup>1015</sup> Is it by works or by grace? Piper writes:

Wright thinks Reformed pastors and scholars do not pay enough attention to the relationship between justification and works. When he spoke at the 2003 Edinburgh

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<sup>1009</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 272-274.

<sup>1010</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 274-275.

<sup>1011</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 872-873, 990.

<sup>1012</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 969.

<sup>1013</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 970.

<sup>1014</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1066.

<sup>1015</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification*, 182-184.



Dogmatics Conference, he said that there seemed to be a massive conspiracy of silence about something that was quite clear for Paul (as indeed for Jesus). Paul, in company with mainstream second-Temple Judaism affirms that God's final judgement will be in accordance with the entirety of a life led – in accordance, in other words, with works.<sup>1016</sup>

Again, though Piper does not use the term “staying in,” it is towards this side to Wright's thinking that Piper is most critical. Let us hear from Piper again:

Huge and important questions go unaddressed here. The allusion to 1 Corinthians 3:10–17 (“he himself will be saved, but only as through fire,” v. 15) as confirming the seriousness of the final judgment does not work. At the place where it cries out for reflection, Wright does not come to terms with the fact that Paul threatens baptized professing Christians not just with barely being saved, but with not being saved at all at the last judgment (Gal 5:21; 6:7–9; 1 Cor 6:9). The whole question of how Paul can speak this way and how our works actually function at the last day are passed over. This is a silence where we very much need to hear Wright speak with detail and precision, since the issues are so controversial and so important for the central doctrine of justification.<sup>1017</sup>

Schweitzer takes a stronger and more definite position than Sanders and Wright. Twice in his book, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Schweitzer claims that in Paul's thought, through baptism, Christ's death atones for the sins committed by an individual prior to baptism. Yet Schweitzer goes on to claim that in Paul's thought sins committed after baptism are not atoned for by Christ's death. After baptism only human suffering atones for sin.<sup>1018</sup> As we heard earlier in this study, Schweitzer writes: “According to the view of Paul, as of primitive Christianity in general, the atoning death of Christ does not procure continuous forgiveness of sins, but only the release obtained in baptism from previously committed sins. For subsequent transgressions, atonement is secured by suffering with Christ.”<sup>1019</sup> If Schweitzer is correct, then his Pauline interpretations are significantly different than those in traditional Protestant thought.

As we have said earlier, the major contribution of the Reformation was not over “getting in,” or baptism, but over “staying in,” or as medieval thinkers termed it, the doctrine of penance. Lohse writes:

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<sup>1016</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification*, 111.

<sup>1017</sup> Piper, *The Future of Justification*, 118.

<sup>1018</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 220.

<sup>1019</sup> Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 146-147.

The practice of indulgences must be understood in the context of the sacrament of penance. Penance first begins with the sinner experiencing contrition. Then the sinner confesses her or his sin to the priest and receives absolution from the priest. Finally, the priest requires the penitent to perform some kind of satisfaction. This satisfaction was laid upon penitents as a way by which they could experience the punishment of their sins that had not been removed by the absolution. This understanding of satisfaction was based upon the presupposition that a sinful act not only results in guilt but also incurs a temporal punishment that must be endured, either here upon earth or in purgatory.<sup>1020</sup>

Even Stendahl recognizes that penance is the dispute point of the Reformation, not “getting in,” as Dunn thinks. As Stendahl writes: “Luther’s inner struggles presuppose the developed system of Penance and Indulgence, and it is significant that his famous 95 Theses take their point of departure from the problem of forgiveness of sins as seen within the framework of Penance.”<sup>1021</sup>

As opposed to some medieval scholars, Protestants held that the work of Jesus on the cross did atone for sins committed after baptism, as long as those sins were repented of. Yet Schweitzer disagrees. Thus, with these statements Schweitzer challenges the central contribution of the Reformation.

Schweitzer’s and Sanders’ claims are not identical but they are similar. Both propose that human suffering may atone for sin. One suggests that the suffering takes place in this life, the other suggests that the suffering might take place in either this life or at least at the entrance point to the next life.

Whether he understands it or not, Schweitzer’s perspectives are close to those of certain Medieval Catholic theologians on this topic. Some Medieval Catholics taught that Jesus Christ’s atonement on the cross only applied to the sins covered by baptism. Baptism thus atoned for original sin and for sins committed prior to baptism, but any sins committed afterwards were cleansed either through human suffering or through works of penance. Furthermore, Luther was aware of similar arguments to the ones that Schweitzer proposes.<sup>1022</sup> Since Schweitzer is so important to the New Perspective, and since these issues do present a major challenge to Reformation thought, it is worth a brief review of these

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<sup>1020</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 42-43.

<sup>1021</sup> Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 82.

<sup>1022</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John*, AE 22: 333-334.

matters in Paul's letters. Does Paul think that Jesus' atonement applies just to baptism and to the sins committed prior to it, to the "getting in" phase of the Christian life, or does Paul also think that Jesus' atonement applies to sins committed afterwards also; to the "staying in" phase of one's Christian experience? Are there passages which suggest that punishment from God, either in this life or at the moment of the last judgement, will atone for sin and allow us to enter eternity? If so, do these passages overthrow the Protestant paradigm?

Before we delve into the biblical texts, however, it is worth noting that in making his claim, the challenge that Schweitzer sets up for himself is immense. Since he maintains that Christ's death on the cross does not atone for post-baptismal sin, if one finds even one clear instance in the Scriptures where Paul suggests that Christ's death on the cross does in fact atone for post-baptismal sin, then Schweitzer's argument runs into difficulty.

In the next few pages we will look at New Testament passages related to Schweitzer's claim. The first step in doing this will be to examine texts that possibly support him. Those, like Schweitzer, who wish to have us question whether Paul thinks that Jesus' atoning work was limited to baptism usually find backing in the Corinthian letters. Let us then first look at some of the arguments from 1 and 2 Corinthians.

To begin with, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says this: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (ESV). This passage could suggest that human suffering at the last judgment at least atones for sin. However, Reformation thinkers also had a place for the last judgment in their thought. One can thus argue that the passage that we have just mentioned does not overthrow the Reformation thinking.

One of the ways that the last judgment was treated by the Reformers can be found in Philip Melancthon's "Apology to the Augsburg Confession." Here he states that although receiving eternal salvation and entering heaven comes through the gift of faith, there still is a judgment. The manner in which the judgment comes into effect for Christians, says Melancthon, is not related to our access to heaven itself. Rather, the kind of reward we will receive in heaven (and to some extent here and now) depends on what we have done in this life. Melancthon writes:

We teach that good works are meritorious—not for the forgiveness of sins, grace or justification (for we obtain these only by faith) but for other physical and spiritual rewards in this life and in that which is to come, as Paul says (1 Cor 3:8). 'Each shall

receive his wages according to his labor.’ Therefore there will be different rewards for different labors.<sup>1023</sup>

Another passage that could possibly support Schweitzer’s position comes from 1 Corinthians 3:15. Paul has just finished talking about the fact that those who teach Christianity need to be accurate in their teaching so that it can withstand God’s testing. Otherwise what they have built will be burned up. He then adds: “If their work is burned up, the builder will be saved, but only as through fire” (NRSV). Sanders mentions this passage above as support for his arguments that human suffering at the last judgment atones for sin. In addition, some Roman Catholics claim that this passage gives support for purgatory. Again, however, the passage is vague and difficult to interpret. “Saved as through fire,” could mean many things. Paul might be thinking of Isaiah 53:2b which states: “When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you” (Isa 53:2b; NRSV). In other words, it could mean that while others suffer the wrath of God on the day of judgment talked about in 1 Thessalonians, and while the builder’s work itself might be burned up, (which is itself tragic and disappointing) those who are saved as through fire are spared the wrath that Paul talks about in 1 Thessalonians. The fire is going on all around the builder but he or she will manage to pass through it.

In looking at passages that might support Schweitzer’s position, another, of course, is 1 Corinthians 5:5 which we have already looked at. Again, however, this passage is vague and difficult to interpret. Paul talks about handing over the one who committed incest “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (NRSV). This could potentially support Sanders’ point that there can be punishment for sins in this life. At the same time, however, as we have seen, Paul might not be talking about the person receiving divine punishment. Paul’s chief aim (and perhaps sole aim) with this passage instead is to talk about the excommunication of this person from the Christian community (what else would handing someone over to Satan mean?). Also, since Paul’s Corinthian community would certainly not be killing or physically punishing the man, the discussion about “the destruction of the flesh” almost certainly refers to a destruction of the man’s fleshly or sinful attitude or outlook.

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<sup>1023</sup> Apology to the Augsburg Confession, in Theodore Tappert trans. & ed. *The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 133.

The next passage, 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:4 should be viewed in its entire context. Paul writes:

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that, if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.... For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed, but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (NRSV).

While at first sight, 2 Corinthians 4:16 could possibly be used to support the notion that either punishment in this life or punishment at the last judgment atones for sin, the meaning changes when one sees it in a larger context. When viewed in its context the passage seems rather to be talking about the burdens of living an imperfect mortal life while longing for the perfect life to come. Hence it is more likely that Paul here is talking about the burdens and hardships that come upon life when one is aging and when one's physical body is not as fit as previously. Some people, in fact, have seen the passage above and its surrounding context as giving evidence for a certain degree of influence by Plato in Paul's thought; in particular, Plato's *Doctrine of Forms*.

We have looked at various passages that could support Schweitzer or Sanders. We have seen that these passages do not give clear support for that position as they are vague and could be interpreted in several different ways. Now we will consider several passages that suggest or state outright that Jesus' death on the cross enables Christians to "stay in" the covenant. For instance, 1 Corinthians 1:18 says: "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (ESV). It is important to remember that Paul's audience in the Corinthians letters are Christians, already baptized and already part of the church. If Jesus' death atoned solely for pre-baptismal sin, then Paul could not talk as if the benefits of the cross were a present on-going reality. Yet he speaks about the cross as something that matters in the present tense. The work of the cross is the power of God, in the present moment, for those who are being saved.

All the sections of 1 Corinthians 15, when taken together demonstrate that Jesus' work counts for "staying in." In verses 1-2 Paul begins by saying: "Now I would remind you,

brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain” (ESV). In this passage, since Paul mentions “holding fast,” a present action that has future implications, Paul seems to suggest that “being saved” is about staying in: the Corinthians’ future life with God.

Paul goes on: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor 15:3-5; ESV). This passage might only imply that Christ’s death enables the Corinthians to “get in.” But if we continue, we see that his death and resurrection affects their future status with God, “staying in.” Paul writes:

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Cor 15:14-22; ESV).

The term “first fruits” in the passage above is best interpreted as applying to the staying in point of Paul’s covenant understanding. In the Hebrew tradition, the first fruits are the first part of the harvest, the first few bundles of grain that have become ripe. The first fruits are offered up to God in thanksgiving for the rest of the harvest that will soon become ripe and resemble the first fruits. Paul uses “first-fruits” here as a metaphor to describe Jesus’ resurrection. Paul also clearly intends to communicate that the rest of us will end up like Jesus, the first fruits, and rise from the dead. Yet, the whole passage links our eventual resurrection to Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection. Our resurrection is brought about by the events of Good Friday and Easter. As 1 Corinthians 15:17a says: “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile” (ESV). The future result of the Corinthians’ faith, the resurrection from the dead, “staying in,” is linked to the death and resurrection of Jesus. No mention is made of extra divine punishment or human penance that needs to be undertaken to bring about the resurrection and forgiveness for the Corinthians’ many post-baptismal sins.

Among the passages that challenge Schweitzer's view, another strong passage in the Corinthian correspondence is 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Here Paul says:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (ESV).

This passage again implies staying in. Once more, Paul's audience here is the Corinthian church, the majority of whom at least are presumably already baptized. Yet he asks them to be reconciled to God. If they need to be reconciled to God, then they need to repent of post-baptismal sin. However, in this passage, it is clearly Jesus who does the atoning work. Both before and after the passage above Paul has been discussing the fact that Jesus was "reconciling the world to himself," or "being made sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Clearly the action of reconciliation here involves the actions of Jesus. It is Jesus who is reconciling the world to himself not humans who have to do extra works of penance in addition to Jesus' work.

One can see that in the Corinthian letters the argument can be made that Paul attaches Jesus' work on the cross to "staying in" as well as "getting in." There are other passages that could be mentioned, including ones where Paul urges people to repent and commends others who do so: 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 and 2 Corinthians 7:8-13. In addition, 2 Corinthians 13:9b states: "Your restoration is what we pray for" (ESV). This suggests repentance is possible. No punishment of sinners is mentioned in these passages, just the action of repentance. We could compare these passages with Galatians 6:1 which also suggests that repentance without punishment is possible.

In general, still relating to Schweitzer, if repentance is possible after baptism, then this fact at least raises questions about the point or usefulness of divine punishment for post-baptismal sin. The fact that someone can repent from sin and seek reconciliation with God does not preclude the possibility that one might be punished for post-baptismal sins but it raises serious doubts about that possibility. If one is to be punished for sins, then why would repentance be even necessary? If punishment removes sin and its penalty, then is it not the case that all that would be necessary for reconciliation with God would be endurance until

the punishment is finished? Within a hockey game, the player who is penalized for misconduct is not usually required to repent. He does not need to say sorry. In most cases, in order to re-join the players on the ice, he merely needs to wait until his time in the penalty box is finished and his crime has been paid for. The same might be said to be true for more serious crimes punished within some of the world's prison systems. Yet 2 Corinthians 7:8-13 seems to talk about repentance without divine punishment. Hence even in the Corinthian correspondence Schweitzer's case seems weak.

Further, the case against Schweitzer's atonement theory is even stronger in Romans. Let us begin with Romans 7. The meaning of Romans 7 is debated. However, at least two interpretations of Romans 7 turn out to be difficult for the New Perspective. If the latter part of Romans 7 refers to Paul's own experience as a Christian, which many people think it does, then this clearly disproves the idea we have been discussing in this chapter, Schweitzer's notion that there is no atonement for the post-baptismal sins of Christians other than human suffering. If, on the other hand, Romans 7 discusses the state of Paul's own mind prior to his conversion to Christianity, then Stendahl's opinion that Paul had a robust conscience is challenged.

However, regarding Schweitzer's opinions stronger counter-arguments can be made from other Romans passages. Romans 4:22-25 states: "That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe [have faith] in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (ESV). Again, Paul's audience, the Roman church, are almost certainly all already Christians, the majority of whom would be already baptized. They have already "gotten in." Yet in the passage above, Paul here is talking about the future. Paul says: "It will be counted to us." Once more, Jesus' righteousness will be counted to those who believe or have faith. What happens in the future is "staying in."

For some pages, we have been discussing Schweitzer's position in relation to the texts in Paul's epistles. New Perspectivists such as James Dunn agree that "getting in" to the covenant takes place through faith and grace. However, if the New Perspective approach to justification by faith is to be believed, justification only refers to the "getting in" phase of the Christian life and not to "staying in." Grace and faith apply chiefly to the entrance point of



the covenant. Yet in the biblical passages we have just looked at faith is seen as beneficial for something that happens in the future, “it *will* be counted to us who have faith in him who raised from the dead Jesus.” Paul is saying that faith will bring about righteousness in the future for people who have already “gotten in.” Paul then must be saying that faith helps us to “stay in.”

Further support for the notion that Jesus’ atonement applies to “staying in,” can be found in Romans 8. In Sanders’ understanding of covenantal nomism, one *does not* earn one’s way into the Jewish covenant through law observance. One gets into the covenant through grace but one *stays in* the covenant through law observance. In Romans 8:4a Paul says that Jesus came “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (ESV). This would imply that Jesus’ death was for post-baptismal sin also, for “staying in,” since Paul compares it to the righteous requirement of the law, which under the Jewish covenant in Sanders’ understanding also refers to “staying in.”

Once again, Sanders’ understanding of covenantal nomism informs our understanding of the following passage. Again, for Sanders, law observance is what one does as a Jew not to “get in,” but to “stay in.” Yet in Romans 9:30-33 Paul says: “The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith. But Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works” (ESV). This again suggests that faith applies to staying in, because the parallel, “a law that would lead to righteousness,” is not about something already achieved but about something that is achieved in the future; “staying in.”

In Romans 10:5 Paul says: “Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says. . .” (ESV). Again this suggests that the righteousness based on faith is about staying in, since the law passage that Paul earlier takes as parallel to it is also about staying in.

In interpreting the next passage we need to remember that in the Greek language the verb believe πιστεύεις is related directly to the noun, faith, πίστις. They are not two separate and unrelated words, as in English. As a result, when one encounters the verb “believe” in the next few passages we could also translate it as: “have faith” or perhaps “trust.” Romans

10:9 says: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe [have faith] in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (ESV). The same relation between faith and belief holds true in the next passage: Romans 10:11 “Everyone who believes [has faith] in him will not be put to shame” (ESV). Again, in these passages Paul is talking about what will happen in the future, in other words “staying in.” We see then that faith does not only apply to the “getting in” part of the covenant in Paul’s understanding, but to the “staying in” part too. Romans 11:20 contains the same idea. Paul writes: “They were broken off because of their unbelief but you stand fast [or remain] through faith.” Again, standing fast implies “staying in” (ESV).

The last few passages that we have looked at relate to another argument that Wright raises to counter Stephen Westerholm. Wright has responded to Westerholm’s critique of his thought by saying the following:

In his reading of 1 Thessalonians, he [Westerholm] naturally sees that ‘justification’ does not occur, but says that since ‘justification entails a divine initiative by which sinners meriting condemnation are reprieved and granted a place in God’s ‘kingdom’, then the doctrine itself, though not the expression, is found there. But that is the very thing at issue: not whether Paul believed all that about the saving of sinners, but *whether he used the language of ‘justification’ to state that point.*<sup>1024</sup>

Wright argues that while yes, in Paul’s letters “justification” takes place through faith, Paul’s use of the term “justification” applies only to the “getting in” aspect of the covenant and not to “staying in.” However, in the passages above we see a link between justification and “staying in.” In Paul’s thought, “justification” takes place by faith but also, as we have seen above, other terms which fall under the category of “staying in” take place by faith as well. Some of these terms Paul might refer to as: “standing fast,” (Rom 11:20) or “being saved” (Rom 10:9) or “not being put to shame” (Rom 10:11) these also take place by faith.

This point is further reinforced by what we see in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10: “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (ESV). The wrath that Paul is talking about here is the wrath that happens at the last judgment, something that happens in the future. Once more, in writing 1 Thessalonians Paul is speaking to a group of

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<sup>1024</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 127. Emphasis in the original.

Christians who have most likely already been baptized. They have already “gotten in.” The future wrath that Paul says that they will avoid assures them that they will “stay in.” Paul here refers to “staying in” as “salvation.” Again we see that “salvation” or “staying in” takes place through the work of Jesus, not through works nor through the visitation of divine punishments upon individual Christians.

In the passages above we have seen strong support for the idea that Paul thinks that Jesus’ atonement applies to the “staying in” phase of the Christian life and not only to the “getting in” phase. This fact makes Schweitzer’s protests to the contrary seem weak. In addition, we have seen evidence that Paul thinks that a Christian’s faith allows him or her to receive the effects of Jesus’ atoning work in his or her life through faith. Thus Paul speaks about faith as being present to receive the effects of Jesus’ atoning work, not just at the “getting in” phase but also at the “staying in” phase. Furthermore, in Paul’s letters we see clear links between a variety of concepts. Being justified takes place through the work of Jesus on the cross. This act is received by Christians through their faith. At the same time, as we have seen in Romans, being saved is something that is received by Christians through their faith. “Standing fast” also takes place by faith and “not being put to shame,” takes place by faith. In 1 Thessalonians 5 we see a link between “being saved,” and avoiding God’s wrath at the final judgment. Avoiding God’s wrath at the final judgment is clearly “staying in.” All of these concepts then, are linked: faith, justification, “staying in,” standing fast in the faith, being saved, and avoiding wrath. As we have seen, all of them take place through God’s grace and through Jesus’ atoning work on the cross. The case is thus strong for claiming that Paul saw Jesus’ atoning work on the cross as applying to “staying in” and not just “getting in.” Hence, we can conclude that Paul saw the atoning work of Jesus as applying to post-baptismal sin, not just to pre-baptismal sin.

Before concluding this section we should note that the New Testament authors would not have seen the effects of Jesus work on the cross in isolation from Old Testament passages which in their view were prophecies about Jesus. One can think of several Old Testament passages which could be read as potentially foreshadowing Jesus’ atoning work. For instance, Genesis 22 contains the story of Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac. During this story Abraham continually states: “God will provide the sacrifice.” By the end of the story,

Abraham's white lie becomes true. This indicates that God, not humans, does the atoning work.

As noted previously, in John 3 Jesus compares his future atoning work to the healing effect of the snake on the pole in Numbers 21. The Israelites who were healed by looking at the snake had already "gotten in," they were already part of the people of God. The effect of the snake on the pole was to atone for the poison in their bodies that resulted from sins that took place after they had already entered the covenant.

In his commentary on Deuteronomy Luther gave an interesting explanation for why it was that Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, whereas Joshua was. The Promised Land represents heaven and Moses the giver of the law cannot bring people into heaven through the means of obedience to the laws that he gives. However, Joshua, who shared the same name with and thus prefigured Jesus, is able to bring people into heaven, (to allow them to "stay in," using Sanders' terminology).<sup>1025</sup>

However, Isaiah 53 is possibly an even stronger passage than those we have already mentioned. Isaiah is the most frequently quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. Isaiah 53:5-6, 9-12 states:

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ... And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

As Acts 8:30-35 illustrates, the early Christians thought that Isaiah 53 was a prophecy of Jesus' death on the cross. They would also understand that the purpose and the results of Jesus' death were as described above. The Messiah "was pierced for our transgressions." However, one has to ask, in the passage above who is the prophet's audience, to whom is the

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<sup>1025</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, AE 9:259, 284.

word “our” referring to? Once again, the prophet’s original audience was obviously the people of Israel, people who had already “gotten in” to the covenant. Since they are already in the covenant, it is their transgressions that they have committed after “getting in” that the messiah’s death atones for. This means that it is the transgressions at the “staying in” not the “getting in” phase of the people of Israel’s relationship with God for which the messiah’s death atones. Certainly this is how the passage would be understood within the early Christian community.

Finally, with regard to the use of the term “justification” it may be helpful to examine a passage from the Community Rule of Qumran (1QS 11:11-15) that James Dunn mentions.

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 . . . . He will draw me near by his grace, and by his mercy will he bring my justification. He will judge me in the righteousness of his truth and in the greatness of his goodness he will pardon all my sins. Through his righteousness he will cleanse me of the uncleanness of man and the sins of the children of men.<sup>1026</sup>

In his essay in *Justification: Five Views*, Dunn mentions this passage demonstrates that the grace based nature of Judaism. However, what is even more interesting is the way in which the passage above treats the term “justification.” Clearly here, in a passage written shortly before the New Testament, the term “justification” is used to speak not about “getting in,” but about “staying in.”

Earlier we heard from Wright how he questioned Westerholm with regards to Paul’s use of the term “justification.” Again, Wright says: “But that is the very thing at issue: not whether Paul believed all that about the saving of sinners, but *whether he used the language of ‘justification’ to state that point.*”<sup>1027</sup> However, the passages we looked at above: the sections of from Paul’s letters, the Old Testament selections and the excerpt from the Community Rule from Qumran would all seem to indicate that the answer to Wright’s question above is yes, justification is used by Paul to talk about the saving of sinners.

In this section we have seen that Schweitzer’s views on the atonement can certainly be challenged. Sanders’ and Wright’s more tentative forays in this direction can also be

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<sup>1026</sup> James Dunn, “The New Perspective View,” 182.

<sup>1027</sup> Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 127. Emphasis in the original.

challenged. From the writings of Paul and from Old Testament sources we have seen that the atoning work of Jesus applies not just to pre-baptismal sin but to post-baptismal sin as well.

### 10.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have maintained that the chief challenge that New Perspectivists launch towards the “Old Perspective” paradigm is to question the role of God’s grace at the staying in point of the Christian covenant. The Reformation was fought over the doctrine of penance, the understanding of what it took to remain in God’s people. Protestants, including Luther, differed from some of their Medieval Catholic predecessors by claiming that Christians not only entered God’s covenant through the grace procured for them by Jesus’ death on the cross, they also remained in the covenant through this same grace. In Luther’s thought, grace applies to Christians at the “staying in” point of the covenant, as long as Christians are willing to repent of their sins.

However, some New Perspective scholars have contested whether the atoning work on Jesus on the cross fully covers the sins of repentant Christians *after* they have entered the covenant. This challenge manifests itself within New Perspective scholarship in at least two ways. First, one position is to maintain that supplemental human involvement or activity might be required in addition to Jesus’ atoning work. For instance, E.P. Sanders has suggested that in Paul’s thought additional divine punishments or human acts might be necessary at times in order to atone for all the sins committed after the covenant entry point. Second, Albert Schweitzer takes an even more radical position by stating that Jesus’ death on the cross does not atone for sins committed by Christians after baptism in any respect. Rather it is human suffering, says Schweitzer, that atones for post-baptismal sin. However, we have seen throughout this chapter that the traditional Protestant perspective on sins committed after the covenant entry point can be defended from Paul’s own writings and from other sources.

It cannot be said though, that the New Perspective endeavours have been wasted. In the next chapter, the conclusion of this study, we look at some positive contributions of the New Perspective approach as well as certain aspects of the New Perspective inquiry that invite further investigation and study.

# CHAPTER 11

## CONCLUSION AND MATTERS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Throughout this study we have continually seen that the main New Perspective arguments that have garnered the most attention may in many cases challenge certain aspects of modern Protestantism, but they do not essentially damage Luther's position. The chief error made by New Perspective scholars appears to be not being familiar enough with Luther's approaches. In New Perspective work Luther is occasionally talked about, but his writings are rarely (and sometimes never) directly or clearly cited. Often Luther's views are confused with Bultmann's or other German scholars of Bultmann's era. Even in a recent essay published in *Justification: Five Views*, James Dunn makes somewhat misguided statements about Luther's positions on certain topics. Then once again, after making these statements, Dunn does not cite Luther to support his claims, but Bultmann. When it comes to Luther, New Perspective scholars have not gone to the sources.

This ignorance regarding Luther has been noted by other scholars too. In his review of Joseph Campbell's work, the Luther scholar Graham Tomlin has in essence said that Campbell misunderstands Luther, although the misunderstanding is not as great as in most New Perspective scholars' works.<sup>1028</sup>

In this study, we have carefully examined the New Perspective approach to Luther in this regard. For instance, James Dunn criticizes Luther for apparently equating the motives for his own conversion to those of Paul. In several recent sources, including the book *Justification: Five Views*, Dunn repeats his claim that Luther equated the motives for his own conversion experience with Paul's motives for converting. Dunn writes: "This became the default perspective of Protestantism, principally because Martin Luther understood Paul's reaction to Judaism in the light of his own reaction against medieval Catholicism."<sup>1029</sup> Yet, as

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<sup>1028</sup> Graham Tomlin, "Luther and the Deliverance of God." in *Beyond Old and New Perspectives on Paul: Reflections on the Work of Douglas Campbell* (ed. Chris Tilling: Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books. 2014), 25-26.

<sup>1029</sup> James Dunn, "New Perspective View," 179-180.

opposed to what many scholars think, Luther never did claim that Paul's motives for converting to Christianity were similar to his own search for a gracious God. As we have seen, Bruce Corley demonstrates that Luther thought that Acts gave the real reasons for Paul's conversion. The idea that Paul was somehow driven to Christianity because he was searching for a gracious God was not Luther's. This came from Enlightenment thinkers who were uncomfortable with the notion of a supernatural experience such as an apparition of Jesus on the Damascus road. Corley says that Luther did not talk much about Paul's conversion, but when he did, it is clear that he had the same viewpoint about Paul's conversion that most other medieval thinkers did. Paul's conversion was an example of a sovereign God triumphing over the will of a stubborn and sinful person.

James Dunn claims that Sanders' discovery of a grace-based Jewish covenantal nomism overturns the Reformation paradigm of Pauline study. According to Dunn, scholars used to say that Paul's reaction to Judaism was similar to Luther's reaction to Catholicism. Both men advocated grace-based alternatives to legalistic covenants. However, Dunn goes on to argue that Sanders' discovery that Judaism was covenantal nomist means that Judaism was more grace-based than we had realized. Therefore, we can no longer equate Luther's and Paul's contributions. Hence, according to Dunn, Luther's interpretation of Paul needs to be examined. There is some truth in Dunn's claim. Dunn's work does challenge some Protestant approaches to Paul. Nonetheless, Heiko Oberman's work shows us that the late-Medieval Catholicism that Luther reacted to can also be described as covenantal nomist. In the theology that Luther reacted to, one entered God's covenant via grace at baptism. This was called first justification. After baptism, however, one hoped to "stay in" God's covenant and achieve second justification through the performance of good works. As a result, if anything, Sanders' work has demonstrated that the patterns of religion of first century Judaism (as Sanders portrays it) and late Medieval Catholic nominalism are more similar than different.

Also, unlike what some New Perspective scholars think, Luther had a different view of Judaism than Bultmann. Luther had roughly the same view of Judaism as he did of Medieval Catholicism. He thought that both the Jewish and Christian covenants were intended to be grace-based but that the Jews misunderstood their covenant and made a grace-based covenant become a works-based one. In this respect Luther follows the statements of Paul in Romans 9:30-10:4. In his writings, Luther occasionally uses a short-hand approach



when discussing Judaism and in those places he does describe it as legalistic, but whenever he goes into detail describing his view on the Jewish covenant, he consistently maintains that it is ultimately a grace-based covenant that has been misunderstood.

However, even if Luther did think that Judaism was legalistic, or had become so, it does not mean that Luther's central arguments have been challenged. Many scholars, including Campbell,<sup>1030</sup> ask whether or not a covenantal nomist covenant can really be described as grace-based. These scholars have noted that while in covenantal nomism one might enter the covenant by grace, still if what really determines the ultimate salvation of the covenant participants are their works, then for all intents and purposes the covenant becomes works-based. Ultimately, all that matters for one's eternal salvation is law-performance, works. Sanders may not have succeeded in arguing that Judaism is grace-based after all.

As we have seen as well, Luther also was not an antinomian, like many New Perspectivists think. He talks a surprising amount about God's judgment, wrath and God's high moral expectations. Luther believes in the preaching of both law and gospel and he claims that if individual Christians persist in some heinous sin, after coming to grace, they can lose their salvation. Luther also talks about God's punishment in this life for those who do sin. Also, while it is questionable whether Luther used the term "third use of the law," (we usually associate this expression with Melanchthon and Calvin and not Luther), Paul Althaus appears to be right in saying that when one combs through Luther's thought one sees that he essentially has that same idea. In addition to driving us to repentance, God's law also functions for Christians as a guide to their behaviour after they are saved and have entered the Christian covenant.<sup>1031</sup>

Unlike some Protestants, both Luther and Calvin were sacramentalists. They understood that baptism is a major part of the salvation process and that baptism joined one to the body of Christ. In Luther's thinking, one might say that baptism is necessary but not sufficient for salvation. For adults at least, faith must be added at a later point. Yet for Luther, as it states in his *Small Catechism*, repentance is essentially an act of re-baptism and

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<sup>1030</sup> Scott Hafemann, "Reading Paul's ΔΙΚΑΙΟ-Language, A Response to Douglas Campbell's 'Rereading Paul's ΔΙΚΑΙΟ-Language.'" in *Beyond Old and New Perspectives on Paul: Reflections on the Work of Douglas Campbell* (ed. Chris Tilling: Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 224-225.

<sup>1031</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22:178-180.

a renewal of one's covenant relationship with God. Repentance thus re-affirms or renews one's membership in the body of Christ. Hence, Schweitzer's claims that modern Protestantism does not make enough of the participationist elements in Paul's thought may be true, but they do not challenge Luther who does make a great deal about the participationist elements of Paul's thought.

Wright has claimed that Luther was virtually a Marcionist. Given the fact that Luther was essentially Wittenberg's Old Testament professor, that most of his exegetical writings focus on Old Testament books, and that he complained about the essentially Marcionistic approaches of others of his era, Wright's argument is difficult to sustain.

Dunn claims to have discovered that Paul has in effect separated the law into ethical and ceremonial components. Dunn also states that Paul does not equate the terms "good works" with "works of the law." Dunn claims that when Paul uses the term "works of the law," he means the ceremonial side of the law, the parts that separate Jews from Gentiles. Yet when Paul says "good works" he means something else, ethical actions. Hence, when Paul claims that we are not saved by "works of the law" Dunn thinks that Paul is only setting aside the ceremonial aspects of the law.

Dunn's arguments though, are not new. The Medieval Catholics taught a somewhat similar idea; that Paul had set aside the ceremonial aspects of the law and kept the ethical ones. Luther and Calvin are both aware of this argument and are not convinced of it. In his *Bondage of the Will*, Luther chastises Erasmus for teaching this very thing.<sup>1032</sup> As Luther states here: "Besides, what is the use of a grace that liberates us only from ceremonial works, which are the easiest of all, and which can at the lowest be exhorted from us by fear or self-love?"<sup>1033</sup>

New Perspective interpretations of Paul can also be challenged. New Perspective scholars have claimed that since Judaism was covenantal nomist and thus grace-based Paul must have been saying something different than what traditional Reformation thinkers had understood. When Paul talked about justification, Paul, claims the New Perspectivists, was chiefly concerned not with matters of sin or salvation but with the Jewish laws that kept Jews and Gentiles separate from each other. Paul's main goal when he talked about justification

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<sup>1032</sup> Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, AE 33:258-260.

<sup>1033</sup> Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, AE 33:258-259.

was then, not so much eternal salvation, but rather including Gentiles. As we have pointed out, Luther agreed that challenging Jewish exclusiveness and including the Gentiles was one of Paul's goals.<sup>1034</sup> Once more the New Perspective arguments here are not new.

At the same time, however, Luther's claim that Paul was reacting against Jewish legalism can be defended. Many recent scholars have recognized that first-century Judaism was a very diverse movement and covenantal nomism does not adequately describe all facets of it. Furthermore, in Chapter 9, we have shown that at times Paul was not just reacting against Jewish legalism, he was also reacting against the grace-based Jewish theologies. Paul's response to Judaism was thus more complex than many scholars have understood. Paul offers his own opinion of what the covenant of Moses really entails. In doing so, Paul first reacts against a grace-based Judaism. He explains that Mosaic Judaism is rigorous and legalistic, but then he goes on to react against the rigorous and legalistic Judaism that he has just identified. This second critique of Judaism is his main critique. Because of this, Luther's understanding that Paul is reacting to Jewish legalism can be upheld.

As a result of what we have said above, Luther can be defended and the major complaints of the New Perspective against Luther turn out not to challenge him. Yet almost in a peripheral fashion, Sanders and Schweitzer raise some issues that possibly do challenge the Reformation paradigm. These issues center around the scope of Jesus' atonement and whether or not divine punishment of humans, either in this life or the next, somehow adds to the atoning work of Jesus. We have reviewed some of the scriptural passages involved and have discovered that these are difficult to interpret and only at best offer doubtful support of Sanders' and Schweitzer's approaches. Passages supporting the contrary Reformation view are more numerous and clearer.

However, it is not as if the New Perspective approach to Paul has been a vain effort. At the very least, it may force a clarification or re-evaluation of Luther's thought on the part of some Protestants. In addition, although the major elements of the New Perspective critique do not challenge Luther, there are further issues that are raised by New Perspective scholars which might in fact either 1) offer some challenge to the Reformation paradigm, or 2) possibly challenge how Reformation thinking has been interpreted, or 3) encourage New

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<sup>1034</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, 1-4*, AE 22: 39-41, 53.

Testament scholarship to further investigate certain avenues, or 4) at the very least prompt Protestant theologians to do more work in clarifying their own thoughts and their responses. We will briefly look at some of these below.

## 11.1 PROTESTANTISM AND SALVATION HISTORY

N.T. Wright is not only frustrated with what he thinks are Reformation approaches to Paul, he also is frustrated with Enlightenment-influenced approaches to Christianity. In keeping with his anti-Enlightenment viewpoint, in several places Wright would like to revive the concept of “salvation history” within Pauline interpretation. Enlightenment philosophy and the concept of salvation history run contrary to each other. Enlightenment philosophy begins with the premise that God does not intervene in human history. Salvation history understands that God does. Still, Wright has stated that Protestantism has neglected the area of salvation history; the notion that just as God has acted in world history in the past he can do so today.<sup>1035</sup> When Wright states that Protestantism has neglected salvation history he might be thinking about passages in Bultmann’s writings such as these:

In another respect, however, the early Christians were quite clear about the implications of freedom. With their sense of being the eschatological people of God, of standing at the end of redemptive history, they no longer identified the redemptive history with the empirical history of Israel.... They ceased, for instance, to regard the Jewish festivals as re-enactments ‘for us’ of the events of the past. When he speaks about the foundation of the Church, Paul no longer points to the exodus from Egypt. The event by which the Church is constituted is the death of Christ.<sup>1036</sup>

Bultmann also writes: “But this means that God’s grace is not an historical phenomenon. It is not the possession of an historical nation, membership of which guarantees the security of the individual.”<sup>1037</sup> In response to sentiments such as what we saw above, Wright speaks about Romans 9-11, and he comments:

There, some have declared is the real heart of what Paul is about. To describe this, they have sometimes used the phrase ‘*salvation history*’, indicating that what matters is, so to speak, ‘what Israel’s God was up to in the story of the chosen people from Abraham to the present’. The now well-known difficulty with this is that the very phrase

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<sup>1035</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 39, 40, 41, 62, 82.; Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 15, 47-52.

<sup>1036</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 187.

<sup>1037</sup> Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 188.

‘*salvation history*’ has been associated, at least by its detractors, with the idea of a steady, progressive, immanent process or development. This is the kind of thing which classic Protestantism has always rejected.<sup>1038</sup>

Wright adds that one of the reasons that some Protestant thinkers have neglected salvation history is because of the negative experiences had by many Germans during the Third Reich or WWI.<sup>1039</sup> Wright cites Käsemann’s statements concerning these negative experiences and the effect that it had on theological thinking regarding the notion of salvation history.<sup>1040</sup> Also, although he does not mention the term “salvation history” one can also sense the reluctance to embrace any notion of a similar concept in Paul Althaus’ reflections on Luther’s theology of the cross.<sup>1041</sup>

It is easy to see why these German thinkers are reluctant to embrace this kind of concept. Hitler claimed divine sanction and guidance for his Third Reich. One might say that the ideology behind Hitler’s Third Reich was a badly twisted version of a secularized salvation history.

Still, it is questionable whether Wright is correct in thinking that classic Protestantism has rejected the idea of salvation history. Among many academics the topic appears to have been shunned, but many lay Protestants have firmly believed that God does work in history. Many immigrants from Europe to North America saw themselves as reliving Israel’s journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Whether it was Mennonites, Quakers, Puritans, British Catholics or even some Lutherans, many of the settlers to the United States fled to the New World to escape religious persecution. Among many of these groups there was a sense that their particular religious community was reliving the biblical exodus experience. For instance, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States has a history book regarding the earliest years of its own denomination entitled: *Zion on the Mississippi*. The implications of the title are obvious. Even though they are not perfect, and can stray into sin, the members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are God’s people now, the Israel of God, and to some extent members of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod can expect God to

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<sup>1038</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 780. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>1039</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 780.

<sup>1040</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 82.; Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 50.

<sup>1041</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 25-34.

act towards them and through them in the same way that he acted towards and through the Old Testament Jewish people.

The identification with the Israelites was taken a step further among America's Negro population, who wrote and spoke about a shared experience of slavery. As embodied in the Negro spirituals, Negro slaves saw themselves as identifying with the slaves in Egypt.

The notion of identification with the history of Israel extends across the Atlantic as well. Historically, King James I of England (James VI of Scotland) wrote in defense of the notion of the divine right of kings. He based his theories on his interpretations of the Old Testament. King James' ideas were challenged by the Puritans. They carried a view that their group with its theology represented the proper embodiment of how God's chosen people should be governed. It is interesting to note, however, that both James and his followers and the Puritans were influenced by the notion that their group had inherited in some measure the promises given to Israel.

The idea continues today. The coronation ceremony of the British monarch reflects the idea that the Queen, as ruler, has made a covenant with God where she is God's representative and shepherd to her people. The ceremony reflects a Davidic understanding of the role of the monarchy and the place of government in society in general. Again, the implications of the coronation ceremony are clear. God is still at work today through the British monarchy as he was with the Davidic monarchy in the Old Testament.

As we have already mentioned, though, one of the difficulties with the concept of salvation history is that it can be sorely misused. Some of the most embarrassing or tragic episodes in Western history have arisen in part because of a distorted understanding of salvation history. After all, many Protestants have thought that not only does God act in history, we too, through our own efforts, can help God along and set up holy nations, or kingdoms. The Mormons have taken the Promised Land idea to extraordinary lengths stating that Jews settled in the United States in the 500's BCE. The British Israel movement, which had a number of prominent subscribers, (including Bill Aberhart, former premier of the Province of Alberta in Canada) claimed that the Danes were the descendants of the tribe Dan in the Old Testament. Furthermore since the Danes had invaded England, the English too could claim to be part of God's chosen people.

There is an old saying, however, “abuse does not negate proper use.” Wright seems to have this understanding of salvation history. Despite the concept’s abuses, Wright states that it is virtually impossible to read Paul without detecting the notion of salvation history. In this sense, Wright is likely correct.

Yet despite Wright’s sense that Protestants have neglected this concept, again it is more difficult to accuse Luther of this. First, as we have seen above, Luther himself believes that if Jesus does not return, established biblical patterns will continue with the church in the present age. This means that God will treat the Christian church overall, including Luther’s own German people, in the same way that he treated the Israelites in the Old Testament. As a result Luther can speak rather freely at times about how he sees God at work in the society of his own day. The belief in a false and idolatrous medieval gospel, says Luther, was the reason why the Europeans lost the Crusades.<sup>1042</sup> Luther thought that unthankfulness to God for the gospel might result in future divine punishment.<sup>1043</sup> Luther writes about divine punishment for what he considers to be false doctrine: “Therefore ask yourself if it was not just of God to be angry with us and to punish us because we had strayed into the ranks of the Pope’s and the Turk’s schismatic spirits. For the Lamb Itself preaches to us: ‘Behold, how I bear your sins!’ However, no one will accept it.”<sup>1044</sup> Elsewhere Luther mentions that he is also concerned about what might happen to Germany in the days to come. Luther anticipates future divine punishment on Germany for becoming overly complacent with respect to the gospel.<sup>1045</sup> Assuming that Jesus does not return, mass-idolatry on the part of the German people in the future or the embracing false doctrine, will, Luther thinks, lead them to be expelled from Germany just as the Jews were expelled from Israel.<sup>1046</sup>

Luther has a tendency to make bold or overly bold statements and then at times partially retreat from them in the conclusions to his documents. As well, in other parts of his writings, Luther is quick to state that God can ultimately only be known through the Scriptures and not through reason or human experience.<sup>1047</sup> One then would expect that if

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<sup>1042</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:83-86.

<sup>1043</sup> Plass, *What Luther Said*, 1416.

<sup>1044</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:168.

<sup>1045</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:137.

<sup>1046</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-4*, AE 22: 207.

<sup>1047</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:76.

challenged regarding the statements we have just mentioned Luther would admit that they are only his personal opinions, that he might be wrong, and that his opinions or anyone else's cannot overturn the image of God that one sees in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, in all of Luther's statements above, we see Luther clearly treating the church as "the Israel of God." Second, we see that Luther does not believe in the god of the Enlightenment. He clearly believes in a God who is active and powerful and capable and willing to act in the here and now to further his purposes and his plans. There is room then to tackle the notion of salvation history within Luther's thought.

Yet while Wright might be correct in stating that the concept of "salvation history" needs to be revisited, more work needs to be done in this area to find a proper approach. How does one avoid the tragedy of another Third Reich? Does the belief that God works in history and among communities of people extend to individuals? If so, how exactly does that function? Are there outer limits to what is appropriate teaching in that area too and if so, what, and why?

For instance, it is easy to critique the much maligned prosperity gospel preachers in the United States if one embraces the theology of the Enlightenment. Yet if one does not, and if God works with individuals as much as he works with communities, then one has to ask uncomfortable questions such as do the prosperity gospel preachers in the United States offer a valid approach to the concept of salvation history? If they do not, then exactly what is the proper theological basis for claiming that they do not?

On the Protestant or at least the Lutheran side of such a discussion more work also needs to be done. For instance, Lutherans would have to discern how the modern day versions of the theology of the cross relate or do not relate to a notion of salvation history. In his book *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde complains about the vagueness of the understanding of the "theology of the cross." Forde says: "We thus find ourselves in a situation where there is increasing talk about the theology of the cross but little specific knowledge of exactly what it is."<sup>1048</sup> As an example of this, Forde goes on to complain about the sentimentalized distortions of the theology of the cross, which again, in effect almost describe God as being a powerless Enlightenment deity who can only

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<sup>1048</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, viii.



suffer with humanity but otherwise not do much else. Forde writes: “A sentimentalized theology gives the impression that God in Christ comes to join us in our battle against some unknown enemy, is victimized, and suffers just like us. Like the daughters of Jerusalem we sympathize with him.”<sup>1049</sup>

Others have complained about the vagueness surrounding common understandings of the theology of the cross. When writing about the theology of the cross and other topics, the international symposium organized by Larry Christenson and others felt they needed to make the following statement in order to bring clarity to frequently confused issues: “To identify either the theology of the cross or a theology of glory simply with outward or inward circumstances, however, is to miss the point. It is a question rather of whether one’s life and ministry center and rest in Jesus or in oneself.”<sup>1050</sup>

Adding to the obscurity are the significant variations that one finds in modern theologians’ expositions of the theology of the cross. For instance, one finds large differences in emphasis between von Loewenich’s *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, and Moltmann’s *The Crucified God*. Both works are quite valuable, but the fact that there is no consistent definition of what the theology of the cross means obviously does not help bring clarity on these matters to the average person.

One would think that normally a discussion of the theology of the cross would not necessarily be relevant to a discussion of salvation history. They are two different concepts, two different theologies. Yet, as we have seen, Enlightenment philosophy prohibits or impedes a real discussion of salvation history. Furthermore, if Forde’s complaint is valid, some, though not all versions of the theology of the cross have become almost sentimentalized versions of Enlightenment philosophy (although Forde himself does not use that term). To the extent then that this has taken place, more work needs to be done to define the proper limits and groundwork for a discussion of salvation history. Overall, however, we have to say that Wright has raised a useful challenge in suggesting that a more careful and nuanced approach towards “salvation history” needs to take place within modern Christian thought.

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<sup>1049</sup> Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, ix.

<sup>1050</sup> Christenson, Larry, ed., *Welcome Holy Spirit*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 192.

## 11.2 LUTHER AND THE REWARD FOR WORKS

A second area that this study can identify as requiring more investigation follows from what we have just discussed. New Perspective scholars are motivated, in part, by the desire to liberate New Testament scholarship from Enlightenment biases. Within this study we have seen that some interpretations of Luther also have been influenced by the Enlightenment. The question of Enlightenment influence pertains particularly to the view of how God acts or does not act in human history and in the lives of individual humans here on earth.

Putting this another way, we can ask: if God works within human history as N.T. Wright and Luther affirm, then, in the understanding of Luther and the Reformers, does God work in the lives of individual humans or in the larger scope of human history in response to either the prayers or the actions of humans themselves? In the section above we looked at whether God works in human history for his own purposes. In this section we ask whether God works in human history in response to human deeds, misdeeds or prayers. In the understandings of the Reformation figures, including Luther, are there places for earthly or heavenly rewards for good works or an earthly or heavenly chastisement for less than perfect works?

One of the positive contributions of E. P. Sanders has been to point out that within both the Scriptures and within Rabbinic writings, at times, there are apparently conflicting and irreconcilable themes, free will versus predestination for instance. Often the Rabbis make no attempt to reconcile these diverse ideas, nor, says Sanders, does Paul. The question as to whether God responds to human works, good or evil, likely falls into a similar category. One finds both answers in Scripture, yes and no.

The debate on this issue is as old as the Scriptures themselves. Within the Scriptures one can find two distinct and opposing themes concerning God's response or reward and punishment of human works. On the one hand there are plenty of passages that state outright that God will either reward good works or punish evil ones, not just in the afterlife but in this life too. Some of the passages that suggest this are: Deuteronomy 28-30; Ecclesiastes 5:1-6, 11:9, 12:13; Isaiah 58-59; Jeremiah 4:1-4, 7:1-7, 9:24, 18:1-11; Jonah 1-3; Haggai 1-2; Malachi 2:1-3; Matthew 7:24-27; Acts 10:4; Romans 12:17-19; and James 5:16. Much of the book of Lamentations has this message. Many of the Proverbs as well have this message as do many of the psalms.

Of course, however, one also finds the opposite message within the Scriptures. The Book of Job, for instance, states that the misfortune that befalls Job has nothing to do with what he has or has not done. This message is clear despite the testimonies of Job's friends who claim that Job's misfortunes must have been somehow related to a sin that he had committed. Ecclesiastes 9:1-3, 11-12 have similar messages. John 9:1-2 has this theme. The life stories of many of the Old Testament heroes of the faith also contain many episodes where the future heroes go through what appears to be meaningless suffering. Abraham had to wait for his son for twenty-five years. Joseph was sold as a slave and then later thrown into prison. Moses lived for forty years in the desert with his father-in-law. King David was on the run from King Saul for seven years. Jesus, himself, suffered on the cross through no fault of his own. We can see then that the Scriptures contain both themes. Some passages speak of a clear reward in this life, either positive or negative, for human works that have been performed. Other passages suggest that at times human deeds are completely unrelated to the positive or negative experiences that humans have in this life.

The debate surrounding the issue as to whether God rewards or punishes human deeds in this life also extends beyond Scripture. One can find the same question looked at in the writings of theologians throughout the history of the Church. For instance, in chapter eight of book one in *The City of God*, Augustine reflects that God could not reward the good deeds of the righteous overly much in this life. If he did, God would be merely bribing them, and not encouraging the development of godliness within them but merely greed.<sup>1051</sup> However, Augustine follows this chapter with chapter nine which has the opposite theme. Chapter nine looks at the possibility that the sufferings of the otherwise righteous might in fact be God's discipline upon them for sins that they did in fact commit.<sup>1052</sup>

The Enlightenment conception of God is that God is largely, if not entirely inactive during the span of a human's life on Earth. Given that this is the case it is not surprising that Enlightenment-influenced thinkers find themselves more comfortable with the theme found in the book of Job. In his essay concluding volume 1 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism* Carson comments about Ritschl's and Cremer's opposing approaches to these issues. Ritschl's views are obviously influenced by Enlightenment philosophy. Carson writes:

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<sup>1051</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* (trans. M. Dodds, D. D.; New York: Random House Inc., 1950), 10-11.

<sup>1052</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 11-13.

It may help to put some of this into historical perspective. Albrecht Ritschl argued that the notion of retributive justice, with its connections with the courtroom, is a product of the pagan world. God's righteousness is simply the consistency of God's actions in line with his aim to bring salvation to the world. God is not interested in some sort of mechanical relation between worthiness and reward or punishment, but in the organic relation between beginning and result. In response, Hermann Cremer argued that in the Hebrew Bible God's righteousness does not have to do with some future goal of salvation, but with his present activity in establishing justice and protecting it. For Cremer, then, the punishment of the wicked was an essential element in the salvation of the righteous. For God, ruling and judging belong together, the Bible speaks of concrete acts of God's judgment. On these points, Cremer is demonstrably and entirely correct.<sup>1053</sup>

In the research we have done for this study, we have seen that Luther's approach to this topic of God's reward or punishment for human actions is more nuanced than is often assumed to be the case. Today, given the prevalence of some versions of the theology of the cross, Luther's thought is commonly associated with the notion that God does not reward or punish humans on earth for their earthly activities. This interpretation of Luther fits very comfortably within an Enlightenment worldview. Luther is often employed in attacking late twentieth century American prosperity gospel thinking. Although some have questioned whether it is appropriate or anachronistic to import Luther's sixteenth century refutations of late Medieval nominalism into a modern American context, nevertheless one still finds passages in Luther's works that would support such a reading.<sup>1054</sup> For instance in his lectures on John's Gospel Luther writes:

If you are eager to afflict and hurt yourself, first take hold of the Son of God, so that the Father will love you. Then, I am sure, scourgings will follow you aplenty, together with the fiery darts of the devil (Eph. 6:16). You will become troubled in your spirit. Only with difficulty will you overcome the temptations that beset you when you see that He delivers the world into the hands of the pope and devil and thrusts the Christians into untold affliction and distress of heart. If you remain loyal to Christ in such circumstances, the devil will scourge you enough and will give you hair shirts enough to wear. Then you will have all you can do to overcome death. When you see how forsaken you are in that hour, it will be hard to say: "I believe in Christ." This calls for a spiritual struggle in which a Christian must be engaged to his end. And if

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<sup>1053</sup> D. A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (eds. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, Mark A. Seifried; North America: Grand Rapids, Baker Academic 2001; Europe: Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen. 2001), 535.

<sup>1054</sup> Martin Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*, AE 31:354.

poverty, illness, grief, and other afflictions are added to these, you will discover how difficult it really is to persevere in faith in the Son of God as Lord over all.<sup>1055</sup>

As well, Luther can also speak about God working in hidden or mysterious ways. Luther maintains that there are times when, although God is at work, to human perceptions at least God seems to be absent or even inactive in disciplining humanity. Luther also can talk about God's "alien work" (judging and condemning) and his "proper work" (forgiving and blessing).<sup>1056</sup>

However, our study has revealed that just as two themes are present in Scripture on this matter, and two themes are present in Augustine's thought, two themes are also present in Luther's writings. Luther was not an Enlightenment philosopher. He did believe in a God who could and did intervene in Earthly affairs. Thus, in addition to what we have seen above, at times Luther speaks very boldly about God's active response in this life to human deeds or human prayers. Although as we mentioned previously, in *Freedom of a Christian* Luther does talk about a sanctifying role for good works while we live here on earth, Luther is quick to maintain that our human actions do not atone for sin and neither do they add to the work of Christ nor can they draw us closer to Christ in an eternal sense.<sup>1057</sup> Yet when Luther states that good works do not earn merit with God he appears to make a distinction between the earthly and the heavenly realms. It is with respect to eternal salvation that we cannot earn merit with God. At times, though, Luther also talks about the temporal realm, earthly existence, as a place where humanity's good or bad deeds might earn a corresponding response from God. Luther writes:

And now if the Holy Scripture contains verses which seem to intimate that one should atone for sin through good works, you should apply these to the inferior realm of domestic affairs or of temporal government; enjoin them upon fathers and mothers, and do not use them in an attempt to prove that good works could present satisfaction for your sins before God. Good works leave sins unborne and unpaid; the Lamb bears them all.<sup>1058</sup>

As a result there are passages where Luther speaks about temporal rewards or punishments for human good deeds or misdeeds. In his explanation to the Ten Commandments in the

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<sup>1055</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:502.

<sup>1056</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 120, 168, 171-172.

<sup>1057</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:501-502.

<sup>1058</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-4*, AE 22:168.

Small Catechism Luther writes: “God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. We should therefore fear his wrath and not disobey these commandments. On the other hand, he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep them. We should therefore love him, trust in him, and cheerfully do what he has commanded.”<sup>1059</sup>

Similar themes are found in his Large Catechism’s explanation on the Lord’s Prayer. Luther writes:

[God] desires of us nothing more ardently than that we ask many and great things of him; and on the contrary, he is angered if we do not ask and demand confidently. Imagine a very rich and mighty emperor who bade a poor beggar to ask for whatever he might desire and was prepared to give great and princely gifts, and the fool asked only for a dish of beggar’s broth. He would rightly be considered a rogue and a scoundrel who had made a mockery of his imperial majesty’s command and was unworthy to come into his presence. Just so, it is a great reproach and dishonor to God if we, to whom he offers and pledges so many inexpressible blessings, despise them or lack confidence that we shall receive them and scarcely venture to ask for a morsel of bread. The fault lies wholly in that shameful unbelief which does not look to God even for enough to satisfy the belly, let alone expect, without doubting, eternal blessings from God. Therefore we must strengthen ourselves against unbelief and let the kingdom of God be the first thing for which we pray. Then, surely, we shall have all the other things in abundance, as Christ teaches, “Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be yours as well.” For how could God allow us to suffer want in temporal things when he promises that which is eternal and imperishable?<sup>1060</sup>

In his treatise, “Against the Sabbatarians,” Luther speaks about the blessings that follow from obeying the Fourth Commandment. Once more we see how he teaches that God’s blessings can be seen as coming about in this life in response to human obedience:

We Gentiles, of course, are not able to say or believe—nor could God tolerate our doing so—that he brought us out of Egypt or led us into the land of Canaan, in which we will prosper IF we honor father and mother. No, we have to take this in a general sense, that God would give happiness and well-being to anyone in his own country who honors father and mother. We also observe that countries and governments, yes, also families and estates, decline or survive so remarkably according to their obedience or disobedience; and it has never happened otherwise than he fares badly and dies an evil death who dishonors father and mother.<sup>1061</sup>

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<sup>1059</sup> The Small Catechism, in Tappert, ed. and trans. *The Book of Concord, 1580* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 344.

<sup>1060</sup> The Large Catechism, in Tappert, ed. and trans. *The Book of Concord, 1580* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 427.

<sup>1061</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Sabbatarians,” AE 47:95.

At times Luther speaks about both themes within the same paragraph or sentence. Let us consider another statement from “Against the Sabbatarians,”: “God does of course punish the sinner, and he also tests his dear saints with misfortune. However, he does not let his promise become a lie or go unfulfilled, for he is Truth itself by his very nature, so that he cannot lie.”<sup>1062</sup> When Luther mentions above that God punishes sinners, he indicates the possibility that God will respond to the people’s good or bad deeds and that their corresponding life situations will be impacted by God’s judgment in this life. When Luther mentions that God’s dear saints will be tested by misfortune he also admits that there may be some misfortunes that people experience that are not punishments from God, but rather have no corresponding relation to their good or bad deeds. Both themes show up in Luther’s writings. In this case we find both in the same sentence.

This particular question matters in a study of Luther and the New Perspective because an exploration of this topic is crucial for meeting some of the legitimate concerns of New Perspective scholars. James Dunn talks about the New Perspective supplementing Protestant thought or at least drawing attention to neglected areas, such as the importance and place of good works within Paul’s thought.<sup>1063</sup> On this front at least, to some extent Dunn is correct. The Reformers rejected any role for human good works in bringing about a response from God in terms of bringing about reconciliation with God and access to *the next life*. Their Enlightenment-influenced spiritual descendants have taken matters a step further and rejected any role for prayers or good works bringing about a response from God towards this world or towards believers, *in this life*. Yet it is this deficiency in the treatment of good works which in part has brought about the rise of the New Perspective as a scholarly movement. Consequently, this issue cannot be ignored. This deficiency will need to be addressed if any meaningful dialogue with those in the New Perspective camp can take place in the years ahead.

At the same time, however, there are obvious dangerous aspects to the treatment of such a topic. What about those like the biblical Job who are experiencing the absence of God or the dark night of the soul? To attempt to blame Job’s tragedy on his own sins, as Job’s friends did, was not only wrong but heartless. Yet the opposite idea exists in Scripture as

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<sup>1062</sup> Martin Luther, “Against the Sabbatarians,” AE 47:74.

<sup>1063</sup> Dunn, James D.G., “New Perspective View,” 176-177.

well. In the face of heartbreaking injustice or oppression one might legitimately ask if it is possible to maintain justice in a society where the bulk of the people have the attitude critiqued in Zephaniah 1:12, that the Lord will not do anything either bad or good.

The tension of the two themes, the absent God and the active God exists in Scripture, it exists in Augustine, it exists in real life and it exists in Luther. There are perils involved with an excessive emphasis on either pole in the tension above. It is the New Perspective contention that in the modern Western world we have strayed too far towards the absent God side of the tension and thus some rebalancing needs to occur. Perhaps with respect to this theme, in this day and age the New Perspectivists are correct. In another time or place they might not be. In any case, modern interpretations of Luther need to be re-evaluated so as to more accurately reflect both sides of this same tension present in his own thought.

There is another reason why this discussion is important. The question of if or how God responds to human actions in this life directly confronts one of the most pressing pastoral issues in modern times. As mentioned earlier, N. T. Wright has touched upon the topic of meaning in life. This is an important theme to address in the modern age since several scholars, including Paul Tillich, have commented that the modern person in western culture searches not so much for a gracious God but for meaning and purpose in life.

The psychologist and concentration camp survivor Victor Frankl, (who has focused his work on the topic of meaning in life), has said that the central quest for meaning in life is resolved on the part of an individual when that person takes upon himself or herself what they believe to be a divinely given task.<sup>1064</sup> Frankl writes:

We want to teach our patients what Albert Schweitzer has called reverence for life. But our patients can only be persuaded that life has unconditional value if we can manage to give them some content for their lives, if we can help them find an aim and a purpose in their existence—in other words, if they can be shown the task before them.... We venture to say that nothing is more likely to help a person overcome or endure objective difficulties or subjective troubles than the consciousness of having a task in life. That is all the more so when the task seems to be personally cut to suit, as it were; when it constitutes what may be called a mission. Having such a task makes the person irreplaceable and gives his life the value of uniqueness.<sup>1065</sup>

Frankl writes again:

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<sup>1064</sup> Frankl, Viktor, *The Doctor and the Soul* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1968), xxi, 116.

<sup>1065</sup> Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 54.



There are people who go a step further, who, as it were, experience life in a further dimension. They also experience the authority from which the task comes. They experience the taskmaster who has assigned the task to them. In our opinion we have here an essential characteristic of the religious man: he is a man who interprets his existence not only in terms of being responsible *for* fulfilling his life tasks, but also as being responsible *to* the taskmaster.<sup>1066</sup>

If Frankl is correct, then several things follow from this. If people are to believe that their lives matter they must believe that the task given to them by God matters. If they are to believe that these tasks matter then they must believe that their actions in performing the task or tasks, right or wrong, matter. If they are to believe that their actions matter they then have to believe that these actions somehow matter to God, even to the point perhaps of eliciting a response from God in this life.

Hence, if people believe that God responds, (at least some of the time) to the things done in this life, then it is much easier for those people to believe that their actions matter. The knowledge that (at least some of the time) God responds in the here and now to human actions elevates the importance of human actions. A temporal response by God to a human action makes that action become important not just in a theoretical sense but also in an immediate and practical sense! Once again, if a person understands that his or her actions matter to God, then that person has a stronger sense that his or her life task matters to God and that therefore his or her life is meaningful.

However, if people, in contrast, believe that God does not respond to their actions either in this life or the next, then Frankl's therapeutic approach unravels. Without a sense of having a concrete task in life that matters to God, then these people are much more likely to experience a sense of meaninglessness. Again, if a person believes that his or her actions, right or wrong, will have no practical relevance to "the ground of all being," either in this life or the next, then it will be much more difficult, if not impossible, for that person to also believe that his or her actions, and therefore his or her life itself can be meaningful. In brief, if God does not respond to what one does, (at least some of the time) then it is much more difficult to believe that what one does actually matters. Further to this, if one's deeds do not

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<sup>1066</sup> Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 59.

matter, then how can one's life task matter? If one's life task or mission does not matter then how can one's life be meaningful?

Luther was clear to say that one's entrance to heaven cannot be achieved through good works. Good works do not matter when it comes to achieving eternity. However, in contrast to Ritschl, Luther at times states that human works may bring about their own rewards (and possibly even responses from God, positive or negative) when it comes to other aspects of existence. This distinction in Luther's thought must be made clear. If it is not made clear, and if Luther is read through the lens of Ritschl or if Luther is made to sound as if he believes that human works have no real import in God's sight anywhere, either in this life or the next, then a pseudo-Protestant theology will be created which tells people that what they do does not matter or at least is less significant. This will add to people's sense of despair and meaninglessness rather than rescuing them from it.

Consequently, Luther's full understanding of the possible rewards for good works must be given a more comprehensive review. This must be done for at least three reasons. First it will hopefully produce a more accurate understanding of Luther and his thought. Second it will help the Old Perspective camp engage in fruitful discussions with the New Perspective. Third, a more accurate understanding of Luther and the Reformers in this matter is necessary in order to address the pastoral needs of those to whom the gospel is preached. A more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Luther and the Reformers will aid the modern person to rise out of the despair of meaninglessness and have a sense that they can make valuable contributions. It will help that person grasp the fact that their works, their deeds and their lives do matter. While these deeds may not achieve eternal salvation, they are essential because they can advance God's kingdom and be very beneficial in other ways.

### **11.3 PAUL'S LAW OF THE SPIRIT OR LAW OF CHRIST**

This study has drawn attention to another area which could use more work. As we saw above, Rabbi Silver and J. Julius Scott Jr. state that intertestamental Judaism's views on the way in which the Messiah would treat the Law varied. However, some voices within intertestamental Judaism held that when the Messiah came he would make the Torah law obsolete and instead institute a new law. In a footnote in his *Paul the Law and the Jewish*

*People*, Sanders refers to the works of Schoeps and Schweitzer who hold to this viewpoint.<sup>1067</sup>

We appear to see echoes of this kind of thinking in Paul's letters. Paul obviously sees the Torah as being obsolete, and yet in two places he talks about a new law being created. Paul talks about the "law of the Spirit" (Rom 8:2) or the "law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) This "law of the Spirit" or "law of Christ" appears to function as a moral and ethical guideline that Paul urges his listeners to follow in order to behave as proper Christians. A similar concept is expressed in Galatians 5:24-25 (although using different words) where Paul writes: "And those who belong to Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit let us also be guided by the Spirit" (NRSV). New Testament scholar Burton L. Mack thinks that Paul uses these terms to indicate that he sees that another new law exists within the Christian community that replaces the Torah. Mack writes: "One can look at Paul's references to the "law of Christ," (Gal. 6:2 and elsewhere), for instance, not only as a substitute for the Jewish law, but as an accommodation of the Greek notion of *nomos* as well."<sup>1068</sup>

One question that can be raised then is, does Reformation thinking on the subject of the law adequately take into consideration Paul's treatment of these new sets of laws: "the law of the Spirit," or "the law of Christ?"

Likely this topic has been dealt with at length in other circles, so we will only respond in brief here. From the reading of Luther's writings done for this study it appears as if Luther does not distinguish between various kinds of laws. He does not make a marked difference in his thought between Torah-law and the newer "law of the Spirit" or "law of Christ." In Luther's thought, law, old or new, is all law. However, he and Melanchthon do differentiate between the different various functions of the law, and the way in which they do so essentially arrives at the same concept that one sees in Paul, although perhaps using different wording.

Although Luther staunchly upholds rigorous adherence to the Ten Commandments and to other ethical laws given in the Scriptures, and although Luther frequently complains about

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<sup>1067</sup> Sanders, *Paul the Law and the Jewish People*, 48.

<sup>1068</sup> Mack, Burton L., *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1990), 38.

the antinomians within the Reformation party,<sup>1069</sup> Luther does talk about various aspects of God's law which are now obsolete. Many of the laws given to the Jewish people, for instance, are part of God's word, says Luther, but they are not God's word given to us, to Gentile Christians. Luther writes: "Remember that Moses, with all his laws, pertains not to Christians but only to the Jews, unless he agrees with that Natural Law which is also written in the hearts of the Gentiles."<sup>1070</sup> Thus, like Paul, Luther states that certain aspects of the law are now obsolete.

Earlier in this study we talked about how Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin in essence upheld three uses of the law. Calvin and Melanchthon use the terminology of three uses of the law outright. Again, according to the Luther scholar Paul Althaus, Luther does not use the terminology of three uses of the law outright, but the same understanding of the law exists in his writings.<sup>1071</sup> What the Reformers were attempting to describe in their understanding of three uses of the law is the notion that while obedience to the law does not save us, nonetheless the law still has a role for Christians and in Christian society. First, it functions as a guide to society in setting up standards and rules. Second it functions as a guide to the individual Christian as to the sins from which he or she needs to repent. Third, the law functions as a guide to the life of reborn Christian believers in terms of how they should act.

When Paul talks about the "law of the Spirit," or the "law of Christ," one can argue that Paul appears to be using these concepts in a way that parallels the third use of the law described above. Paul speaks about the "laws of the Spirit," or the "laws of Christ," as guides to behaviour of Christians who are already part of the covenant. Even though this appears to be Paul's approach to these laws, likely this is an area that would deserve further investigation.

#### **11.4 MOVEMENT TOWARDS RHETORICAL CRITICISM**

One of the legacies of the New Perspective will be, one would think, a further push to enhance the prominence of rhetorical criticism among New Testament scholars. In his book,

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<sup>1069</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works Volume 22*, 139-140.

<sup>1070</sup> Plass, *What Luther Said*, 979.

<sup>1071</sup> Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 273.

*New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, George Kennedy states: “The ultimate goal of rhetorical analysis, briefly put, is the discovery of the author’s intent and how that is transmitted through a text to an audience.”<sup>1072</sup> One could define rhetorical criticism as the following: the discipline of examining biblical texts that pays particular attention to the manner in which the texts are communicated, and the techniques used by the author(s) to communicate the message and/or convince the audience of the import of the message. Yehoshua Gitay prefers the term rhetorical analysis to rhetorical criticism and he defines this in the following manner: “a pragmatic analysis that seeks to reveal the mutual relationship of the author(s), the text, and the audience. Style is just one aspect of rhetoric, which endeavours to reach the audience effectively.”<sup>1073</sup>

Rhetorical criticism as a discipline acknowledges that in the Greek-speaking world methods of rhetoric were core subjects in the system of formal education.<sup>1074</sup> Ancient teachers of rhetoric advised that letters and speeches be composed according to certain patterns and structures. According to Keck, when doing scriptural exegesis rhetorical critics begin with the premise that many parts of the New Testament were written by the author with the understanding that they would be read aloud.<sup>1075</sup> Consequently the authors, when they wrote, likely used the ancient rules surrounding rhetorical discourse to give extra force to their message. All this becomes relevant for the modern student of Scripture because knowing these rules will foster a better understanding of why Paul said the things that he did, in which particular order, and with what emphasis, yielding further insight into the thrust of Paul’s argument and his intended meanings. Rhetorical criticism seeks to follow the order of the writer’s thought.<sup>1076</sup>

During the time when Paul was alive, Cicero had already written his work on rhetoric and Quintilian was starting to write what was to become one of the commonly used rhetoric manuals. Even though Quintilian did the bulk of his work at least two or three decades after

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<sup>1072</sup> Kennedy, George A., *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 12.

<sup>1073</sup> Yehoshua Gitay, “Rhetorical Criticism” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (eds. Stephen R. Haynes, Steven L. McKenzie. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 136.

<sup>1074</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 5.

<sup>1075</sup> Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 18.

<sup>1076</sup> Soulen, Richard, N., *Handbook of Biblical Criticism, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 169.

Paul wrote his letters, it is nevertheless helpful to compare Paul's letters to the standards laid out in Quintilian's writings, given that Quintilian almost certainly builds on the work of rhetoricians before him and is giving his advice according to the conventions of his time.

Both Cicero and Quintilian talked about the use of written letters for the purpose of persuading one's audiences. Three hundred or more years later, when Augustine was teaching rhetoric, it was still understood largely as the use of language for the purpose of persuasion. This idea comes from Aristotle, who in his *Rhetorica* had also written about rhetoric. In her book on rhetorical criticism, Phyllis Tribble says that not just for Aristotle, but the understanding that the discipline of rhetoric focused chiefly on persuasion was common among other classical authors as well.

Rhetorical analysis has even been applied to the Old Testament prophets. As Gitay has remarked, these prophets were not solely concerned with condemning people for their unrighteous deeds but they also wanted to convince them to change their behaviour.<sup>1077</sup> In this sense, Paul's writings often function similarly. The ultimate purpose of his letter to the Galatians, for instance, is that he truly wants to see the Galatians' behaviour change.

Again, we do not know whether Paul had read Cicero's works, and he likely would not have read Quintilian's, but if he had not, he would have likely read other writings on rhetoric with similar messages or ideas as these. From an examination of Paul's writings, this seems to be the case. According to Keck, in Galatians Paul conforms to all the classical rules of rhetorical discourse, although he can be known to modify the rules on occasion.<sup>1078</sup> Hans Dieter Betz claims that Paul displays evidence for rhetorical skills and training in the writing of his letters. George Kennedy agrees. Paul may or may not have studied rhetoric formally, he says, but since the influence of rhetoric, as a discipline, was so pervasive in the ancient world Paul could not have avoided knowing something about Greek rhetoric.<sup>1079</sup> Hence, several biblical scholars, including Gerhard Ebeling, Leander Keck, H. D. Betz, Burton L. Mack, and George Kennedy, have examined certain sections of Paul's letters in the light of ancient rules of rhetoric.

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<sup>1077</sup> Yehoshua Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism," 137.

<sup>1078</sup> Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters*, 18.

<sup>1079</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 9-10.

Modern rhetorical criticism, as used as a tool for biblical study, had its roots within the disciplines of form criticism and literary criticism. It is, of course, now seen as an academic discipline in its own right. Some date its birth as a separate academic study to Muilenberg's famous call in 1968 to extend the study of form criticism.<sup>1080</sup> Soulen writes that by March of 1969 Muilenberg had further suggested that rhetorical criticism should: "exhibit the structural patterns employed in the fashioning of a literary unit, whether prose or poetry, and to the discern the various devices (such as parallelism, anaphora, epiphora, *inclusio* etc.) by which the predictions of the composition are formulated and ordered into a unified whole."<sup>1081</sup>

Yet according to Burton L. Mack, rhetorical analysis of the Scriptures is not a new phenomenon. Mack claims that rhetorical analysis was much more common during the Middle Ages and up until one hundred years ago.<sup>1082</sup> However, after falling out of favour as an academic discipline for nearly a century, in recent decades it has made a comeback. Mack also states that in his opinion Betz's *Galatians* is the latest in a long and illustrious tradition of German rhetorical commentaries.<sup>1083</sup> As Mack writes: "One can follow the rhetorical reading of the New Testament through the Middle Ages and into the early period of the Reformation where, for instance, Martin Bucer and Heinrich Bollinger simply assumed that Paul should be read through the eyes of Quintillian."<sup>1084</sup>

However, the modern discipline of rhetorical criticism is multi-faceted, almost to the point of being difficult to define. Tribble states that there is no one kind of rhetorical criticism. Rather a plurality of approaches abounds.<sup>1085</sup>

Just to take one example of how rhetorical analysis helps understand an author's true intent with respect to writing a text, we can look at how a branch of rhetorical analysis (what Tribble calls the dramaturgical perspective), can help us understand Paul's use of symbols in

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<sup>1080</sup> Yehoshua Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism," 136.

<sup>1081</sup> Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, 169.

<sup>1082</sup> Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 9.

<sup>1083</sup> Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 11.

<sup>1084</sup> Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 10.

<sup>1085</sup> Tribble, Phyllis, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 73.

his texts. The dramaturgical perspective within rhetorical criticism focuses on symbol as important to the message.<sup>1086</sup>

Although some rhetorical critics claim that Northrup Frye is closer with his style of analysis to form criticism or literary criticism, his work is still discussed by rhetorical critics, including Tribble. Frye echoes Tribble's ideas on the importance of symbolism within a Biblical work. In his book on the Bible, *The Great Code*, Frye states that it would be easy to claim that the Bible is not even a single book. After all, the word τα βιβλία, in Greek, says Frye, means "the little books." However, there are many factors within the various biblical books that tie them together into a single document. One of these factors, he says, is the shared set of symbols used throughout the biblical text from the oldest to the latest written texts.<sup>1087</sup>

Paul relies on symbols to convince his audience. In Galatians, Hagar is a negative symbol and Sarah is a positive symbol, (Gal 4:21-31). Paul uses the symbolic image of Hagar (an Egyptian woman) to describe the cursed Torah covenant of slavery. The term slavery, of course, is a reminder of the bondage that God's people suffered under Pharaoh. This is a rather interesting use of Hagar as a symbol, since the Torah, through Moses, was not given to Hagar's descendants, nor were Hagar's descendants kept as slaves in Egypt. In any case, Paul uses Sarah, and God's covenant to the people of Israel with Sarah, to describe the new covenant through Jesus Christ all the way back to Abraham. Sarah, of course, nearly was made a concubine or slave in Pharaoh's house, but God arranged her escape.

In Galatians, Colossians and Philippians the symbol of the Old Testament practice of circumcision is relied on as one of the means by which the books' messages are conveyed. In Genesis and Exodus circumcision is focused on as an actual act that had to be carried out, even at the risk of divine wrath and death if it were not (Exodus 4:24-26). In the books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, an additional layer of symbolic meaning is added to the practice of circumcision. The phrase: "circumcise your hearts," or some statement similar to it, is used in the following passages: Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6; Leviticus

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<sup>1086</sup> Tribble, Phyllis, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*, 58-59.

<sup>1087</sup> Frye, Northrup, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., 1981), xiii.



26:41; Jeremiah 4:4, 6:10, 9:25-26; Ezekiel 44:7, 9. In the symbolic way that circumcision is used in these passages it is still used positively.

The Pauline material has a different approach to circumcision than in the Old Testament. The spiritual or symbolic use of circumcision, as is the case in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deuteronomy, is still used, and in a positive way. For instance, in Romans 2:29 Paul talks about the need for circumcision of the heart. Colossians 2:11-12 mentions the need for a spiritual circumcision. In the Colossians 2 passage, this reference to circumcision is still positive and its meaning is symbolically linked with baptism. Yet in the Pauline material, other than in its symbolic sense, the actual practice of circumcision is now seen negatively, especially as it concerns the Gentiles. The meaning of the actual practice of circumcision is almost reversed. Instead of tying the Galatians into the covenant with Abraham as it was used under Moses, Paul explains that the practice of circumcision cuts off the Galatians from the covenant with Christ, who is *the* descendant of Abraham. Moreover, since circumcision cuts one off from Christ it also severs one's possible connection to Abraham (Gal 5:2-6). Paul even states that he wishes that those who preach circumcision to the Galatians would castrate themselves—not a positive use of the symbol of circumcision.

In Philippians he goes further, describing those who preach to the Gentiles the actual physical practice of circumcision as dogs and mutilators of the flesh (Phil 3:2). But he restates the symbolic use of circumcision positively, claiming that Christians are the true circumcision, “who worship in the Spirit of God,” (Phil 3:3).

Thus Paul borrows the positive use of circumcision as a symbol from the Old Testament. Paul does this because in the way that he uses the term it connotes a connection to Abraham and to God's covenant people throughout time. Paul, however, sees the actual practice of circumcision negatively since in the way he views it, it connotes an actual connection to the Torah covenant, under Moses.

Aside from any specific uses of rhetorical critical approaches, the New Perspective will likely prompt a move towards rhetorical criticism for two reasons. First, some of the aims and goals of New Perspective scholars are being met by rhetorical scholars. We will discuss this more later on. Second, as we have already stated, it very much appears as if at least some of the time, Paul wrote his letters according to the rules of rhetoric in the classical culture of his time. The New Perspective has raised questions about Paul's true intentions in

his writing. Since rhetorical criticism is useful for understanding Paul's original intent and message in his writing, the quest to discover what Paul really meant by certain passages will inevitably drive scholars to examine the methods of rhetorical discourse in the classical world.

To a certain level, this is already taking place. Rhetorical analysis of Paul's letters is to some extent being advanced by Douglas Campbell. Campbell is a scholar who some would put into the New Perspective camp<sup>1088</sup> and who others would refer to as a post-New Perspective scholar who has been deeply influenced by the New Perspective. In any case, one of the major premises of Campbell's argument is that in the initial three chapters of Romans, Paul's portrayal of Judaism is not intended to be serious but rather intended to be spoken ironically. There has been some scholarly critique of Campbell's idea, however. In the book *Beyond Old and New Perspectives on Paul: Reflections on the work of Douglas Campbell*, one of his responders, Robin Griffith-Jones has commented that in order to make a fair evaluation of his idea a more thorough understanding of ancient classical rhetoric needs to be embarked upon by modern New Testament scholars. Griffith-Jones writes:

Scholars are at last, in our own generation, giving due attention to Paul's rhetoric. But this can "blind-side" New Testament scholars. We are not at home among the volumes—indeed the bookshelves—of Greek and Roman speeches and letters that it seems we must now carefully read. (We hope it will suffice to read the ancient theorists; it won't.) If a scholar constructs an Olympian argument in which, as we trudge through its foothills, we find serious attention paid to Paul's rhetoric, we are reassured. We accept his or her analysis of the rhetoric with gratitude and relief, and climb the mountain towards the substantive topics that *matter* to us. But we might be moving on and upwards too soon. We should keep our eyes wide open for the specifically *rhetorical* signals that Paul himself gave to his audience to steer them through the letter and to mark their progress.<sup>1089</sup>

In addition to the reflections made upon Campbell's work, there is another reason why the New Perspective may end up inspiring a push towards rhetorical criticism. In this study we

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<sup>1088</sup> In their essay "Justification in Contemporary Debate," in *Justification: Five Views*, Eddy, Beilby, and Enderlein refer to Wright's statement that there is no such thing as the New Perspective, merely a variety of perspectives, and thus they question whether the phrase Post-New Perspective is a meaningful one. In effect they are saying then that Campbell and Francis Watson can best be considered to be New Perspective scholars. (*Justification: Five Views*, 63-65).

<sup>1089</sup> Griffith-Jones, Robin, "Beyond Reasonable Hope of Recognition?" in *Beyond Old and New Perspectives on Paul: Reflections on the Work of Douglas Campbell* (ed. Chris Tilling; Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 173.

have argued that not all of the claims of the New Perspective can pass the test of scholarly review. Nevertheless, some of the aims of the New Perspective can be met by applying the tools of rhetorical criticism to Paul's letters.

For instance, James Dunn has claimed that one of the goals of the New Perspective is to create a more positive treatment of the law within Paul's writings.<sup>1090</sup> Yet using different means, some of the rhetorical reflections on Paul's letters arrive in the same place. When evaluating Galatians, most rhetorical critics also elevate the importance of Paul's ethical commands at the end of the letter, in chapters five and six. In chapters one through four Paul constructs and proves his theology but finally within chapters five and six Paul applies it. Betz emphasizes this fact to some extent, but other scholars claim that Galatians five and six should be stressed even more than Betz does.

Ebeling, who also relies on rhetorical analysis, states that rhetorical analysis underlines the importance of Galatian's parenetical section, chapters 5:25-6:10. Ebeling says that though the book of Romans has a much larger parenetical section than Galatians does (from chapter twelve to the end), the size of the Roman *probatio*—its doctrinal section—is much larger than the Galatian *probatio*. Therefore, as Ebeling says, the Galatian parenetical section, “in proportion to the entire epistle is even more important than the parenthesis in Romans, since the doctrinal section of Galatians is limited to the instruction in chapters three and four.”<sup>1091</sup>

George Kennedy thinks that the importance of Galatians 5-6 should be given even more focus than Betz gives it. According to Kennedy, Betz views Galatians as judicial rhetoric whereas Kennedy thinks its “best viewed as deliberative rhetoric,” concerned with the future.<sup>1092</sup> Hence Kennedy claims that: “Betz overemphasizes the presence of narrative and underestimates the presence of exhortation and in so doing neglects the principle of linearity, which was stressed in our outline of rhetorical criticism in Chapter 1. Galatians, like other works intended to be heard, unfolds in a linear manner. What Paul is leading to in chapters 1-4 is the exhortation of chapters 5-6. That is the point of the letter.”<sup>1093</sup> Mack writes concerning the dispute between Betz and Kennedy:

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<sup>1090</sup> Dunn, James D.G., “New Perspective View,” 176-177, 194-200.

<sup>1091</sup> Ebeling, Gerhard, *The Truth of the Gospel, an Exposition on Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 240.

<sup>1092</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 144-145.

<sup>1093</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 146.

The recent debate between George Kennedy and Hans-Dieter Betz over the issue in Galatians is a case in point. If the letter is read as an apology (a judicial speech), as Betz holds, the issue involves Paul's own authority and his argument is a defense of his own version of the gospel against other views. If, on the other hand, the letter is deliberative, as Kennedy insists, the issue is not which gospel or whose gospel, but failure by the community addressed fully to live according to a gospel upon which all parties were already in agreement.<sup>1094</sup>

For the purpose of the present study we note that the rhetorical analysis by Betz and even more so by others reveals that despite the fact that Paul strictly warns the Galatians away from returning or adopting the Torah covenant, he placed a high level of importance upon the need for Christians to follow ethical laws (Gal 5 & 6). Paul viewed both the following of the Torah and the falling into sin as slavery. The only true freedom comes from remaining faithfully within the covenant with Christ.

## **11.5 INTERPRETING ROMANS 11:13-14 POST-SANDERS**

Throughout this thesis we have, for the most part, pointed out the inadequacies with the New Perspective approach to Paul and to Luther. Nonetheless we have also argued that, while New Perspective scholars have not challenged Reformation thinking in the ways they perhaps had thought, still what they have done has been useful. We shall conclude this section with one such area. Sanders' viewpoints can lead us to a helpful re-evaluation of Paul's intentions with regards to Romans 11:13-14.

In Romans 9-11 we perhaps see Paul's true heart revealed. In Romans 9:1-5, he expresses his deep desire that the ethnic Jewish people would become Christian as he did. While elsewhere Paul is happy to state that he has been commissioned to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:9, Rom 11:13) in Romans 9-11 it almost appears as if Paul, himself, views this calling as a means to an end. In Romans 11:25 Paul states that God has revealed to him that his own desire, that all the Jews will join the Christian covenant, will not be met, "until the full number of Gentiles has come in." Thus, one would think that Paul would almost see this situation as being an incentive for him to complete his mission work among the Gentiles. The sooner "the full number of Gentiles" comes in, the sooner his own people, the Jews, will be saved. He has a second incentive though. He states that if Gentiles enter God's covenant

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<sup>1094</sup> Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 35.

this act will make his own people, the Jews, become jealous, and thus save some of them (Rom 11:13-14).

This is where Sanders' contribution is helpful. Up until the time of Sanders, many or all Protestants who have read Romans 11:13-14 believed that Paul was talking about grace versus legalism. If the Jews think that they have a legalistic religion, then, once the Jews fully perceive the grace-based nature of Christianity they will become jealous of this grace-based gospel and wish to join the Christian church. This is what Luther himself once thought with regards to the Jews.<sup>1095</sup> This is what Bultmann and Barclay think motivated Paul himself to become a Christian.

However, Sanders has pointed out that the Jews, (at least some of them), did not perceive their own covenant to be legalistic. According to *m. Sanhedrin* 10.1, the Pharisees taught that all Israel (minus a few really bad characters) will be saved. However, if this is how the Jews of Paul's day thought, then it forces a reinterpretation of Romans 11:13-14.

If a sizable number of Jews think that they will be saved by grace, (according to *m. Sanhedrin* 10.1) then they would feel no desire or jealousy that would motivate them to become connected to a *grace-based* Christian gospel. What need would they have for it? There is already enough grace in their own Jewish covenant, they would think. They will enter the age to come merely by being descended from Abraham.

Paul and the early church writers knew about this Jewish viewpoint. As we have seen in Chapter 9 Paul himself argued against this viewpoint. Paul had to argue that Judaism is in fact rigorous and legalistic and that mere physical descent from Abraham alone will not save. Still, Paul had to argue against this viewpoint because he knew that many people believed it. In other words, despite his own legalistic views of Judaism, Paul knows that many of his Jewish compatriots still think that Judaism is grace-based. He also would know that they would thus *not* be drawn to Christianity merely through the proclamation of a grace-based Christian gospel. Thanks to Sanders' work, this has become clear.

Sanders' work thus leads us to ask another question. What then does Paul think will actually make the Jews jealous and want to become Christians? Paul may think that Judaism is legalistic and he might see that Christianity offers a grace-based alternative, but he

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<sup>1095</sup> Luther, "That Jesus Christ was born a Jew," AE 45:200.

understands that many of his fellow Jews will not see it this way. So then, if it is not grace versus legalism that would be appealing to the Jews, what would be?

Perhaps Paul hopes that the experience of a loving Christian community would make the Jews jealous. One might think so from reading 1 Corinthians 13. Perhaps Paul thinks that the received gifts of the Holy Spirit are what would make the Jews jealous. He certainly sees them as being of major importance in Galatians 3:14. Perhaps Paul thinks that the firm assurance of being on the right side on the day of judgment would be appealing, as one might think from reading 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10. Perhaps Paul might be referring to the passages from the Old Testament prophets that suggest that when the Messiah comes the Gentiles will seek to worship the God of Israel (Isa 2:1-4, 42:1-6; 49:6; 51:4-5; Jer 3:17; 16:19-21; Zep 2:11, 3:9; Micah 4:1-3; 7:16-17; Zec 8:20-23), Paul then might be hoping that if the church grows, and if in doing so, it becomes clear to the Jews that Gentiles are worshipping the God of Israel, they then will deduce from this fact the idea that the Messiah has come. Once they have deduced this, then they might desire to be part of the Messiah's community themselves.

Paul's efforts to bring a collection from the predominantly Gentile churches to Jerusalem could also reflect his hopes that Jews would recognize this money as a sign of the Messianic age where the Jews received the wealth of the nations as prophesied in Isaiah 60:11, 61:6, 66:12 and Zephaniah 3:10.

The only difficulty with this latter explanation is Paul's use of the word *jealous*. The word *jealous* implies an internal desire on the part of the Jews. If the Jews, in Paul's way of thinking, are supposed to be jealous of the Christians, then they have to themselves *want* to become Christians. If one recognizes that the Messiah has come because the Gentiles are worshipping Israel's God, still, one has to ask, would any Jew *want* to be like a Gentile or *want* what the Gentiles have?

Thanks to Sanders' work we are freer to ask this question. Moreover, whatever the answer is it would also give great insight into what Paul hopes would be the general flavour, character and experience of a Christian church: something that would make the Jews wish to become Christian themselves. Furthermore, while the answer to this question may not be a high priority for Christians today, it would have been a major issue for Paul. The salvation of the Jews, after all, is his ultimate desire. In any case, like the other issues for further study that we have identified in this Chapter, this question too deserves further work.

## 11.6 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter we have reviewed the main contention of this study. The New Perspective critique of Luther does not arise from solid research into Luther's own writings.

Consequently, while some of the New Perspective critiques of modern day Protestantism may have some validity, Luther's own opinions are often different than what New Perspective scholars think that they are. As a result, despite their claims to do so, New Perspective scholars have not effectively challenged Luther. In many cases they have not yet begun to deal with his actual positions.

This study has also made an evaluation, although in less detail, of the New Perspective approach towards Paul and Judaism. We have maintained, that although their contributions have been helpful, it is questionable whether the New Perspective scholars are entirely accurate when it comes to their evaluations of first-century Judaism or of Paul.

Nevertheless, New Perspective scholars have made a valuable contribution to modern day scholarship. They have first assisted in furthering a more positive and sympathetic approach towards Judaism on the part of Christian scholars. New Testament scholars cannot now uncritically describe Judaism as being legalistic. Second, as stated above, the New Perspective critiques of modern-day Protestantism do have some validity. N.T. Wright is likely partially correct when he complains that modern day Protestantism has slid towards an almost gnostic stance with respect to certain issues. We have focused so much on Jesus' role in saving us from this world, claims Wright, that we have forgotten that Jesus is not just Saviour but also Messiah. This means that Jesus' ministry has an earthly focus too. It also means that God intends to redeem this world and not just save people off of it. Third, New Perspectivists can remind us that Paul was not an antinomian, nor was Luther. Fourth, Sanders has in effect argued that instead of attempting to understand Judaism through the lens of Paul's writings, we should attempt to understand Paul through the lens of Judaism. While not without its own difficulties, this approach has some merit. By comparing Paul's writings to those of the rabbis, Sanders has helped us come to terms with several apparent paradoxes within Paul's thought.

In addition, as we have argued in this Chapter, the New Perspective challenge to Protestantism will prompt further helpful reflection on the part of Old Perspectivists around

certain issues. First, the New Perspective can encourage us to better understand Paul's approach to salvation history. Second, in making a response to the New Perspective Lutherans will have to come up with a clearer understanding of Luther's theology of the cross, or at least be clear in stating what kind of thinking cannot be labeled as being described as Luther's theology of the cross. Third, it is beyond dispute that Luther did not think that human action could atone for sin. However, in making a response to the New Perspective, Lutherans will need to clarify Luther's understanding of God's response to human deeds or misdeeds. Outside of salvation itself, does Luther think that God can reward or discipline human actions, either in this life or the next? Fourth, in their search for Paul's true intentions, the New Perspective scholars have already begun to encourage a deeper exploration of rhetorical criticism. Fifth and finally, Sanders has highlighted the fact that at least a part of the Jewish community did believe that they were saved by grace because of their descent from Abraham. This New Perspective emphasis does aid us in grasping what Paul and the other New Testament writers are speaking about and reacting to. For instance, Paul feels that he needs to remind the Galatians that those who get circumcised will have to obey the entire law. The New Perspective emphasis also helps us discern what it is that Paul hopes will make the Jewish people jealous and want to become Christians. New Perspective viewpoints do not challenge Luther. Yet, despite its many flaws, and despite its tremendously significant misunderstanding of Luther, the New Perspective has made a helpful contribution to New Testament scholarship.



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