The New Perspective on Paul
A Historical, Critical, Appraisal
of a New Approach to Judaism and Paul

By Chris Reeves

Like the Athenians of Paul’s day, many religious people throughout time, and some Christians recently, have been fascinated “to tell or hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21), as if that new thing was better or truer than the old things.

For example, from the 3rd through the 6th Centuries A.D., there was Neo-Platonism. In the 20th Century there was the New Age Movement. Among the denominations there have been such movements as New Divinity, Neo-Thomism, Neo-Orthodoxy, Neo-Pentecostalism, Neo-Evangelicalism and the New Morality (or Situation Ethics). In my lifetime there have been several new religious trends among certain brethren such as Neo-Calvinism, the New Unity Movement, and now, the New Hermeneutic (sometimes called the “Scholarship Movement”).

“New” is not wrong if it comes as a result of God’s planning (Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Heb. 8:8; Rev. 21:1, 2). There is a time and place for new things in God’s plan.

“New” is wrong, however, if it comes as a result of man’s planning. Someone has said, “If it is new, it is not true. If it is true, it is not new.” The apostle Paul said the same thing long ago (Gal. 1:6-10)."1

With these words, I began a review of the New Hermeneutic that was circulating at that time (1993) among some members of Churches of Christ. Today, exactly 20 years later, I have been asked to review the New Perspective on Paul. Apparently, this “new thing” is circulating among some Bible students and teachers making my opening words 20 years ago fitting today. We must be careful not to be enamored “to tell or hear some new thing,” even if that “new thing” is advocated by scholars who appear to be in agreement with us on certain biblical matters.

Many seminary students for the past 35 years or so have been hearing much about the New Perspective on Paul from their scholarly professors. Pick up a recent Bible commentary (especially on Romans or Galatians)2 or a New Testament theology textbook written by an evangelical scholar and you will probably read something about the New Perspective on Paul. Representatives of the New Perspective can be found in

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1 “Out With the Old and In With the New: The Cry of the New Hermeneutic,” 1.
2 Various elements of the New Perspective on Paul are incorporated into the Word Biblical Commentary series on Romans (Volumes 38a and 38b by James D.G. Dunn) and Galatians (Volume 41 by Richard N. Longenecker).
contemporary discussions of Paul, the Law, justification, and the role of works in the final judgment. Some members of local churches of Christ have also interacted with and made use of this New Perspective. What is the New Perspective on Paul (hereafter, NPP) and what are we to make of it?

My assignment in this paper is to sketch a brief overview of the historical development of the NPP. I will do this in the first part of my paper followed by my critical analysis of some of the key elements (and errors) of this view and my appraisal of it.

New Perspective: Historical Developments

Paradigms: Old and New

About 10 years after the introduction of the NPP, a Newsweek Magazine article appeared which stated: “A new generation of Scripture scholars is challenging many of the commonplace assumptions about who Paul was and what his teachings meant.” More recently, the NPP has been described as “the loudest subject in Pauline scholarship today.” Timothy G. Gombis writes: “Perhaps the thorniest and most contested current issue involved in Pauline studies today is his relationship to the Judaism in which he was nurtured.”

The NPP has to do with how NT scholars understand the relationship of the average Jew to God and to the Gentile in Second Temple Judaism as well as Paul’s reaction to that relationship in his gospel. Second Temple Judaism (hereafter Judaism) includes

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6 See Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment edited by Alan P. Stanley and Stanley N. Gundry (Zondervan, 2013). James D.G. Dunn takes the “New Perspective” view.
11 Second Temple Judaism refers to the beliefs and practices of Jews from the time of Zerubbabel’s temple in 520 B.C. to the fall of Herod’s temple in 70 A.D. This time is also called the Inter-testamental period.
century Judaism – the Judaism of Jesus’ day and of Paul’s own upbringing. According to NPP advocates, the majority of Protestant NT scholars for the past 150 years have incorrectly portrayed Judaism (specifically rabbinic Judaism) primarily as a religion of legalism (works of OT law-keeping combined with the keeping of Pharisaical traditions).

It is argued by NPP advocates that Protestant NT scholars, borrowing their paradigm from Luther, believed that Paul reacted to this legalism with his gospel of grace and faith. These scholars, according to the NPP, incorrectly understood the Judaism of the 1st century to be primarily interested in securing (earning) salvation from God through obedience to law, or more specifically, through meritorious works of law-keeping instead of by faith. Thus, Paul’s gospel to the Jews was a gospel of grace/faith verses works. Paul was trying to convince Jews that salvation is by “justification by faith” (grace alone through faith alone) apart from “works of the law” (meritorious, legalistic works of the Law of Moses).

The general position of the NPP is that scholars for centuries have been wrong about Judaism and thus wrong about Paul. According to NPP advocates, the entire scholarly tradition concerning Judaism and Paul is built upon anachronism and it is now time for a “new look.” According to them, Judaism was not about legalism and Paul was not about preaching faith (alone) vs. works (legalism).

Michael B. Thompson writes:

> Essentially the NP represents a ‘reformation’ of a few notions Christians have inherited primarily from the Protestant Reformation…Scholars holding NP views do not see themselves as a particular religious movement; disagreeing among themselves about a number of interpretive details, they do not reflect any one particular theological persuasion…The ‘New Perspective is therefore fundamentally a new perspective for non-Jews on biblical Judaism and the Judaism to which Paul was reacting in some of his letters, as well as a new perspective on Paul.

Thompson goes on to summarize the “old” perspective this way:

1. Judaism was (and, by implication, is) a religion of merit, in which one earns salvation. 2. Like Luther, Paul was not satisfied with his inherited religion and wanted to find a solution to the problem of his inability fully to obey God’s demands; his broken relationship with God needed fixing. 3. Paul’s essential religion – his understanding of God’s character and his way of relating to Him – fundamentally changed when he became a Christian. Justification by grace through faith is something new that came with the person of Jesus. It is the centre of Paul’s

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12 Paul writes how he “advanced in the Jew’s religion” (Gal. 1:13-14) and his position as a “Pharisee” (Phil. 3:4-6). See more on Paul’s upbringing below.


14 The New Perspective, 4, 8.
theology, the heart of the gospel. 4. Paul’s focus in his writings was on how individuals can come to find acceptance with God. 5. Paul thought that faith and works, understood respectively as believing and doing, stand in stark contrast as two different principles. 6. Similarly, law (OT religion) stands in opposition to grace (NT faith).

What has surfaced in the contemporary Pauline debate are four main points advanced by the NPP: 1) We have misunderstood Judaism. Judaism was not primarily about legalism, but rather about “covenantal nomism” (a Jew was “in” the covenant by God’s grace and a Jew “stayed in” that covenant by obedience to God’s law); 2) Paul did not confront legalistic, meritorious works in his letters; 3) the issue at hand in Paul’s day was Jewish social identity; i.e., does a Gentile have to be Jewish (be circumcised, keep food laws, celebrate the Sabbath) in order to be in God’s covenant? Paul says “No”; and, 4) Paul does not differ from Judaism as to the role of grace, faith, and works in salvation; faith and works are compatible. Thus, the NPP is “a revolution in Pauline studies that has left Paul looking radically different.”

The question before us then is this: How have Judaism and Paul been interpreted through the centuries and has that interpretation been correct or incorrect? Is any degree of honing of that interpretation necessary? What paradigms (models) have been suggested through the centuries to understand Judaism and Paul? Do we need to take a “new look” at Judaism and Paul? The long story of Paul’s interpreters goes back to Thomas Aquinas (and before to Augustine) and stretches forward to the present-day writings of N.T. Wright.

The Emergence of a Paradigm

Early interpreters of Paul viewed Pauline theology differently. For example, Thomas Aquinas believed that man is saved by God’s grace and that grace enabled man to be...
transformed to eternal life and to attain to good works which merit God’s reward. Aquinas believed that this divine grace was absent during the period of the Old Law but it came in with the New Law.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), on the other hand, was in serious conflict with Aquinas on the matter of works that merit God’s reward. In Luther’s Works, he argued that no amount of works could justify man and save him from God’s wrath. Luther argued that the primary role and purpose of the Law was to point out sin, but not to save. Mankind is saved by faith in Jesus Christ and faith alone. As for the Jews, Luther viewed Paul’s statements about salvation by faith rather than by works to be leveled against the meritorious works of Judaism in Paul’s day as well as against the works of the Roman papists of his day. Some scholars today would describe what Luther did here as a “radical reinterpretation of Paul” and they are quick to point out that Adolf Hitler later used Luther’s works to promote his extreme Nazi anti-Semitism.

John Calvin, the younger contemporary of Luther, believed that the primary purpose of the Law was to reveal God’s holiness and will. In his Commentary and in his Institutes, Calvin wrote about the divisions of Law (moral, ceremonial, judicial) and the functions of the Law (to point out sin, to restrain sin, to guide to God’s will). However, Calvin did not think that the believer could obey the Law perfectly. He believed (as per his understanding of Roman 8:3-4) that the perfect obedience of Christ and his righteousness is imputed to the believer for salvation.

Like Luther, but to a lesser degree, Calvin compared the meritorious works of the Roman papists of his day to the Jewish Pharisees of Paul’s day. NPP scholars today would describe what Luther and Calvin did with their analogies as a “hermeneutical shift” (or “hermeneutical error”) that is unwarranted because no attempt was made by Luther or Calvin to carefully examine who or what exactly Paul was opposing. NPP scholars would argue that no argument was advanced by Luther or Calvin in support of the analogy between the Catholic Church and Judaism.

In the three centuries that followed Luther and Calvin, it was common for Protestant biblical scholars to equate the enemies of Protestantism with Judaism, and thus, a particular Pauline paradigm emerged. Scholars at this time (especially those in Germany)
attempted to show the absolute superiority of Christianity in relation to Judaism by highlighting Paul’s negative statements against the Jews.  

The Formation of a Paradigm

Ferdinand Christian (F.C.) Baur came to the Tübingen School in 1809 to study philosophy and theology. He graduated in 1814, left, and then came back to teach in 1826. In 1831, Baur published his seminal essay on Paul while teaching at Tübingen. Using 1 Corinthians 1:11-12 as a basic framework, Baur argued that Paul’s law-free Gentile Christianity was fundamentally opposed to Peter’s law-oriented Jewish Christianity. Baur argued from this premise that there was a basic conflict between Judaism and Christianity. He believed that Judaism was essentially inferior to Christianity and that Christianity’s evolution would eventually cause it to win out and become the “absolute religion” by the end of the second century.

While many 19th century scholars rejected Baur’s framework due to its weak historical and theological assumptions, Baur’s treatment of Paul raised three interrelated issues that all students of Paul since have wrestled with as they attempt to work out a comprehensive picture of Paul’s life and theology. These issues are: 1) the identity and argument of Paul’s opponents; 2) Paul’s view of the Law and its relationship to the gospel; and 3) the center or main thrust of Paul’s theology. These three issues, above all, have been the focus of Pauline interpretation for the last 150 years and interpreters of Paul usually enter the debate through one of these three issues.

26 While no one should desire to promote anti-Semitism or Christian triumphalism (Stendahl’s terminology), it must be remembered that Christianity has some advantage over Judaism. If this is not the case, then the “better” argument of Hebrews makes no sense (see Heb. 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; etc.).

27 “The Christ-party in the Corinthian Church, the Conflict Between Petrine and Pauline Christianity in the Early Church, the Apostle in Rome.” TZT 4 (1831) 61-206. See also Baur’s 1845 work titled, “Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ.”

28 In his article on “Hermeneutics/Interpreting Paul,” G.R. Osborne cautions against looking for one single “center” of Pauline thought, be it “justification by faith,” being “in Christ,” or something else. See also R.P. Martin’s on “Center of Paul’s Theology.” Terence L. Donaldson believes that Paul’s center of theology is “participation in Christ,” not “justification by faith”; see his article, “The Juridicial, the Participatory and the ‘New Perspective.’”

29 Other contemporary questions in the Pauline debate include: 1) Was Paul converted? Or did he remain Jewish? 2) Who was Paul addressing in his letters? And why does it matter? 3) What was Paul’s attitude toward the Law? 4) Was Paul consistent in his views about the Law? 5) What is Israel’s future according to Paul? Each of these questions will be answered below. For more on these questions see Daniel J. Harrington’s article on “Paul and Judaism: 5 Puzzles.”

30 The discussion of these three questions is long and the answers multicolored, so I will limit my comments here to the NPP’s take on each one. During the 19th and 20th Centuries, scholars set forth many theories as to the identity of Paul’s opponents, from Judaizers (Jewish or Christian) promoting OT legalism, to Gnostics promoting philosophical heresy, a mixture of both, or someone completely different. Following the conclusions of E.P. Sanders, NPP advocates would say that Paul’s opponents certainly were not Judaizing legalists. What about the second question concerning Paul’s view of (or problem with) the Law? NPP advocates would say that Paul was not opposing a legalistic view of the Law when he opposed the “works of the law.” What about Baur’s last and most important question concerning the center of Paul’s theology? Was the center of Paul’s theology “justification by faith” or something else like being “in Christ” and his kingdom? Following the lead of Krister Stendahl, NPP advocates today would say that the center of
Men like Ferdinand Weber\textsuperscript{31}, Emil Schürer\textsuperscript{32}, and Wilhelm Bousset\textsuperscript{33} continued Baur’s portrayal of Judaism as an inferior religion that kept law-keeping as its primary goal. William Sanday, Arthur C. Headlam, and Martin Noth all cast Judaism in a similar light.

**Rudolf Bultmann.** A student of Bousset, Rudolf Bultmann (1884 – 1976), was one of the most influential biblical scholars of the twentieth century. In his 1949 book, *Primitive Christianity in Its Historical Setting*, Bultmann set forth a picture of Judaism that was legalistic and of Jews who sought to earn justification by their own efforts. In Bultmann’s earlier 1948 *Theology of the New Testament*, Paul is set forth as one who teaches that the Law led humanity into death and sin to make God manifest as God.\textsuperscript{34} Judaism, according to Bultmann, was doomed to end in death, whereas Christianity (faith without works of the Law) is a better and higher form of religion and leads to life.

**Ernst Käsemann and Günther Bornkamm.** Two students of Bultmann were Ernst Käsemann (1906-1998) and Günther Bornkamm (1905 – 1990). Both of these men worked on their doctoral thesis under the supervision of Bultmann and both of these men set forth a similar picture of Judaism as found in Bultmann. Käsemann claimed that the Jews in Paul’s day trusted in their own pious works (self-justification) and they would be saved from their deeds only through justification by faith.\textsuperscript{35} In similar fashion, Bornkamm claimed that Judaism represented a complete misunderstanding of God’s plan for humanity and of their own religion and they needed saving through justification by faith alone.\textsuperscript{36}

Before proceeding, it would be good to ask this question: Were these 19\textsuperscript{th} century and 20\textsuperscript{th} century scholars correct in their assessment of Judaism? Frank Thielman offers some good insight to this question:

> The pervasiveness and persistence of this understanding of Judaism cannot, however, be attributed to a misreading of Weber or even to the influence of Luther alone. Part of the reason it was so successful was that the theological insight on which it was based was valid, not as an insight into the “grievous error” of Judaism (as Schürer put it) but as an insight into the implications of Paul’s comments about boasting in the law. This insight, moreover, met the theological needs of the times in which it was perceived. In the context of the problems faced by the 16\textsuperscript{th} century Roman Catholic Church, it was important to emphasize Paul’s convictions about the

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\textsuperscript{31} Weber documented what he thought to be Jewish legalism in his 1880 work, *System of Theology of the Ancient Palestinian Synagogue, or the Teaching of the Talmud; later titled Jewish Theology on the Basis of the Talmud and Related Writings* (1897).

\textsuperscript{32} Schürer documented what he thought to be Jewish legalism in his 1885-1891 two-volume work, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*.

\textsuperscript{33} Bousset documented what he thought to be Jewish legalism in his 1903 work, *The Judaic Religion of the New Testament Era*.

\textsuperscript{34} This was Bultmann’s understanding of Romans 3:20.

\textsuperscript{35} See Käsemann’s 1969 *Commentary on Romans*.

\textsuperscript{36} See Bornkamm’s 1969 book titled *Paul*. 

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danger of placing confidence in human ability, as it has been in nearly every epoch since. The problem lay not in the validity of the theological insight, nor in drawing that insight from Paul, but, as a few scholars have pointed out, in regarding Judaism as the great symbol of the problem before attempting to understand it on its own terms.  

The Dismantling of the Paradigm

Claude J.G. Montefiore. As scholars began to seriously address the questions raised earlier by Baur, a dismantling of the established Pauline paradigm began to be seen. Some scholars began to protest the established paradigm of Judaism and Paul. For example, Claude J. G. Montefiore (1858 – 1938), a British scholar and distinguished Jewish reformer, took Weber’s work to task. 38 He believed Weber was wrong in placing a systematic grid of legalism on rabbinic literature. Montefiore did not believe that Judaism and its view of the Law should be characterized as a religion of hypocrisy, externalism, or legalism. He believed that Judaism should be portrayed as a loving, merciful, and joyful relationship between a parent and a child. He believed that Paul was not against rabbinic Judaism but “some other form of Judaism” and “other non-Jewish intellectual systems.” 39

In 1909, the Jewish theologian Salomon Schechter gave a similar assessment of rabbinic Judaism as Montefiore. 40 George Foot Moore (1851 – 1931), the American rabbinics scholar and professor at Harvard, also took sharp issue with Weber’s caricature of Judaism. Moore completely rejected the scholarship of Weber, as well as the works of Schürer and Bousset. Moore accused Weber of imposing the grid of Lutheran dogmatics on rabbinic literature. 41

Searching for a New Paradigm

The works of Montefiore, Schechter and Moore had no real impact during their day, but they provided the impetus for scholars in the late 20th century to search for a new Pauline paradigm. In the late 20th century, a quiet revolution in New Testament scholarship occurred which was largely unobserved by people in the pew, but well-known among the academics of the apostle Paul. 42 A search for a new paradigm (perspective) on Paul was

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37 Paul & and the Law, 26-27. For Paul’s references to “boasting” and “confidence,” see Romans 3:27 and Philippians 3:3-4 respectively.
38 Montefiore’s critique of Weber can be found in his article, “Rabbinic Judaism and the Epistles of St. Paul,” Jewish Quarterly Review 13 (1900-1901): 161-217; and in his book, Judaism and St Paul (1914). 
39 Approaches to Paul, 91.
40 Schechter’s work was titled Aspects of Rabbinic Theology.
42 This NPP revolution was also unknown and unobserved by members of churches of Christ. No one, among these members, writing at this time (from the 1960’s to the 1990’s!) made reference to or use of the NPP. Only in the past 10 years or so have a few members made use of the NPP. Those among us wishing to utilize the NPP should take a good look at this historical fact before proceeding.
in the making. Today, this revolutionary thought is not confined to liberal theological academia, but has made its way into some evangelical Protestant churches as well.

It is important to note at this point the timeframe which brought about this search for a new paradigm. The post-World War II era was a time in which many Protestant Christian scholars attempted to reach out to Jews with conciliatory dialogue in the wake of the holocaust. Magnus Zetterholm documents this practice thus:

World War II fundamentally changed the conditions for research on Judaism and early Christianity. When the atrocities of the death camps became widely known, time was ripe for a serious reassessment of the synthesis between theology and biblical scholarship. It came increasingly evident that there was a direct relationship between the anti-Jewish Christian theology and the industrialized mass murder of six million Jews. The Christian church that almost twenty centuries had defined itself in contrast to a distorted picture of Judaism no doubt shared the responsibility for the worst crime against humanity in history.

A tangible step on the way toward increased understanding between Christians and Jews was the establishment of various organizations like The Council of Christians and Jews in the United Kingdom, founded in 1942…Even though this incipient change, both in the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church, meant a certain improvement of the official relations between Christianity and Judaism and led to some practical alterations, one must also point out that among the absolute majority of scholars and theologians, the attitude was “business as usual”…But even though most scholars and theologians continued to repeat the traditional stereotypes about Paul and his relationship to Judaism, others seriously started to ponder other alternatives, often inspired by the evolving Jewish-Christian dialogue. An excellent example of this is Krister Stendahl…

The point to note here is that there was a climate of peacemaking between Protestant Christians and Jews in Europe that ran from the 1940’s to the 1960’s. Some Protestant Christian scholars during this time were trying to make amends with their Jewish “brethren” and they began to formulate a paradigm of Judaism and Paul that was less antagonistic than what had been previously portrayed. These scholars (particularly those in Britain) believed that it was simply time for a new paradigm which would place Judaism and Paul in a better light. Donald A. Hagner observes:

43 Approaches to Paul, 95-97. Krister Stendahl made it clear in the “Sources and Critiques” portion of his book that he was fighting anti-Semitism at the time. He wrote: “When the first two essays in this book assert that Paul’s argument about justification by faith neither grows out of his ‘dissatisfaction’ with Judaism, nor is intended as a frontal attack on ‘legalism,’ I believe that I am striking at the most vicious root of theological anti-Judaism” (Paul Among the Gentiles, 127).

44 It should come as no surprise that the leading figures in the NPP movement today (Sanders, Dunn, and Wright) have all taught at universities in Britain. NPP advocates are quick to point out how they believe Luther was affected by his Catholic climate, but they are not willing to admit that Stendahl, for example, was affected by his post-holocaust climate of reconciliation. Glenn David Earley traces the process of Stendahl’s hermeneutic shift as Stendahl first deconstructed certain Pauline texts and then rebuilt them using his own “perspectival relativism.” When
To my mind what explains the impact of Sanders’ book is that it was the first lengthy and strongly articulated statement of the case in the post-holocaust era. Thanks to the work of many Jewish writers – and non-Jewish too – people have become sensitized concerning the role of anti-Judaism in nourishing the evil of anti-Semitism. It was a point whose time had come.46

Krister Stendahl: Paul Called to the Gentiles. Krister Stendahl, professor of New Testament studies at Harvard University between 1958 and 1984, was a prominent figure in the Jewish-Christian dialogue mentioned above.47 In 1961, Stendahl delivered an essay titled “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” in which he set forth the idea that Paul was not addressing Jewish legalism or a guilt-ridden conscience of sin48 when he preached about “justification by faith.”49 Stendahl, a Lutheran Bishop himself, attempted to set forth a non-Lutheran view of Paul. He believed that Paul needed to be “de-Lutheranized” from the interpretation that had prevailed and been perpetuated by German Lutherans for many years. Stendahl wanted Paul put back in his proper historical context. Stendahl was the first scholar in the modern era to seriously challenge and change the long-standing perception of Paul.

According to Stendahl, Paul has been misunderstood and misinterpreted for centuries. The idea of a guilty conscience became prominent later in the writing of Luther who himself inherited the idea from Augustine. Stendahl stated that Paul did not have an “introspective conscience” (a guilt-ridden conscience) and he did not preach about the individual needing “forgiveness.” Paul’s concern was more practical for the group: the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.50 Paul was simply fulfilling his mission to the Gentiles in preaching to them about how they could be included in God’s plan to save mankind.

Stendahl was finished, these Pauline texts were changed to fit the post-Holocaust perspective and they were ready for the non-anti-Jewish theology so common in the post-Holocaust period of his day.

47 Stendahl gives credit to the previous work of W.G. Kümmel and his view of Paul’s inner struggle with sin discussed in Romans 7. For a rare, but good response to Stendahl, see John M. Espy’s article on “Paul’s ‘Robust Conscience’ Re-examined.”
48 Based upon passages like Acts 23:1, Philippians 3:6, and 2 Timothy 1:3, Stendahl did not believe that Paul had a guilt-ridden conscience, but rather a “robust conscience” (Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles, 80).
49 This essay was later published along with some other essays in Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles (Fortress Press, 1976).
50 Stendahl was not the first to articulate a shift away from the individual to the group. This shift goes back to Albert Schweitzer and his publication of two books: Paul and His Interpreters (1911) and The Mysticism of Paul and the Apostle (1931). Schweitzer argued, among other things, that Paul was not concerned about the individual pangs of conscience, but about uniting Jew and Gentile into one cosmic body. Schweitzer attempted to refocus Paul’s attention from concerns over sin on a personal level to the problem of sin on a cosmic level and Paul’s mission to the Gentiles. Schweitzer’s view of Paul represented a significant change in understanding Paul up to this time. Ernst Käsemann also argued the same point and in the same year (1961) that Stendahl wrote his article.
Stendahl believed that Romans 9-11 was the real center and climax of Paul’s thought; i.e., God, in salvation-history, has given a place to Gentiles to be saved in the church through justification by faith in Christ. Stendahl writes:

For Paul had not arrived at his view of the Law by testing and pondering its effects upon his conscience; it was his grappling with the question about the place of the Gentiles in the Church and in the plan of God, with the problem Jew/Gentiles or Jewish Christians/Gentile Christians, which had driven him to that interpretation of the Law which was to become his in a unique way...The problem we are trying to isolate could be expressed in hermeneutical terms somewhat like this: The Reformers’ interpretation of Paul rests on an analogism when Pauline statements about Faith and Works, Law and Gospel, Jews and Gentiles are read in the framework of late medieval piety. The Law, the Torah, with its specific requirements of circumcision and food restriction becomes the general principle of “legalism” in religious matters. Where Paul was concerned about the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man’s salvation out of a common human predicament.51

In 1963, Stendahl delivered another essay titled “Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles,” in which he set out to establish a proper view of Judaism and Paul. He argued once again that Paul’s main interest was not how a sinner could find a merciful God, but how Jews and Gentiles could get along in their relationship with each other. According to Stendahl, Paul’s primary concern was not a theological question: “How do I get saved?”; but, rather a practical question: “How do Jews and Gentiles relate to each other in the church?”

Stendahl made five basic points in his essay to this end: 1) Paul was not “converted” from one religion (Judaism) to another (Christianity), but simply “called” to a specific mission of preaching to the Gentiles – the “apostle to the Gentiles”; 2) Paul did not preach “forgiveness” to all, only “justification” (God’s acceptance of both Jews and Gentiles) by faith; 3) Paul did not feel the personal guilt of “sin,” only “weakness”; 4) Paul did not stress divisive “integrity” (rights) of Jews and Gentiles, but the need for a unifying “love” between them; and 5) Paul focused on his “unique” mission to the Gentiles, not on trying to establish a “universal” theology for all the church. Stendahl concluded this way:

The first two essays in this book are partly an attempt to get at some of the roots of Christian anti-Semitism...When the first two essays in this book assert that Paul’s argument about justification by faith neither grows out of his ‘dissatisfaction’ with Judaism, nor is intended as a frontal attack on ‘legalism,’ I believe that I am striking at the most vicious root of theological anti-Judaism...Paul’s arguments concerning justification by faith have not grown out of his ‘struggle with the Judaistic

51 Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles, 84-86.
52 Stendahl downplayed Paul’s use of “forgiveness” in Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 (see also Romans 4:7).
53 Stendahl interpreted Paul’s words in Romans 7:7-25 in such a way that removes a sense of personal guilt from Paul’s mind.
interpretation of the law,’ and are not ‘a fighting doctrine, directed against Judaism.’ Its place and function, especially in Romans, are not primarily polemic, but apologetic as he defends the right of Gentile converts to be full members of the people of God. When he uses the argument ‘justification by faith’ in Galatians, he defends the rights of his Gentile converts against the practice of ‘Judaizing,’ i.e., of Gentiles submitting to circumcision and food laws. Furthermore, there is no basis for believing that Paul had any personal difficulties with obeying the law…I would now add that one of the most striking elements of Pauline anti-triumphalism lies exactly in the fact that in Romans Paul does not fight Judaism, but reaches a point where he warns the Gentile Christians against feelings of superiority toward Judaism and the Jews (Rom. 9-11, esp. 11:11-35 which climaxes in a non-christological doxology). When it dawns on Paul that the Jesus movement is to be a Gentile movement – God being allowed to establish Israel in his own time and way – then we have no triumphalist doctrine, but a line of thought which Paul uses in order to break the religious imperialism of Christianity. I also read this as a profound warning against that kind of theological imperialism which triumphs in its doctrine of the justification of the ungodly by making Judaism a code word for all wrong attitudes toward God…I would again stress that Paul is not carrying out such a polemic against Jews, but is rather giving an apology for his mission in which he reflects on the mystery of God’s dealings with Israel.54

The 1961 and 1963 essays by Stendahl mentioned above contained many of the basic perspectives that would later be found in more contemporary research on Paul making him a groundbreaking figure in the NPP movement.55 It was Stendahl who provided scholars with a “fresh look” at Paul.56 However, a radical new calling-in-question of the predominant paradigm of Judaism was still needed in the mind of some NT scholars. E.P. Sanders would be the one to offer this “new look” as he questioned the long-standing paradigm of Judaism.

E.P. Sanders: Jewish Covenantal Nomism. If Stendahl cracked the mold of contemporary Pauline studies, it was Ed Parish (E.P.) Sanders who broke it all together.57 Sanders would be the one who would lay a foundation on the ground broken by Stendahl in the 1960’s.58 A turning point in modern Pauline studies came in 1977 with the publication of

54 Ibid., 126-132.
55 Stendahl’s point about Paul, not attacking Judaism, but simply working out the relationship between Jews and Gentiles is one main argument that would find its way into later NPP writings, especially those of James D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright. For Stendahl’s point here see Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles, 9, 16-17, 85, 87. Stendahl would later incorporate these ideas with some elaboration in his book, Final Account: Paul’s Letter to the Romans (Fortress Press, 1995).
56 “A fresh look at the Pauline writings themselves shows that Paul was equipped with what in our eyes must be called a rather ‘robust conscience.’” (Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles, 80). In 1969, Ernst Käsemann published his Perspectives on Paul and devoted a chapter to answering Stendahl.
57 It was noted above that Montefiore, Moore, and Schechter offered new appraisals of the classic view of Judaism, but their voices had little impact on Pauline studies. Sanders’ 1977 work popularized and articulated with impact the new view of Judaism for the first time. Sanders succeeded in influencing Pauline scholarship where previous scholars had failed. Some have described this as “the Sanders revolution.”
58 Sanders is called the “godfather of the NPP” by some scholars.
Sanders’ book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*[^59] Sanders (1937–), was formerly Arts and Sciences Professor of Religion at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* has become one of the most influential books on Judaism and Paul in our generation and is now considered by many scholars to be *the* accurate portrait of Judaism that is basic to the NPP approach. Sanders’ purpose in this book was to compare the “pattern of religion” in Judaism (how “getting in” and “staying in” a religion is understood)[^60] with the “pattern of religion” in Paul’s letters. What was the basic relationship between Palestinian Judaism and Paul’s religion? Was Paul’s theology basically the same as Judaism? Or was Paul’s theology antithetical to Judaism with some of his thoughts rooted in Judaism?

To answer these questions, Sanders surveyed the Jewish literature between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200[^61] and argued that the Judaism of Paul’s day emphasized their place in God’s covenant by God’s free election and grace alone. Sanders stated the six aims of his book this way:

- to consider methodologically how to compare two (or more) related but different religions;
- to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, of New Testament scholarship;
- to establish a different view of Rabbinic Judaism;
- to argue a case concerning Palestinian Judaism (that is, Judaism as reflected in material of Palestinian provenance) as a whole;
- to argue for a certain understanding of Paul;
- to carry out a comparison of Paul and Palestinian Judaism[^62]

According to Sanders, Jews as a whole believed salvation from God was a gift, not something earned by meritorious, legalistic, law-keeping. Jews certainly kept the Law,


[^60]: *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 17.

[^61]: See the article by D.A. deSilva on “Writing and Literature: Jewish.”

[^62]: *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, xii.
but they did not keep it in order to “get in” God’s covenant, neither did they keep it to *earn or merit* their salvation. They believed that they were already “in” God’s covenant by God’s free grace alone. They simply kept the Law in order to “remain in” or *maintain* their status in the covenant.

Sanders’ portrayal of Judaism was designed to refute the notion that Judaism was a religion of legalistic, works-righteousness. Sanders coined the now-famous term “covenantal nomism” (covenant - law) to describe the Jewish “pattern of religion” that combined covenant and law. He defined “covenantal nomism” this way:

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

Sanders argued eight main points in his book: 1) Israel believed that their position in the covenant required them to obey the Law fully and completely which led to the formation of the “halakic” rabbinic literature (documents which spelled out in detail the precise applications of many of the laws); 2) God’s commitment to the covenant with Israel was unconditional and he would remain faithful to Israel even if they disobeyed; 3) Israel believed different things about why they were chosen by God over other nations, but they never believed that they must *earn* their place in the covenant; 4) Israel believed that man has a free will and he can choose to obey God and be rewarded or disobey God and be punished; 5) Israel believed that membership in the covenant, not perfect obedience, is the basis of one’s standing before God; 6) God made provision for Israel’s sin through repentance and atoning sacrifice, so God does not determine human destiny by weighing merits against transgressions; 7) a righteous Jew does not earn divine approval, he simply accepts the covenant and remains in it; and 8) Pauline theology is not distinct from rabbinic thinking; rather, it is in basic *agreement* with Judaism that God’s grace and human works go together and the fundamental point of disagreement between Paul and Judaism is that salvation is to be found only in Christ.

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63 Sanders wrote that the legalistic concept of Judaism was not found in the Jewish literature itself, but in the writings of scholars who sought to put legalism back into Judaism: “We have here the retrojection of the Protestant-Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity the role of Lutheranism” (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 57). Sanders would write later: “I was not interested merely in publishing a critique of legalism, but rather in replacing it with a superior view” (*Covenantal Nomism Revisited*, 25).

64 “Covenantal nomism” has become the NPP shibboleth for understanding Second Temple Judaism.

65 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75, 180, 420, 544.

Two crucial conclusions emerged from Sanders’ work concerning Judaism. First, Sanders agreed with Montefiore and Moore that many scholars had previously offered incorrect evaluations of Judaism. Second, in surveying the “Tannaitic Literature” (pages 33-238), the “Dead Sea Scrolls” (pages 239-328), and the “Apocryphal and Pseudepigrapha” (pages 329-418), Sanders concluded that a single, unified “pattern of religion” known as “covenantal nomism” was the norm in Judaism as evidenced from each body of literature surveyed (pages 233-238, 316-321, 419-428).

Sanders found that although Judaism was worked out in many ways, it still rested upon a common “pattern of religion” and should be placed under the rubric of “covenantal nomism.” This “pattern of religion” focused on the primacy of God’s gracious election for Israel “getting in” the covenant and their obedience to the Law for “staying in” the covenant. Obedience allowed a Jew to maintain his position in the covenant, but it did not earn or merit God’s grace. Judaism, according to Sanders, was a religion of free-grace that kept works on the “staying in” side of the religious pattern.

As for Paul and Judaism, Sanders believed that Paul taught a different type of religion, but it was still in basic agreement with covenantal nomism. Sanders writes:

Paul’s ‘pattern of religion’ cannot be described as ‘covenantal nomism’, and therefore Paul presents an essentially different type of religiousness from any found in Palestinian Jewish literature. This is true despite the fact that on the point at which many have found the decisive contrast between Paul and Judaism – grace and works – Paul is in agreement with Palestinian Judaism...There are two aspects of the relationship between grace and works: salvation is by grace but judgment is according to works; works are the condition of remaining ‘in’, but they do not earn salvation...The point is that God saves by grace, but that within the framework established by grace he rewards good deeds and punishes transgression.

While the tide of biblical scholarship in the late 1970’s was now moving away from the established “Lutheran view” of Paul in search of a new paradigm, NPP scholars still had to deal with Paul’s apparent negative statements about Jews and the Law (particularly, his statements about the “works of the law”). These NPP scholars had dealt accurately (they

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67 Ibid., 33-59.
68 Sanders was looking for a “common Judaism.” He looked for the following in Judaism: a “general understanding” (page 69), a “common pattern” (page 70), “basic religious principles” (page 71), “what principles lie behind” (page 71), “underlying agreement” (page 85), “the same underlying pattern” (page 424), and “basic common ground” (page 424).
69 Paul’s type of religion according to Sanders was “participationist eschatology” (becoming one person with Christ); see Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 549.
70 Sanders writes: “Thus one can see already in Paul how it is that Christianity is going to become a new form of covenantal nomism” (Ibid., 513). Sanders fails to grasp Paul’s own words in 2 Corinthians 3:6-18 concerning the complete passing away of the Old Law and the Judaism built upon it. Paul Barnett comments: “In short, 2 Corinthians 3 rejects both Sanders’ sunny verdict on Judaism/the old covenant and his proposal that Paul merely annexed Christianity to it along similar lines” (Paul: Missionary of Jesus, 132).
71 Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 543. Peter T. O’Brien answers this point in his article titled “Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?” (Justification and Variegated Nomism, 249-296).
believed) with Judaism, now they had to deal with Paul. For example, what did Paul mean by “apart from works” (Romans 3:28), “as it were by works” (Romans 9:32), and “seeking to establish their own” (Romans 10:3)?

If, according to NPP advocates, the picture of Judaism we find in Luther and much of the former scholarship is inaccurate, what was Paul saying when he spoke so negatively about the Jews, their works, and the Law? To what error was Paul responding? Was Paul fighting a straw man who did not exist? Who or what was he opposing?

Much earlier, Montefiore, for example, tried to deal with Paul’s negative statements about the Law by saying that Paul directed these statements to the “poorer” Diaspora Judaism, not Palestinian Judaism. Hans Joachim Schoeps dealt with Paul’s negative statements in a similar way. Moore, on the other hand, dealt with Paul’s negative statements by saying that Paul missed entirely the significance of the Law in Judaism and that Paul’s critique of Judaism and the Law was based upon his presuppositions that no Jew would have accepted.  

More recently, Sanders, similar to Montefiore, argued that Paul directed his statements away from Judaism. Sanders argued that because Paul spoke so loudly about salvation in Jesus Christ, Paul had no real dissatisfaction with the Law before his conversion, nor did Paul accuse Judaism of being legalistic after his conversion.  

According to Sanders, Paul’s negative statements about the Jews and the Law (for example, Romans 2:17, 23; 3:27-4:25; 9:32; 10:2; Philippians 3:9) are not condemnations of self-righteousness. These statements are simply Paul’s way of saying that salvation comes only through faith in Christ. Paul was opposed to “works of the law,” not because they were inherently flawed, but simply because they were not faith in Christ. For Sanders, the problem with the Jews was that they rejected God’s plan to save the Gentiles through faith in Jesus. Sanders concluded with his now-famous statement: “In short, this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.”

Thus, the grace-covenant (non-legalistic) view of 1st century Judaism found in the NPP today was brought to the forefront of academic studies by E. P. Sanders. S.J. Hafemann comments:

Sanders changed the course of scholarship on Paul because he succeeded in forcing scholars to rethink fundamentally the nature of the opposition Paul faced in his churches, and consequently the character and content of the criticism he raised against it. He accomplished the feat by presenting his own portrayal of Paul against

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72 Moore believed that the false caricature of Judaism not only went back to Luther, but even back farther to Paul himself. He wrote: “The prejudice of many writers on Judaism against the very idea of good works and their reward, and of merit acquired with God through them, is a Protestant inheritance from Luther’s controversy with Catholic doctrine, and further back from Paul’s contention that there is no salvation in Judaism” (“Christian Writers on Judaism.” Harvard Theological Review. 14 [July 1921]: 197-254).

73 NPP advocates debate among themselves whether or not Paul was really “converted.” For a helpful discussion of this, see the article by J.M. Everts on “Conversion and Call of Paul.”

74 Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 474-511.

75 Ibid., 552.
the backdrop of a comprehensive and polemically forceful understanding of Palestinian Judaism as a religion of non-legalistic “covenantal nomism”... Once accepted, the effects of the paradigm shift regarding Judaism precipitated by Sanders are thus both far-reaching and decisive for the way in which Paul will be read in the decades ahead.76

Various Bible scholars and students reading Sanders in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s soon became dissatisfied with the once established portrayal of Judaism (the legalism of the “self-righteous” Pharisees). They began to favor a portrayal of Judaism that focused on a covenant of grace. They opted for Sanders’ kinder, gentler caricature of Judaism. NPP advocates have been and are still often at odds with each other on various points of scripture exegesis, but they are unified by their common conviction that 1) 1st century Judaism was not the legalism of past caricatures, and that 2) Sanders’ “covenantal nomism” is a fair and accurate picture of the Judaism of Paul’s day.

While NPP advocates at this time were satisfied with Sanders’ basic depiction of Judaism, they were not, however, satisfied with Sanders’ portrait of Paul and they sought to better understand Paul’s opposition to Judaism. They would soon argue that Paul was more opposed to Jewish exclusivism, not the Jewish legalism proposed by Luther or even the Jewish rejectionism proposed by Sanders. It was time for Sanders’ “covenantal nomism” to be developed further and given a “new look.” James D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright would be the men to do it.77

James D.G. Dunn: The Social Function of the Law. While the foundational work of E.P. Sanders opened the way for scholars to think afresh about Judaism, it was a lecture given by James D.G. Dunn in 1982 and published the following year which marked the launching point of the NPP.78 Dunn (1939 – ), Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham, England, would become a leading voice in the radical reorientation (paradigm shift) offered first by Stendahl and then by Sanders. Like Stendahl and Sanders, Dunn wanted to see Paul “de-Lutheranized” and put back in his own historical context. Dunn

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76 “Paul and His Interpreters” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, 673.
77 There were other scholars at this time like Heikki Räisänen, who agreed with Sanders’ basic assessment of Judaism, but who went in an entirely different direction with reference to Paul. Räisänen set forth his understanding of Paul and Judaism in Paul and Law (1983). He believed that Paul was inconsistent and incoherent in his presentation of the Law. Because Räisänen’s bizarre views of Paul are not popular with the general NPP crowd, they will not be included in this basic introduction.
78 Dunn’s T.W. Manson Memorial Lecture was delivered at the University of Manchester on November, 4 1982. It was later published as “The New Perspective on Paul” in the Bulletin of the John Ryland’s Library 65 (1983): 95-122. This lecture is considered his seminal work on the subject. Dunn, of course, incorporated his NPP views with expansion and modification in subsequent works: Romans (1988), Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians (1990), and The Theology of the Apostle Paul (1998). Dunn’s lecture and a collection of his other writings on this subject from 1988 to 2004 can be found in The New Perspective on Paul: Revised Edition (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008). The page numbers cited for Dunn’s lecture are taken from this revised edition.
coined the term “new perspective on Paul” in this lecture and he acknowledged the impact that Sanders’ work had on his own thinking.79

Dunn accepted Sanders’ portrayal of 1st century Judaism and he stated his agreement with Sanders that Paul was not fighting Jewish legalism. Dunn wrote:

The problem focuses on the character of Judaism as a religion of salvation. For rabbinic specialists the emphasis in rabbinic Judaism on God’s goodness and generosity, his encouragement of repentance and offer of forgiveness is plain. Whereas Paul seems to depict Judaism as coldly and calculatingly legalistic, a system of “works” righteousness, where salvation is earned by the merit of good works. Looked at from another angle, the problem is the way in which Paul has been understood as the great exponent of the central Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. As Krister Stendahl warned twenty years ago, it is deceptively easy to read Paul in the light of Luther’s agonized search for relief from a troubled conscience. Since Paul’s teaching on justification by faith seems to speak so directly to Luther’s subjective wrestlings, it was a natural corollary to see Paul’s opponents in terms of the unreformed Catholicism which opposed Luther, with 1st century Judaism read through the ‘grid’ of the early 16th century Catholic system of merit. To a remarkable and indeed alarming degree, throughout this century the standard depiction of the Judaism which Paul rejected has been the reflex of Lutheran hermeneutic...But now Sanders has given us an unrivalled opportunity to look at Paul afresh, to shift our perspective back from the sixteenth century to the first century, to do what all true exegetes want to do – that is, to see Paul properly within his own context, to hear Paul in terms of his own time, to let Paul be himself.80

So, as Dunn was influenced by Sanders, a new perspective on Paul was born out of a new perspective on Judaism. But, while agreement existed between Dunn and Sanders on the basic characterization of Judaism, Dunn, like other scholars of his day, disagreed with Sanders over the relationship that Paul maintained with Judaism. Dunn believed Sanders’ position on Paul to be “only a little better than the one rejected.” While Sanders believed that Paul broke with Judaism, Dunn, on the other hand, believed that Paul maintained his connection with Judaism.81 Dunn voiced his disappointment with Sanders this way:

I must confess that I find Sanders’ Paul little more convincing (and much less attractive) than the Lutheran Paul. I am not convinced that we have yet been given the proper reading of Paul from the new perspective of 1st century Palestinian Judaism opened up so helpfully by Sanders himself. On the contrary, I believe that the new perspective on Paul does make better sense of Paul than either Sanders or

79 Dunn acknowledges that Krister Stendahl had written about a “new perspective” earlier in his Paul Among Jews and Gentiles (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976). Dunn is also among the first, if not the first, to write commentaries utilizing the NPP framework.
80 The New Perspective on Paul, 101-102.
81 According to Dunn, Paul’s connection with Judaism is found at the point of “justification by faith” which is a key element of Judaism and Old Law as well as a key element in the gospel.
his critics have so far realized. And, if I may, I would like in what follows to make a beginning to an exegesis and description of Paul’s theology from this perspective.\(^{82}\)

Dunn’s statement here demonstrates clearly that the NPP is based upon Sanders’ new perspective of Palestinian Judaism. Dunn agreed with Sanders that the picture of Judaism up to that point had been “historically false” and “fundamentally mistaken.” Dunn believed that scholars to a greater or lesser degree have been guilty of modernizing Paul. The question and puzzle that remained for Dunn concerned Paul’s objection to “works of the law.” If Judaism, according to Sanders, was a system of “covenantal nomism” and Judaism was not legalistic, to what exactly was Paul objecting?

Dunn’s wrestling over this question would lead him to formulate his view of the NPP. Dunn believed he had found the answer to this question within the context of Galatians 2:16. Dunn believed that Paul was objecting to the Jews’ misunderstanding or misuse of the Law. According to Dunn, Paul’s objection to “works of the law” was an objection to Jewish works like circumcision, the Sabbath, and dietary food laws. Thus, Paul was opposed to specific works of the Law and not to the Law per se, or “good works” in general. These specific works, Dunn said, acted as national markers or badges of identity for the Jews. Thus, the Jews’ pride was a nationalistic or racial pride, not a pride in meritorious law-keeping.

One major point argued by Dunn in his lecture concerned Jewish heritage or culture. The problem of Judaism, according to Dunn, was not their legalism or work-righteousness; it was their covenantal exclusivity. The Jews’ social function of the law was wrong. They believed that by their “works of the law” they maintained their status in God’s covenant and that Gentiles had to comply with specific “works of the law.” Dunn used Galatians 2:16 in his lecture as a focus to make this point.

Dunn argued four points from Galatians 2:16: 1) Paul used the term “justified” in the standard way that Jews’ of his day used it: being already in God’s covenant, not getting into the covenant; 2) Paul spoke against the “works of the law” which were, in this context, specific things like Jewish circumcision, dietary food laws, and feast days like the Sabbath; 3) Paul spoke of being “justified by faith in Christ” and meant that a person is justified through faith in Christ and from faith in Christ and that this faith is the only necessary and sufficient response that God looks for in justifying anyone;\(^{83}\) and 4) Paul clarifies what he meant by “works of the law” when he added “no flesh,” i.e., not by fleshly circumcision.

Dunn focused primarily on Galatians 2:16 in his lecture, but he did make the following observation about a couple of passages in Romans which helps us to understand his position:

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 105.

\(^{83}\) It should be noted that while some advocates like N.T. Wright are opposed to specific elements of Calvinism, they still advocate the general Calvinistic position of salvation by “grace alone through faith alone” in Jesus Christ. They maintain their Calvinism, but argue it from a different angle.
Likewise, Paul’s later letter to the Roman Christians gains considerably in coherence when viewed from the same perspective. For example, when in Romans 3.27 Paul affirms that boasting is excluded, he is not thinking of boasting in self-achievement or boasting at one’s good deeds. It is the boasting of the Jew which he has in mind – the boasting in Israel’s special relationship with God through election, the boasting in the law as the mark of God’s favour, in circumcision as the badge of belonging to God (Rom. 2.17-29). Among other things, this means that there is no significant development in Paul’s thought on this particular point, at least, between Galatians and Romans.  

The strength of Dunn’s lecture was found in his attempt to do careful exegesis of Paul’s statements about the law in Galatians 2:16 and his desire to relate what Paul said to the broader context of Jewish “covenantal nomism.” Because of this, Dunn’s work would become the foundation of much of the NPP material published from the early 1980’s to the present.

N.T. Wright: One Church Justified by Faith. While Dunn is credited for launching the NPP, Nicholas Thomas (N.T.) Wright (1948 – ), former Cambridge professor and Canon Theologian of Westminster Abby, has been a major force in bringing the NPP view to a popular audience. Wright, now Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, writes in such a way that a general audience can understand and he has been able to spread the NPP through his prolific writings.

N.T. Wright actually spoke about “a new way of looking at Paul,” “a new perspective,” and “a new picture of Paul’s theology” in his 1978 Tyndale House lecture titled, “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith.” This lecture was delivered just one year after the publication of Sanders’ Paul and Palestinian Judaism. Wright said:

I want in this lecture to contribute to the debate in question…and discuss the distinction which needs to be made today between the real Paul and the Apostle of the church’s imagination…between the Apostle who preached the Lutheran gospel of justification by faith and the Paul who was called…to be the Apostle to the Gentiles…I want to try nevertheless to present what I take to be a new view of Paul, in the hope of at least stimulating fresh thought, and also to prepare the way for further and fuller, exegetical studies.

Wright, in his lecture, referenced Stendhal, Sanders and others whom he believed had the proper perspective on Judaism and Paul. Some of the key ideas set forth by Wright in this lecture are as follows: 1) Israel was not guilty of “legalism” or “work-righteousness,” but

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85 Dunn is often given this credit even though N.T. Wright had addressed the same subject five years prior to Dunn’s lecture. Wright was among the first to espouse the NPP.
86 “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” 61. This lecture was originally delivered by Wright at Tyndale House, Cambridge, on July 4, 1978. It was then published in *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 61–88. This lecture is considered his seminal work on the subject. He, of course, incorporated his NPP views with expansion and modification in numerous subsequent works that can be viewed in the bibliography at the end of this manuscript.
of “national righteousness” or national pride – the belief that fleshly Jewish descent guarantees salvation – and circumcision was a badge of that national pride;\textsuperscript{87} 2) Jesus as the Messiah was the climax of God’s covenantal dealings with Israel and the representative embodiment of all Israel;\textsuperscript{88} 3) justification is set in the context of salvation history demonstrating that both Jew and Gentile can be saved through faith in Jesus Christ;\textsuperscript{89} 4) faith is not a work because it is based upon the historical facts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection;\textsuperscript{90} 5) interpreters of Paul in the past have manufactured a false Paul by manufacturing a false Judaism for him to oppose – Judaism was a religion of grace and good works, not a religion of legalistic works-righteousness;\textsuperscript{91} 6) advocates of the new view of Judaism (like Sanders) got it right about Judaism, but got it wrong about Paul;\textsuperscript{92} and, 7) a new view of Paul is needed, namely, that Paul’s fault with the Jew (Rom. 2:17-29; 3:27-31; 9:30-10:13; Gal. 2-4) is not legalism but using the Law as a “national righteousness” to reject the Gentiles; Paul offered a sensitive critique of Judaism as its advocates present it.\textsuperscript{93}

Like Dunn, Wright worked from the basic premise of Sanders to produce his own nuanced version of the NPP.\textsuperscript{94} At this point, it would be good to observe that the NPP is not one, unified perspective on Paul. NPP adherents do not agree among themselves on some of the specifics of their view. The NPP is actually made up of different perspectives (plural), thus, the New Perspectives on Paul would be more accurate.\textsuperscript{95} Other NPP scholars influenced by the works of Sanders, Dunn, and Wright\textsuperscript{96} have produced their own versions of the NPP, so that today, NT scholars have proposed many perspectives on Paul.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{87}“The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” 65-66.
\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 66-69.
\textsuperscript{89}Ibid., 69-72.
\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., 72-77.
\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., 78-81.
\textsuperscript{92}Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., 82-88.
\textsuperscript{94}One example of Wright’s nuanced version of the NPP concerns his belief that Israel was in “exile” until the time when Christ removed the “curse” of the exile (as per Gal. 3:10-13); see The Climax of the Covenant (1991).
\textsuperscript{95}N.T. Wright noted in 2003, “there are probably almost as many ‘New Perspective’ positions as there are writers espousing it – and… I disagree with most of them”; see “New Perspectives on Paul,” http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_New_Perspectives.htm.
\textsuperscript{96}The NPP has been labeled the “Sanders – Dunn – Wright trajectory” by some of its advocates (Yinger, 30).
\textsuperscript{97}Yinger documents several perspectives on Paul (including his own) that have been advocated since Sanders, Dunn, and Wright (31-36). In a similar way, I documented in my work on the New Hermeneutic how that some in Churches of Christ (in the 1980’s and 1990’s) were not advocating just one new hermeneutic, but in fact, several new hermeneutics. They were not in agreement what the new hermeneutic should be, so they proposed different new hermeneutics (plural). The only agreement they possessed among themselves was that the old hermeneutic of commands, examples, and necessary inference had to go. See Out With the Old and In With the New, 19.
Hafemann wrote the following in 1993 about 10 years after the emergence of the NPP:

But the plethora of new proposals spawned by this paradigm shift suffers as much from internal dissent as from external critique, since no consensus has yet emerged concerning the reason(s) why Paul actually rejected Judaism and the “works of the Law,” nor concerning the actual meaning of “works of the Law” in Paul’s writings.  

Twenty-five years after the advent of the NPP, Stephen Westerholm documented the names and works of no less than 33 scholars who have advanced different perspectives on Judaism and Paul. Some of these scholars have even now moved beyond the NPP. For them, the NPP is passé or even incorrect. Today, several scholars are looking elsewhere for the correct interpretive key to Paul’s writings.

Thielman suggests two lessons that can be learned from surveying the broad landscape and long history of Paul’s interpreters. He writes:

The clearest lesson the journey teaches is that an awareness of our own theological context will help to rescue us from the assumption that Paul, who wrote within a different context, must mean whatever our own traditions teach that he means. No one, however, should be able to get away with the claim that after the destruction of the old Lutheran-Weberian consensus on Judaism, scholarship on Paul’s view of the law has reached some enlightened, bias-free plane...The books of Sanders and Räisänen, similarly, have been produced within a context in which theological truth

98 “Paul and His Interpreters” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, 673. This admission by Hafemann goes a long way in showing that NPP advocates have yet to ground their teaching on plain statements of scripture. If Sanders’ “covenantal nomism” is so clear and obvious from Judaist literature, and if a new reading of Paul is so clear and obvious from Romans and Galatians, then why so many “new perspectives” (plural)?


100 Zetterholm lists Lloyd Gaston, Peter J. Tomson, Mark D. Nanos, and Caroline Johnson Hodge as examples of contemporary scholars who have moved beyond the NPP (Approaches to Paul, 123-167). Zetterholm lists Neil Elliott, Kathy Ehrensperger, and Davina C. Lopez as representing a radical new perspective on Paul (Approaches to Paul, 195-224).
is increasingly viewed as elusive and many from Christian traditions are trying to come to terms with the shameful treatment of Jews by “Christians” throughout the history of the church… Dunn’s reading of Paul’s statements about the law were produced, similarly, in a climate in which the intellectual world has become increasingly concerned with the problems of racism, nationalism, and the plight of the oppressed, and Dunn is quick to demonstrate how his understanding of Paul helps address these issues.

A second lesson that Paul’s past interpreters teach is the importance of treating the traditions of others honestly. The story of the misinterpretation of Judaism by New Testament scholars should cause every Christian interpreter of Paul to wince and should stand as a warning of the immense harm that comes when we wrench the traditions of others out of shape in order to pillory them… On the other hand, as Westerholm reminds us, the pendulum has now swung so far the other way that scholars stand in danger of pillorying Luther and the Protestant tradition in retaliation for what they did to Judaism. Luther’s bad handling of Paul’s relationship to Judaism does not necessarily mean that the great Reformer misinterpreted Paul.¹⁰¹

**New Perspective: Critical Analysis**

Having examined the basic historical development of the NPP and its three prominent proponents (Sanders, Dunn, and Wright), we now turn our attention to the major concerns that have been raised within the NPP debate. There are three: historical concerns, exegetical concerns, and theological concerns.

**Historical Concerns over NPP Judaism**

Was Sanders right about 1st century Judaism being non-legalistic? Advocates of the NPP argue that Sanders was right and that the Judaism of Paul’s day was primarily a religion of grace and not a religion of legalism. They argue that the Jews of Paul’s day were not interested in maintaining righteousness based upon keeping the works of the law. So, a critique and question is in order here: Does the grace-covenant view of Judaism (a non-legalistic view of Judaism) fit with the facts found in and out of the Bible? N.T. Wright believes that it does and goes so far as to say this about Sanders:

> He nevertheless dominates the landscape, and, until a major refutation of his central thesis is produced, honesty compels one to do business with him. I do not myself believe such a refutation can or will be offered; serious modifications are required, but I regard his basic point as established.¹⁰²

Advocates of the NPP will often acknowledge that both grace and some legalism are present in 1st century Judaism, but when they argue their case they focus primarily on

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¹⁰¹ *Paul & and the Law*, 45-46.
grace. NPP advocates frequently use the word “primarily” in their discussions. To focus as the NPP does primarily on the grace-covenant religion of Judaism and admit only some legalism does not fit the facts historically or biblically. When we are fair and balanced with all the material, both non-biblical and biblical, we must conclude that the caricature of Judaism is quite diverse (or complex), and both Jesus and Paul would have said what was necessary to address whatever Jew was present on any given occasion.¹⁰³

Historical Concerns: The Historical Picture of Diversity

The Judaism of Jesus’ day and Paul’s day was diverse (or complex) and this can be established by the historical documents outside of scripture. The grace-covenant view of 1st century Judaism found in the NPP does not represent all the facts found outside the Bible. In 2001, D.A. Carson and other scholars published a work titled Justification and Variegated Nomism¹⁰⁴ in which they documented how 1st century Judaism was in fact complex¹⁰⁵ and variegated, made up of a variety of beliefs including both “covenantal nomism” and legalism. How widespread legalism was in Judaism we may never know, but still, legalism was in fact present among the Jews. Carson concludes this way: “One conclusion to be drawn, then, is not that Sanders is wrong everywhere, but he is wrong when he tries to establish that his category is right everywhere.”¹⁰⁶

The contemporary Jewish scholar, Shaye J.D. Cohen offers the following picture of 1st century Judaism that includes both the faithful covenant Jew and the legalistic Jew:

And then there were Jews who integrated the new piety into their lives through the observance of the rituals and observances, but did not seek to sanctify their lives thereby. They ignored the meaning and purpose of the entire regimen, the sanctification of life and the direction of one’s thoughts to God and to God’s revealed truth. These are the Jews whose ‘legalism,’ that is, reliance on the mere external observance of the rituals to ensure them favor in God’s eyes, has loomed so large in Christian polemics against Judaism. Such people are to be found in all religious communities...in all ages, and we may assume that such Jews existed in ancient times, even if we disbelieve the jaundiced portrayal of the Pharisees in the Gospels. Jesus was not the only preacher to attack the hypocrisy and the ostentatiousness of the self-righteous. Whether Jewish piety lends itself more readily than the Christian to a focus on external observances rather than inner spirituality is a question that a historian cannot answer. Most Jews observed the commandments of the Torah; some did not. Of these, some became apostates and left the Jewish community. Others simply ignored some or all of the commandments, while others protested that the Torah did not really demand literal observance of the ritual laws...

¹⁰³ A fair and balanced caricature of Judaism (OT, Inter-testamental, and NT) can be found in Frank Thielman’s Paul & the Law, 48-68, 238-245.
¹⁰⁵ See Roland Deines and Martin Hengel’s review of Sanders in “E.P Sanders’ ‘Common Judaism,’ Jesus, and the Pharisees” (Journal of Theological Studies 46, 1995, 1-70). See the article on “Judaism” by B.D. Chilton where he describes 1st century Judaism as “a radically pluralized Judaism.”
¹⁰⁶ Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 1, 543.
Other Jews rejected both the rhetoric and the conclusion; for them the yoke of the Torah, the yoke of the commandments, and the yoke of the kingdom of heaven were not burdens but opportunities for the service of God.\textsuperscript{107}

Modern scholars like Sanders are willing to admit this Jewish diversity just described (more on this below). However, the NPP paradigm shift to “covenantal nomism” comes into play when these scholars focus \textit{primarily} on the covenant aspect of Judaism. In other words, Judaism’s diversity is admitted (given lip service?), but “covenantal nomism” is selected as the \textit{primary}, \textit{prevalent}, \textit{pattern} of religion. Thus, any legalism that is present among Jews is downplayed when looking at 1\textsuperscript{st} century Judaism. NPP advocates are not willing to accept the simple truth that Judaism’s diversity can and did include the legalistic, self-righteous Jew.\textsuperscript{108}

Here is an example of this line of thinking from N.T. Wright in his 1978 lecture:

\ldots we have in the Rabbinic literature, the Targums, the Scrolls and the Apocalyptic literature a broad and varied picture of the many-sided Judaism which, in the widest sense, formed Paul’s milieu. Those who are experts in these fields…have recently been saying increasingly clearly that the real Judaism was not a religion of legalistic works-righteousness.\textsuperscript{109}

The practice of admitting a Jewish \textit{diversity} but then selecting a Jewish \textit{primary} pattern can also be seen in the comments of Michael B. Thompson. Thompson is sympathetic toward the NPP position and he makes a candid admission about Jewish \textit{diversity}, but then sides with Sanders’ \textit{primary} view of Judaism:

Recently a number of scholars have challenged Sanders’ basic thesis about Judaism. There does appear to be evidence that some Jews held to notions that people could attain merit before God, storing up a ‘treasury of works’ (4 Ezra 6.5; 7:77; 8:33, 36; 2 Baruch14.12; see also Tobit 4.9-10 and Psalms of Solomon 9:3-5). 2 Baruch 51.7 refers to those who have been ‘saved because of their works,’ although both it and 4 Ezra were written at least a generation after Paul. And no doubt some Jews in Paul’s day misunderstood the teaching of the OT and thought in terms of personal merit, just as many Christian have misunderstood grace in the NT. Nevertheless, most scholars accept that Sanders has successfully debunked a caricature that had previously led some German scholars in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century to seek and to show the inferiority of Judaism as ‘legalism’ rather than grace…\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{107} From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{108} For a good picture of this diversity, see the article by S. Mason on “Jewish Theologies and Sects,” the article by P.R. Trebilco and C.A. Evans on “Diaspora Judaism,” and the article by C.A. Evans on “Post-A.D. 70 Judaism.”
\textsuperscript{109} “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” 79.
\textsuperscript{110} The New Perspective on Paul, 9.
False dilemmas need to be avoided in our discussions about Paul and the Jews.\textsuperscript{111} It is not the case of “either-or,” but the case of “both-and.” The choice is not: either all of Judaism was legalistic\textsuperscript{112} or none of it was. That fact is that some individuals, groups, or areas of Judaism were legalistic; others were not.\textsuperscript{113} Likewise, there is not a single Judaism behind all the documents (biblical or extra-biblical), nor should we presume that the opponents of Jesus were necessarily the same as the opponents of Paul. And Paul’s opponents were not always of the same mindset.\textsuperscript{114} Each case and context where John the Baptist (Luke 3), Jesus (Matthew 12, 15, 23; John 8), Peter (Acts 3-5), Stephen (Acts 7), or Paul (Romans 2, 9-11; Galatians 1-6) addressed erring Jews must be studied by itself. Additionally, a priority must be given to the biblical accounts over the non-inspired, extra-biblical information the likes of which Sanders surveyed in his book.

\textit{Historical Concerns: The Biblical Picture of Diversity}

Yes, there were Jews in Paul’s day who believed that they were in God’s covenant and they were there by God’s grace. We must certainly be careful not to reduce Judaism down to a religion of legalism alone. Many faithful Jews in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century would remember that God expressed his “gracious” favor (Exodus 33:19; 34:6) and “love” (Deut. 7:6-8; 8:14-18; 9:4-5) toward Israel in choosing them. They believed that their obedience was a response to God’s grace.\textsuperscript{115}

Jews like Zacharias\textsuperscript{116} and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary (Luke 1), Simeon, Anna (Luke 2), and all who came with humble repentance to John’s baptism (Luke 3), were clearly a part of a faithful remnant who appreciated God’s gracious covenant with them. They desired to obey his will in all things and they recognized their need for forgiveness (compare Luke 1:77 with Jeremiah 31:34). Like the assembly of the 120, there were Jews who desired to worship God in Jerusalem with a faithful attitude toward God’s grace (Luke 24:52-53; Acts 1:12-15).

No doubt, there were also humble and contrite Jews in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century, who, like Ezra (9:6-15), Nehemiah (9:5-37) and Daniel (9:4-19), were very conscious of God’s grace and faithfulness as well as their own disobedience and need for forgiveness. They understood that they had broken God’s covenant.\textsuperscript{117} There would have been Jews at this time who were also looking for the fulfillment of a God’s new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{111} For a good review of this false dilemma often found in the NPP debate, see Moisés Silva’s article “The Law and Christianity: Dunn’s New Synthesis.”
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Sanders writes “that ancient Judaism was not…a miscellaneous bunch of people, isolated from one another and from their own history, all of whom tried to save themselves by their own efforts…The view that Judaism was ‘legalistic’ meant that all individual Jews thought they had to save themselves by their own merits” (Covenantal Nomism, 26).
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Charles H. Talbert describes Judaism as “one genus…and within that genus a number of species were in tension with one another over who represented the true tradition with reference to the scriptures of Israel” (“Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists,” 2).
  \item \textsuperscript{114} See the article by P.W. Barnett on “Opponents of Paul.”
  \item \textsuperscript{115} See also Baruch 1:15 – 3:8 and Prayer of Manasseh 1-15.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} See “Zechariah’s Song” by S.C. Farris.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} See also Baruch 1:15-3:8; Judith 5:17-21; 8:18-19; 2 Macc. 4:16-17; 8:36; and similar references in Josephus’ Jewish War (2.391-93) and Antiquities of the Jews (1.14).
\end{itemize}
34) and new spirit (Ezekiel 36:22 – 37:14). There were Jews who were humble and repentant (Luke 18:13). There were Jewish rulers like Nicodemus (John 3) and Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43) who were willing to come to Jesus because they were “looking for the kingdom of God.”

However, while there were Jews in the 1st century that no doubt approached God’s covenant in the right way as the faithful remnant (Romans 9-11), there are Bible passages that tell us there were many other Jews at this time who were very much interested in “doing” or “keeping” the law and boasting in their observance of the law. Keep in mind that a “remnant” (Romans 9-11) is just that, a “remnant” (minority) and not a majority. A majority of Jews at this time were disobedient to God and we must ask why.

Consider the mixed picture of Judaism given by Daniel and Malachi. Daniel 11:32-35 and 12:10 speak of Jews around 150 B.C. who are “wicked” and other Jews who are “wise” and “pure.” Malachi 3:1-6 and 4:1-6 deal with John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10, 14) and the Jews of his day. We are told that some Jews in his day will be “wicked” and some Jews will “fear my name.” There is a difference in the attitude and religious practice among Jews that must be admitted. Apparently, some scholars today do not want to “discern between the righteous and the wicked” (Mal. 3:18) among the Jews. Inspired literature like Daniel and Malachi is what we need to be reading to get an accurate picture of 1st century Judaism.

It must also be remembered that the Judaism of the 1st century was not the unified Judaism of OT Israel, but the diverse Judaism of the post-exile. After the Babylonian Captivity, there was the dispersion of the Jews into Greek-speaking areas, the rise of the Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, etc.), the formation of the synagogue worship service, the addition of two new feast days (Lights and Purim), the imposition of human traditions, etc. All of these factors and more contributed to the formation of diverse Judaism that simply did not exist before 587 B.C.

There were Jews in the 1st century who believed they could maintain their covenant status by keeping the law. Jesus faced this kind of Jew who had set his hope on Moses (John

118 Simon Gathercole argues convincingly from extra-biblical Jewish literature and from Romans 1-5 that some Jews indeed “boasted” with confidence in their individual righteousness via their observance of the law. Their “boasting” was not as Dunn argues, a boasting in Israel’s national righteousness, neither was it a “boasting” in election alone. Their “boasting” was related to their obedience to the Law. See Gathercole’s book, Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1-5.

119 See Romans 2:25; 10:5; Galatians 3:10,12; 5:9; 6:13; etc. For the Old Testament backdrop to “doing” the law, see Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:33; 30:11-20; etc. Compare also Sirach 15:15-17 and Psalm of Solomon 9:4-5. The Law, of course, did not encourage legalism. But, the interpretation and application of these verses by some Jews did encourage legalism. This was not the position of all Jews, however. How widespread this legalism was among the total population of Jews we do not know from scripture or from reliable historical sources.

120 See the article by P.R. Trebilco on “Jewish Communities in Asia Minor,” the article by W.T. Wilson on “Hellenistic Judaism,” and the article by C.C. Hill on “Hellenists, Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Jewish Christianity.”

121 See the article by G.G. Porton on “Sadducees,” the article by W.J. Heard and C.A. Evans on “Jewish Revolutionary Movements” and the article by T. Beale on “Essenes.”

122 See the article by B. Chilton and E. Yamauchi on “Synagogues.”
5:45) and who was a disciple of Moses (John 9:28). He had placed his hope, in part, on strictly following the Law of Moses (see also Matthew 23:2). The Pharisee of Luke 18:9-12 was this kind of Jew. He did not believe he was a sinner in need of repentance. He believed he was righteous because of his fasting and tithing.123

Jesus pronounced woe upon the Pharisees124 who shut others out of the kingdom of heaven and they themselves would not even enter in (Matthew 23:13; Luke 11:52). How could these Pharisees be practicing “covenantal nomism” when they would not even enter God’s kingdom themselves? The “not-all-that-bad” picture of the Pharisees portrayed by some NPP advocates today just does not match up with the truth of the gospel record.

Many of the Jews in Paul’s day rested upon the Law (Romans 2:17) and gloried in the Law (Romans 2:23), thinking that they could be justified by their circumcision and their keeping of the letter of the Law (Romans 2:25-27). Paul told these erring Jews that their law-keeping apart from doing all the Law and apart from faith in Christ did not justify them (Romans 2:13, 25; 3:19-28).

The problem with many Jews at this time was their focus on the Law that came from Sinai and not on the law that came from Jerusalem. Some of these Jews may well have accepted Gentiles, but these Gentiles had to accord to the Law that came from Sinai (Acts 15:5). These Jews did not fully comprehend or accept the teaching of Isaiah (Isaiah 2:2-4) and Micah (4:1-5). These two men prophesied that “all nations” or “many nations” (Jews and Gentiles) would go to Jerusalem and be taught to walk in God’s way from “the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.” The problem for the Jews of Paul’s day was not simply their demand upon Gentiles to keep the Law, it was their demand to keep the wrong law.

There was enough of this kind of Jewish thinking for Paul to address them this way: “What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, following after a law of righteo uses, did not arrive at that law. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works” (9:30-32).125 Israel, on the whole, refused a “righteousness which is of faith.” They followed an OT “law of righteousness” which was a way of life that sought to be justified by law-keeping (see 10:3-5).126

Paul, as a Jew and a Pharisee, can also give us insight into 1st century Judaism. He said to the “brethren and fathers” in Jerusalem: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as ye all are this day” (Acts 22:3). He told Agrippa: “My manner of life then from my youth up, which was from the beginning

123 See also Mt. 9:10-13; Mk. 2:15-17; Lk. 5:27-32; 7:36-47.
124 See the article on “Pharisees” by S. Westerholm. The article on “Pharisees” by S. Mason concludes with these words: “Rabbinic literature should no longer be used, therefore, as transparent evidence for the Pharisees.”
125 Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from American Standard Version (1901).
126 See the article by W.S. Campbell on “Israel” and “Church as Israel, People of God.”
among mine own nation and at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; having knowledge of me from the first, if they be willing to testify, that after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” (Acts 26:4-5).

Again, Paul said that he: “advanced in the Jews’ religion beyond many of mine own age among my own countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14). Would Paul’s instruction in the Jews’ religion lead him to naturally have an attitude of wanting to work the Law and trust (boast) in his working the Law? Yes, but let Paul answer for himself in Philippians 3:5: “as touching the law, a Pharisee,” in 3:6 – “as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless,” and in 3:9: “not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law.”

**Historical Concerns: The Biblical Picture of God’s Wrath**

In addition to the biblical picture of Jewish diversity, we also have the biblical picture of God’s wrath upon disobedient Jews. We must remember that the New Testament tells us that God was displaying his wrath upon the disobedient Jews of Paul’s day. This would have been a continuation of God’s promise found back in Deuteronomy 27-32 to punish Israel for their disobedience. One clear example of God’s wrath upon the Jews is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:16: “to fill up their sins always: but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” The point here is that God is punishing hardened Israel for their rejection of the Christ.

The general pattern of Sanders’ Jewish “covenantal nomism” is actually not found in the New Testament. What is found is a minority, remnant of faithful Jews and another majority group of hardened and disobedient Jews who are receiving God’s wrath. These hardened Jews would receive God’s wrath in Paul’s day (Romans 1:18; 3:5; 9:22) and they will receive it again in the future if they do not repent (Romans 2:5, 8). The faithful remnant will be saved because they are “an election of grace” (Romans 11:5-7). The majority of hardened Jews will be lost because of their reliance upon “a law of righteousness” (Romans 9:31-32; 10:3-5) and “works” (Romans 11:5-7).

In Paul’s day, the ultimate display of God’s wrath upon the hardened Jews came with the divine destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Jews’ house would be left desolate because of their rejection of God’s prophets (Matthew 23:37 – 24:34) and of Jesus himself (John 1:11-12). God’s wrath upon the disobedient Jews of Paul’s day is an aspect of Judaism that is sometimes left out in the NPP debate. J.M Scott observes:

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127 N.T. Wright sidesteps the force of this passage by redefining “righteousness” (dikaiosune) to mean a “covenant status” or covenant membership,” even though no Greek lexicon has “covenant membership” as a possible meaning of “righteousness”; see What Saint Paul Really Said, 124.

128 Sanders claimed that Paul argued against the Jews “from solution to plight.” He wrote: “It seems likely, however, that Paul's thought did not run from plight to solution, but rather from solution to Plight” (Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 443) ... “The most important observation to make in order to understand the situation of the non-Christian in Paul's view is the one which has already been made: that, for Paul, the conviction of a universal solution preceded the conviction of a universal plight. It is perhaps the principal fault in Bultmann's treatment of Paul that he proceeded from plight to solution and supposed that Paul proceeded in the same way (Ibid., 474). Against Sanders, Thielman demonstrates
Unfortunately, however, Sanders has so stressed continuity in the covenantal relationship between God and his people, and readily available atonement for sin by means of repentance, that another major stream of tradition in Palestinian Judaism, which emphasizes prolonged discontinuity in the relationship as punishment for sin, has gone practically unnoticed. In no way can it be said that the ‘business-as-usual’ approach of the theocratic stream prevailed in every quarter...Sanders fails to see that, according to the Deuteronomic view of Israel’s history which Paul appropriates in Romans 9-11, there was a plight: Israel had apostatized from the covenant and this led to their judgment in exile; covenantal nomism had ceased to be a viable option after 587 B.C.\(^\text{129}\)

**Exegetical Concerns over NPP Interpretation**

In addition to historical concerns, there are also exegetical concerns raised against the NPP. Is the hermeneutical method of Bible interpretation found among NPP proponents accurate as they go through and exegete (?) Paul’s passages on justification, works, law, righteousness, gospel, or faith in Jesus Christ? Opponents of the NPP have raised several exegetical concerns,\(^\text{130}\) but I will limit mine to four biblical phrases that are used by NPP advocates. What we will find in this survey is that NPP advocates often take a reductionist\(^\text{131}\) approach to these biblical phrases unnecessarily limiting them to fit their NPP theology. The hermeneutic of the NPP is both revisionist and reductionist.

My exegetical (hermeneutical) critique of the NPP is that it is unnecessarily reductionist in its approach to scripture. The understanding of Paul by many NPP advocates is far too narrow and simple to capture all that Paul is saying in his writings. The basic, often one-dimensional definitions (or redefinitions) offered by many NPP advocates simply do not do justice to all that Paul says about a particular matter, be it justification, works of the law, or something else. Using Sanders’ “covenantal nomism” as a starting point, we find that eisegesis, not exegesis, dominates NPP hermeneutics.

NPP advocates approach Pauline texts with a hermeneutic maneuver that involves three steps: 1) read any passage where Paul demonstrates an antithesis between grace and law, or faith and works, with Sanders’ “covenantal nomism” as a background (Jews are non-legalistic); 2) read the antithesis as an ecclesiological (church) statement about the inclusive nature of God’s people (faith = God’s inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles; works = the Jews’ exclusion of the Gentiles); and 3) reduce and redefine the meanings of biblical words and phrases to fit the alleged “covenantal nomism” and ecclesiological...
statement of the first two steps. Let us now consider some examples of this NPP maneuvering.\textsuperscript{132}

“Works of the Law.” What does Paul mean by the phrase “\textit{works of the law}” (\textit{ἔργων νόμου})?\textsuperscript{133} Those who advocate the NPP suggest that the \textit{primary} meaning of the biblical phrase “\textit{works of the law}” in Galatians 2:16\textsuperscript{134} and elsewhere refers to a restricted, limited number of works.\textsuperscript{135} In all fairness, it should be noted that early on (1983) Dunn limited the “\textit{works of the law}” to things like circumcision, the Sabbath, and dietary restrictions.\textsuperscript{136} But, in his later writings (1988 to the present), he expanded his definition to include whatever the Law requires to be done. However, what Dunn wrote in 1983 about Paul’s “\textit{works of the law}” is what has stuck in contemporary NPP theology. Here, Dunn believes that phrase primarily means the particular observances of the Law like circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary restrictions.\textsuperscript{137}

Dunn says that these “\textit{works of the law}” function as “badges” of Jewish identity. “\textit{Works of the law}” is not a reference to works-righteousness or legalism, but simply another way of describing the Jewish people and their \textit{misuse} of the Law.\textsuperscript{138} According to NPP advocates, Paul is not fighting meritorious works; he is fighting racial (Jewish) exclusivity. So, when Paul writes “not by \textit{works of the law}” (Galatians 2:16), he is simply saying “not by being Jewish.” Dunn writes:

‘\textit{Works of law}, ‘\textit{works of the law}’ are nowhere understood here, either by his Jewish interlocutors or by Paul himself, as \textit{works which earn} God’s favour, as merit-amassing observances. They are rather seen as \textit{badges}: they are simply what membership of the covenant people involves, what mark out the Jews as God’s people; given by God for precisely that reason, they serve to demonstrate covenant status…The phrase ‘\textit{works of the law}’ in Galatians 2.16 is, in fact, a fairly restricted

\textsuperscript{132} For more on the NPP’s hermeneutical maneuvering, see “Not the New Perspective” by Francis Watson, an unpublished paper delivered at the British New Testament Conference, Manchester, September 2001.

\textsuperscript{133} The phrase “\textit{works of the law}” (\textit{ἔργων νόμου}) is found eight times in Paul’s letters (Romans 3:20, 28; and Galatians 2:16 [3 times]; 3:2, 5, 10).

\textsuperscript{134} Some Bible translations of Galatians 2:16 emphasize the human doing in the phrase “\textit{works of the law}.” See for example, “\textit{justified by doing the works of the law}” (NRSV), “\textit{justified by observing the law}” (NIV), or “\textit{justified by obeying the law}” (NLT).

\textsuperscript{135} Moisés Silva answers this argument in his article titled “Faith Versus Works of the Law in Galatians” (\textit{Justification and Variegated Nomism}, 217-248).

\textsuperscript{136} Dunn was not the first to do this. John Calvin comments on scholars in his day and before who limited “\textit{works of the law}” to “ceremonies” and would not apply this phrase to the whole law. See Calvin’s comments on Romans 3:20.

\textsuperscript{137} Dunn was not the first to suggest that “\textit{works of the law}” in Galatians 2:16 refer to specific and limited boundary markers. In 1973, Joseph B. Tyson took the same position in his article “\textit{Works of the Law}” in Galatians” (Journal of Biblical Literature 92 [1973]: 425).

\textsuperscript{138} Some scholars have narrowed down Dunn’s limited scope of “\textit{works of the law}” even farther than he did, demonstrating the old adage: “What proves too much, proves too little.” Consider this comment by Jouette M. Bassler: “Tabatha Wiley notes that ‘\textit{works of the law}’ do not mark off \textit{all} Jews as privileged, only \textit{male} Jews. Only men bear the gender-specific mark of the covenant and only their status in homes and in assemblies is enhanced by the covenant law. Paul’s resistance to \textit{works of the law}, she argues, was fueled at least in part by his determination to retain the equality not only of Gentiles and Jews but also of men and women within the body of Christ” (\textit{Navigating Paul}, 15).
one: it refers precisely to these same identity markers described above, *covenant* works – those regulations prescribed by the law which any good Jew would simply take for granted to describe what a good Jew did. To be a Jew was to be a member of the covenant, was to observe circumcision, food laws and sabbath. In short, once again Paul seems much less a man of 16th century Europe and much more firmly in touch with the reality of 1st century Judaism than many have thought.139

There are several problems with Dunn’s limited view of “works of the law”:

1) Some Jews in Paul’s day prided themselves in counting and keeping over 100 commands and prohibitions found in the OT.140 These laws of Moses, *in addition* to the traditions, were spelled out in detail. Passages such as Matthew 19:3, 7 (dealing with divorce) and 23:2-3, 23 (dealing with tithing) bear this out. There would be no reason for Jews to do this if they were focusing *primarily* on circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary restrictions.

2) The biblical information we have about what Jews (Christian Jews) were binding on themselves and Gentiles does not fit Dunn’s limited (reductionist) view of “works of the law.” For example, Luke records the following: “But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, ‘It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5). The charge to keep the Law of Moses was *in addition* to being circumcised.141

Additionally, consider Peter’s response to these Jews in Acts 15:10: “Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers no we were able to bear?” The problem with these Jews was not their Jewish exclusivism or nationalism (as per Dunn). Their problem was in putting a “yoke” (compare Galatians 5:1) of law-keeping on the Gentiles via their charge to keep the Law of Moses. Peter’s point is about a Law given to Israel, not some misused exclusivist attitude that Jews had toward Gentiles in the first century. Peter’s point is about the “yoke” of the Law, not some alleged “badges of identity.” Peter and his fellow-Jews

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139 *The New Perspective on Paul*, 111.
140 Approximately 613 commands in the OT have been delineated by Jews, but many of them relating to the tabernacle, entrance into Palestine, etc., would not have counted by Jews in the first-century.
141 There is no question that Paul has much to say about circumcision. He mentions circumcision approximately 30 times in his letters. And there is no question that Jews placed the demand of circumcision on Gentile believers (“they compel you to be circumcised,” Galatians 6:12). But, the large amount of material from Paul discussing circumcision and the high demand of the Jews upon Gentiles for circumcision does not warrant the conclusion that Jews of Paul’s day were focused only or primarily on circumcision and not doing the rest of the law. Note, for example, that Paul opens and closes his thought in Galatians 5:2-12 with circumcision. But, right in the middle, he writes: “Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law...” (verse 4). He does not write, “ye who would be justified by circumcision.” The particular observance of circumcision for some Jews was a demand of the greater observance of all the law. Unlike NPP advocates, Paul is careful here not to reduce the Jew-Gentile debate to circumcision alone. Circumcision was not the only concern even among Jewish believers (Acts 21:20-21). For other examples of Paul’s mention of the particular act of circumcision within the larger context of keeping the law, see Romans 2:25-27 and Galatians 6:13. For a helpful discussion of circumcision, see T.R. Schreiner’s article on “Circumcision” as well as D.R. de Lacey’s article on “Circumcision.”
could not bear the “yoke” of Mosaic law-keeping; therefore, this “yoke” should not be put on the Gentiles. The Gentiles would be saved by faith (15:7-9) through grace (15:11), not by Mosaic law-keeping.

This emphasis on circumcision and other obligations in the Law is consistent with what Paul wrote concerning the Jews “who with the letter and circumcision art a transgressor of the law” (Rom. 2:27). When you back up to Romans 2:15 and read “works of the law” there, you find that the meaning of it in context includes more than just circumcision (read from verse 12 down to verse 29). Therefore, when Paul writes in Romans 3:28 about “a man” (anyone, Jew or Gentile) that is justified by faith “apart from the works of the law,” he is describing a caricature that began back in 2:12; that is, a Jew (and the proselyte Gentiles who followed them) that demanded circumcision and law-keeping as a system of justification.\(^{142}\)

3) When Paul argued against “works of the law” in Romans 3:20 and 3:28, he followed that argument in the rest of Romans with just the word “works.” The use of “works” (without the words: “of the law”) in Paul’s antithesis demonstrates that he was not focusing primarily on a restricted use of “works of the law” (Dunn’s Jewish “badges of identity”). Consider these words from Paul: “justified by works” (4:2); “righteousness apart from works” (4:6); “not of works” (9:11); “as it were by works” (9:32);\(^{143}\) and, “no more of works” (11:6).\(^{144}\) Clearly, Paul was arguing against a principle or system of justification upon the grounds of, or upon the basis of “works”-keeping in general.

When Paul argued against “works of the law” in Galatians 2:16 (and again in 3:2,5,10), he followed that argument in the rest of Galatians with just the word “law”. The use of “law” (without the words: “works of”) in Paul’s antithesis demonstrates that he was not focusing primarily on a restricted use of “works of the law” (Dunn’s Jewish “badges of identity”). Consider these words from Paul: “For I through the law died unto the law” (2:19); “if righteousness is through the law” (2:21); “no man is justified by the law” (3:11); “the law is not of faith” (3:12); “the curse of the law” (3:13); “if the inheritance is of the law” (3:18); “if there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law” (3:21); “that he might redeem them that were under the law” (4:5); “ye that desire to be under the law” (4:21); “a debtor to do the whole law” (5:3); “ye who would be justified by the law” (5:4); “ye are not under the law” (5:18); and, “do themselves keep the law” (6:13). Clearly, Paul was arguing against

\(^{142}\) Note that the faith-works argument used by Paul in Romans 3:27-28 was not used by Peter in answering the Jews in Acts 11:1-18. Neither was this argument used by Peter, Paul, or James in answering the Jews in Acts 15. NPP advocates leave the impression that the faith-works argument used by Paul was how the Jew-Gentile argument was settled. Paul used this argument to address a particular audience in Rome and in the Galatian churches, but it was not a standard argument used in all cases of the like. Additionally, the faith-works argument is nowhere found in the Gospels, and yet we find Jesus and the apostles dealing with Jews and Gentiles and their place in the kingdom. See the article on “Gentiles” by S. McKnight.

\(^{143}\) The KJV has “as it were by the works of the law” in 9:32 where other versions have “as it were by works.”

\(^{144}\) See also Paul’s wording outside of Romans: “not of works” (Ephesians 2:9); “not according to our works” (2 Timothy 1:9); and “not by works done in righteousness, which we did our selves” (Titus 3:5).
a principle or system of justification upon the grounds of, or upon the basis of “law”-keeping in general.\textsuperscript{145}

Michael B. Thompson, a sympathetic proponent of the NPP, makes candid admission on this point:

Dunn’s approach has the strength of drawing our attention to the social and historical context when Paul wrote, and his suggestion about ‘works of the law’ has led many to think again. Nevertheless, not all texts referring to ‘works’ can be neatly identified and limited to specific ‘badges of Judaism.’ Rom 2.17ff, 3.9-20, 11.6 and Titus 3.5 seem to have something broader in mind, and Dunn himself has now clarified his earlier claim, acknowledging that the word can have a wider meaning in Paul. What is more, in some passages Paul clearly speaks of ‘boasting’ of self-accomplishment (Rom. 4.2; 1 Cor. 1.29; 4.7; Eph. 2.9; compare Gal. 6.4) rather than boasting in the gift of the law or election. Many still see Rom. 4.4-5, Eph. 2.8-10 and Phil. 3.9 as texts that fit the ‘Old Perspective’ much better than the ‘New.’\textsuperscript{146}

4) Paul’s point about “works of the law” in Romans 3:28 comes after he has discussed how both Jews and Gentiles are in sin (Romans 1:18 – 3:23). In particular, the problem with the Jew in Romans 2 is not that he excludes Gentiles, but that he is disobedient and in sin. Jews have the Law and they practice circumcision, but these things are not accompanied by obedience. Paul charges the Jews with “transgression” (2:23) and being a “transgressor” (2:25,27), not with national pride or exclusivism. Disobedience is their primary problem (Rom. 3:9,23), not national pride or exclusivism.\textsuperscript{147}

5) Paul applies the phrase “works of the law” in Romans 3:19-20 to all people, Jew and Gentile (“every mouth”, “all the world”, and “no flesh”). The principle of not being justified by the works of law is true for the Jew (legalist, exclusivist or both) and the Gentile. No one, Jew or Gentile will be justified on the basis of a system of law-keeping apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Since that is true, then Dunn’s emphasis on Jewish “boundary markers” is misdirected and steers the argument away from what Paul was actually attacking. What “boundary markers” was the average Gentile (not just the Gentile proselyte living by the Law)\textsuperscript{148} trying to live by and use to exclude others?\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{145} In his article, “Paul and the ‘Works of the Law,’” Daniel P. Fuller shows that he is aware of the social and ethnic tensions between Jews and Gentiles found in Galatians 2:11-15. But Fuller argues from the remaining context (Galatians 2:16 – 3:14) that Paul had more in mind than social/ethnic issues when he argued against “works of the law.” While Fuller sees legalism almost at every turn in Galatians 2-3, his awareness of the context to determine the meaning of “works of the law” is worth noting.

\textsuperscript{146} The New Perspective, 11.

\textsuperscript{147} Brendan Byrne observes: “What is wrong with going the way of ‘works of the law’ is not primarily a national pride that refuses to recognize God's design to include the nations of the world within the promises of salvation. What is wrong is a refusal to admit what Paul has been at pains to show in Rom 2:1-3:20, that the way of the Torah has been undercut by Israel's being mired (despite possession of the Torah) in the sinful mass of humankind. Faith acknowledges all this to be the case, which is why faith and attempting to pursue the ‘works of the law’ remain diametrically opposed for Paul” (“Interpreting Romans: The New Perspective and Beyond,” 249).

\textsuperscript{148} See the article on “Proselytism and Godfearers” by S. McKnight.
Additionally, Dunn’s definition of “works of the law” does not adequately explain the last part of 3:20: “for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin.” One reason why no one is justified by works of law is because law serves to expose sin.

6) NPP advocates like Dunn make the point on Romans 3:29 that because God is a God of the Jews and Gentiles that Paul’s argument surrounds the national pride of the Jews toward Gentiles (i.e. circumcision) and not around works (legalism) and faith. However, one must consider what Paul wrote later in the book of Romans that is parallel in thought with what he writes in 3:29. For example, Romans 9:24 is parallel with 3:29 and Romans 10:12 parallel with 3:29. These passages are parallel not only in wording, but also in argumentation. If you trace the argument back from Romans 9:24 to 9:11, you find that Paul is arguing against “works” and if you trace the argument back from Romans 10:12 to 9:32, you find the same thing.

However, when you look at Paul’s argument in these places you find that he references OT scriptures and examples (9:11-13; 10:5-6). He does not refer to the NT Jew and his nationalistic pride against Gentiles. If Romans 3:27-29 is parallel in argumentation to 9:11-24 and 9:32-10:12, then it demonstrates that Paul is not talking about NT Jews boasting in a nationalistic pride in 3:27-28 (Dunn’s “badges of identity”). Paul is arguing his point that “works” and faith are in opposition and this has been the case going back to these OT examples. Thus, a God of Jews and Gentiles will save them both the same way; not by “works” but by faith.

7) Paul speaks of “works” in relationship to Abraham in Romans 4:1-5 and it has nothing to do with the works of the Law of Moses (circumcision or any other law) because that law had not been given to Abraham. Still, Paul argues that Abraham was not justified by works (by human activity or by doing alone). In other words, Dunn’s restricted use of “works of the law” does not hold up when talking about Abraham in Romans 4; yet, Paul makes the same argument for the Jew and Gentile in Romans 3 (“apart from the works of the law”) as he does for Abraham in Romans 4 (“him that worketh not”). Paul appeals to Abraham again later in Romans 4:13-16 to present his antithesis between law and faith. Paul also uses the example of Abraham in Galatians 3:1-14 to demonstrate the same antithesis between works and faith.

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149 While it is true that Paul’s argument (“not by works”) may be applied to the Gentile, it must be remembered that Paul’s argument began with his Jewish interlocutor in Romans 2.

150 The same point could be made concerning Jacob and Esau in Romans 9:11: “that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.” The same point could be made of David even though he was under the Law (Rom. 4:6): “apart from works.” Jews in David’s day were not binding circumcision, the Sabbath, and dietary restriction on Gentiles around him.

151 Preston M. Sprinkle presents a solid case against Dunn’s definition of “works of the law” by appealing to a proper understanding of Abraham in Romans 4:4-5 (Paul & Judaism Revisited, 152-155). Also against Dunn, Gerhard H. Visscher offers one of the most extensive discussions of Abraham in Romans 4 and how he relates to justification in Romans 3; see Roman 4 and the New Perspective on Paul: Faith Embraces the Promise. A. Andrew Das also shows how Dunn’s definition of “works of the law” will not fit properly into Paul’s discussion of Abraham in Romans 4:4-5 (“Paul and Works of Obedience in Second Temple Judaism: Romans 4:4-5 as a ‘New Perspective’ Case Study”).

152 Paul’s use of Abraham to demonstrate the antithesis between works and faith should not be interpreted to mean that faith is “faith alone” without obedient works of faith. Paul writes about walking in “the steps
8) When Paul writes that one cannot be justified by the “works of the law” (Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16; etc.), this is the same as what he preached earlier in Antioch. In Acts 13:15, there was “the reading of the law and the prophets” in the synagogue there and then Paul began his lesson. Paul closed his lesson this way: “and by him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). The law and the prophets that these Jews read from that day (not just circumcision) could not justify, but their faith in Jesus Christ could.

9) The biblical phrase “works of the law” is clarified in such passages as Galatians 3:10: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone who continue not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.” Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 and speaks of “all things that are written in the book of the law.” Paul’s quotation here would be unnecessary and off point if Jews were merely binding the limited work of circumcision. “Works of the law,” by Paul’s own definition, includes more than circumcision. “Works of the law” for Paul means doing the law.

Additionally, Paul quotes from Leviticus 18:5 in verse 12 and writes: “He that doeth them shall live in them.” Doing the Law in general, and not just circumcision, is clearly the context of Leviticus 18:4-5. Remember, Paul writes elsewhere: “the doers of the law shall be justified” (Romans 2:13).

10) Paul’s writings on this subject outside of Galatians and Romans must also be considered. Paul speaks about God’s plan to save all mankind by his grace and mercy and “not of works” (Ephesians 2:9), “not according to our works” (2 Timothy 1:9), and “not by works” (Titus 3:5). These passages speak of the plan of salvation for all mankind. All mankind, both Jew and Gentile, will be saved by God’s grace and not upon the basis of “works.” These passages cannot be used to speak of Jewish exclusivism as Dunn would have us believe, because these passages are not talking primarily about Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles. “Not of works” applies to all mankind that “no man should glory” (Ephesians 2:9, emphasis mine).

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155 Paul is not excluding God’s works of righteousness that a person must perform as a part of demonstrating an obedient faith (Acts 10:35). Paul is talking about human works of merit that do not save. For Paul’s use of Abraham in Romans and Galatians see the article by N.L. Calvert on “Abraham.”
11) The issue of Dunn’s limited view of the “works of the law” raises an important question: What exactly was Paul’s directive concerning “works of the law”? Was he asking Jews to stop these “badges of identity” all together, or just in some cases where it was not helpful to Gentiles? W.R. Stegner, in an article sympathetic toward the NPP, candidly admits the following:

Was Paul asking Jewish Christians to abandon the boundary markers of the Law in their own practice? Did he teach that they should cease circumcising their sons and observing the dietary law in their homes? Or was he speaking about fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in such places as Antioch and other mixed congregations? The question can be asked more pointedly: Did Paul entirely abandon the boundary markers (“works of the law”) for himself? Or did he continue to observe them in so far as they did not interfere with his Gentile apostolate? At this point, there does not seem to be a clear answer [among NPP advocates – chr] to this question.156

12) When Dunn replaces Jewish legalism with Jewish exclusivism as the meaning of “works of the law,” what has been gained in the discussion? Paul is now opposed to exclusivism instead of legalism, so what? A Jew seeking to be justified by a limited number of works (exclusivism) is not substantially different than a Jew seeking to be justified by all the works of the Law (legalism). Indeed, exclusivism can become a type of legalism itself.

13) When Dunn says that “works of the law” are the Jewish prescribed practices of circumcision, the Sabbath, and dietary restrictions, he misses Paul’s point. Paul focused on the performance of the Jew as it relates to his “works of the law,” not on what was prescribed to the Jew (see “doer” in Romans 2 and “doeth” in Galatians 3). There is a difference between prescription in the Law and performance (or lack thereof) of the Law. Jacqueline C.R. de Roo offers this keen observation:

Some scholars belonging to the so-called ‘New Perspective on Paul’ argue that ‘works of the law’ are identity badges … ‘Works of the law’ do not justify, because being Jewish does not save a person … The main strength of this view is that it does not ignore Paul’s statements concerning good works in relation to justification and salvation. Its weaknesses are (1) it does not always adequately explain Paul’s emphasis on sin in relation to his polemic against justification by works of the law, and (2) some of its adherents wrongly argue that ‘works of the law’ are works prescribed rather than performed.157

14) When Dunn focuses “works of the law” on Jewish exclusivism, he shifts the argument away from Paul’s central point about grace and works and removes the basic polemic that Paul is trying to establish between the two.158 Paul writes that salvation is

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156 “Paul the Jew.” Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, 510-511.
157 Works of the Law at Qumran and in Paul, 71.
158 Dunn’s emphasis on Jewish nationalism or exclusivism also shifts the argument away from what the author of Hebrews was trying to say. The author of Hebrews points out that Jewish Christians erred, not by
grounded upon God’s (unmerited but not unconditional) grace; it is not grounded upon man’s (merited) works. If salvation were by man’s works, then it could no longer be by God’s grace. Why? It would be a “debt” that God owes the worker, not grace (Romans 4:4). This whole point and polemic (for grace to be grace, it cannot be of works) is lost with Dunn’s limited view of works and emphasis on Jewish exclusivism.

Read Paul again: “But if it is by grace, it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace” (Romans 11:6). This particular dichotomy between grace and works presented by Paul is real; it is not a false dichotomy. This whole point and polemic (for grace to be grace, it cannot be of works) is lost with Dunn’s limited view of works and emphasis on Jewish exclusivism.

In a similar way, Paul sets “the righteousness which is of faith” (Romans 9:30) in opposition to “a law of righteousness” (Romans 9:31). The first one (“the righteousness which is of faith”), is a righteousness that comes by trusting God’s word and obeying God’s word (whether the Law or the gospel) for forgiveness (Romans 1:17; 3:22; 4:11,13; 10:6; Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 11:7). This is a “righteousness apart from works” (Romans 4:5). The second one (“a law of righteousness”) is a righteousness that comes by attempting to keep the law, perfectly or otherwise (Romans 10:5; Galatians 2:21; 3:21; Philippians 3:6,9). This is “works done in righteousness” (Titus 3:5). The first one focuses on a faith-righteousness approach and leads to “giving glory to God” (Romans 4:20). The second one focuses on a works-righteousness approach and leads to boasting (glorying) in self (Romans 3:27; 4:2; 1 Corinthians 1:29; Ephesians 2:9).

15) When Paul critiques “works of the law,” it is not a singular or one-dimensional entity that he is arguing against (the NPP’s Jewish exclusivism). He is arguing against a) Jews holding to their national identity, but by holding to a now defunct priesthood and Law system (Hebrews 5-10). For a discussion of what some Jewish Christians (Judaizers) bound on Gentile Christians, see the article by D.A. Hagner on “Jewish Christianity.”

159 In Galatians 3:12, Paul’s dichotomy is the same, but he words it a little differently: “the law is not of faith.” Paul’s law-faith dichotomy is found in Romans 4:13-14; Galatians 3:11-12; and Philippians 3:9. Paul’s works-faith dichotomy is found in Romans 3:27-28; 9:32; and Galatians 2:16; 3:2, 5.

160 No doubt, Calvinists present a false dichotomy between grace and works when they try to eliminate all works from their “grace only” theology. However, the grace-works dichotomy of Paul in Romans 11:6 and other passages is real. It belongs to Paul, not the Calvinist. We do not need to remove a real dichotomy between grace and works found in Romans 11:6 (or law and faith in Gal. 3:12) in order to answer the Calvinist. Yes, Calvinists misread the New Testament scriptures concerning grace and works or faith and works in order to eliminate all works (doing). However, we do not misread the same passages when we uphold the proper dichotomy that Paul was presenting and when we uphold the proper use of certain works (doing) in God’s plan of salvation. The Calvinist’s misuse of scripture should not sway us from a proper exegesis of scripture.

161 The removal of the grace/works or faith/works dichotomy in the NPP schema may be the very reason why some among us find the NPP so attractive. They have struggled in the past to explain Paul’s dichotomy to the Calvinist’s satisfaction. They find that the NPP in turn helps them because it removes the dichotomy altogether.

who are keeping “works of the law” within the Law of Moses that is now defunct (Romans 7:1-6; Galatians 3:15-25; 4:21-31);\(^{163}\) b) Jews who are keeping “works of the law,” but are not keeping all of the Law (Galatians 3:10; 5:2-3; 6:13); c) Jews who are keeping “works of the law,” but who also transgress other parts of the Law (Romans 2:12, 23, 25, 27); d) Jews who are keeping “works of the law” and boasting in them (Romans 3:27; 4:2); e) Jews who are keeping “works of the law” and binding those works on Gentiles (Romans 3:29; Galatians 2:16); and f) Jews who are keeping “works of the law” to attain a law-keeping righteous status before God (Romans 9:31-32; 10:5; Galatians 3:11-12).

16) Finally, consider this question: Does Sanders’ picture of Judaism in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* tell us in an affirmative way what the “works of the law” were that Paul was opposing? I know that Sanders set out to show what Judaism was not (it was not legalism), but did Sanders show us what “works of the law” (as per Romans and Galatians) was in fact? Sanders’ picture of Judaism does not give us an affirmative as to the meaning of “works of the law.”\(^{164}\) That is one reason why Dunn said that Sanders’ view was only a little better than the Old Lutheran perspective (see above).

So, my point is this: Why appeal to Sanders’ Judaism as the corrective to the “old perspective” on Paul when that picture did not even give us the proper meaning of “works of the law”? Sanders tells us what Judaism is not, but he does not tell us what “works of law” is. Dunn had to come along and tell us what “works of the law” means. Thus, Sanders’ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* does not tell us what “works of the law” means, Dunn has to tell us. Therefore, we are not going back to the 1\(^{st}\) century after all to get the meaning of “works of the law” when we appeal to *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. We are going back to around 1982 and the musings of Dunn!

“For justification by faith.” What does Paul mean by the phrase “justified by faith” (δικαιωθὸς ἐκ πίστεως)?\(^{165}\) Advocates of the NPP like Dunn and Wright would have us believe that the primary meaning of “justification by faith” deals with God’s acknowledgement that both Jews and Gentiles are in the covenant. According to them, justification does not refer to how guilty sinners can find favor and be right with God, but about who belongs in God’s covenant. Thus, justification is not primarily about soteriology (forgiveness of sins and how one is saved), but about ecclesiology (who belongs in the covenant).\(^{166}\) Dunn writes:

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\(^{164}\) I am aware that Sanders stated a belief about “works of the law” that was similar to Stendahl (and Dunn), but that was not until his later work *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (1983) which was published about one year after Dunn’s lecture in 1982.

\(^{165}\) The phrase “justified by faith” (δικαιωθὸς ἐκ πίστεως) is found five times in Paul’s letters (Romans 3:28; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; 3:11, 24).

\(^{166}\) Men like Dunn and Wright take their cue on this point from Krister Stendahl who wrote about the place of the Gentiles in the church and plan of God and its affect on Paul’s interpretation of the Law (see Stendahl’s *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 84).
This understanding of ‘being justified’ is thus, evidently, something Jewish, something which belongs to Jews ‘by nature’, something which distinguishes them from ‘Gentile sinners.’ But this is covenant language, the language of those conscious that they have been chosen as a people by God, and separated from the surrounding nations...Paul therefore prefaces his first mention of ‘being justified’ with a deliberate appeal to the standard Jewish belief, shared also by his fellow Jewish Christians, that the Jews as a race are God’s covenant people...God’s justification is God’s recognition of Israel as his people, his verdict in favour of Israel on grounds of his covenant with Israel...In talking of ‘being justified’ here Paul is not thinking of a distinctively initiatory act of God. God’s justification is not his act in first making his covenant with Israel, or in initially accepting someone into the covenant people. God’s justification is rather God’s acknowledgement that someone is in the covenant... 

N.T. Wright puts it this way:

There, ‘justification by works’ has nothing to do with individual Jews attempting a kind of proto-Pelegian pulling themselves up by their moral bootstraps, and everything to do with definition of the true Israel...Justification in this setting, then, is not a matter of how someone enters the community of the true people of God, but of how you tell who belongs to that community...

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

Mark M. Mattison, following Dunn and Wright, removes justification from the realm of salvation and places it into the realm of the church:

The unity of the church at that time was threatened by ethnic and social conflict. The issues then at hand — circumcision, holy days, meat sacrificed to pagan idols — are no longer issues in the church. It must be asked, then, whether comparable issues currently exist. Our answer must be in the affirmative. We no longer fight over circumcision but we do fight over worship styles and a host of other issues. Even today Christianity is confused with culture and many are unable to distinguish between the substantial and the supplemental. Paul speaks to all of this by affirming


that all cultural and ethnic groups stand before God on an equal footing and that we are not justified on the basis of peripheral issues. In this light, the Pauline doctrine of justification has less to do with the individual quest for righteousness and more to do with the sociological makeup of the community of faith.  

Here, as with other biblical phrases, NPP advocates reduce a biblical word or phrase unnecessarily. They err in two ways: their basic definition of the word “justification” does not include the idea of an individual being right with God, only corporate identity; and, 2) their application of the word “justification” does not include past or present right-standing, only the possibility of a future right-standing in the judgment day. N.T. Wright overstates the case when he writes: “every time Paul discusses justification he seems simultaneously to be talking about Gentile inclusion” (Paul: Fresh Perspective, London: SPCK, 2005). Really?

The biblical words justify, justified (from Gr. verb dikaioo), justification (from the Gr. noun dikaiosis), and “just” (from the Gr. adjective dikaios) are all used of man’s salvation (to pronounce as righteous, or to be right). These words have reference to one’s initial “getting in” (to use Sanders’ words) to God’s covenant (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 4:5; 5:1, 9, 16; 6:7; 8:30; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:7) as well as one’s “staying in” (to use Sanders’ words) in that covenant all the way until the judgment day (Luke 18:14; James 2:21, 24-25; Revelation 22:11).

We learn from God’s word that some people will attempt to be “justified” on their own terms (Luke 10:29; 16:15), while others will be “justified” rightly on God’s terms (Luke 7:29; Romans 8:30,33). God, as the “justifier” of mankind (Romans 3:26), has his own terms of justification which include belief or faith (Acts 13:39; Romans 3:26, 28; 4:5; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; 3:8, 24), grace (Romans 3:24; Titus 3:7), the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 4:25), the blood of Jesus on the cross (Romans 5:9, 18), and being in Christ.

170 Terence L. Donaldson speaks of the “restricted role of justification” and its “limited place” in Paul’s theological argumentation; see “The Juridical, the Participatory and the ‘New Perspective’”, 233.
171 The family of Greek words in the NT with the dik prefix carry with them a meaning of “being right” (in a forensic or judicial sense) that NPP advocates like N.T. Wright are not willing to consider seriously.
172 For a comprehensive understanding of both the definition of justification and the scope of justification, see Peter Stuhlmacher, Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification.
174 The verb dikaioo is found 29 times in the Greek Old Testament with the meaning “to pronounce right, to be right”: Genesis 38:26; 44:16; Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 25:1; 2 Samuel 15:4; 1 Kings 8:32; 2 Chronicles 6:23; Est. 10:12; Psalm 50:6; 72:13; 81:3; 142:2; Job 33:32; Isaiah 1:17; 5:23; 42:21; 43:9, 26; 45:25; 50:8; 53:11; Jeremiah 3:11; Ezekiel 16:51, 52 (2x); 21:18; 44:24; Micah 6:11; 7:9.
175 Read Acts 13:38-39 and note that justification in Christ is tied in directly with remission (forgiveness) of sins in Christ.
176 See the article on “Justification” by A.E. McGrath. In The Saving Righteousness of God, Michael F. Bird demonstrates how the results and ramifications of man’s justification are both vertical (a right relationship with God) and horizontal (a right relationship between Jew and Gentile) in nature; both soteriological and ecclesiological.
His terms of justification do not include the perfect doing of law (Romans 2:13), the perfect working of law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:11, 21; 5:4), or the works of man (Romans 4:2).

A few examples from Paul will show that the term “justification” does not refer simply to who belongs in the covenant (as per Dunn and Wright). Consider Romans 2:13. Here, one is “just before God” and it is on the basis of being “doers of the law.” Paul is talking about one who is declared right or righteous “before God” (see also Galatians 3:11). Consider Romans 3:20. Paul writes, “justified in his sight.” Clearly, the verb dikaioo refers to being declared right before God and not simply who belongs in the covenant. Consider Romans 5:1. Paul writes, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” When one is “justified by faith” he has “peace with God” because he has been acquitted of his sin (a conclusion to the whole argument of Paul from 1:18 to 4:25).

A study of Paul’s use of the verb dikaioo (to justify) shows that Paul had in mind a forensic meaning, “to pronounce as righteous, or to be right” (see also Romans 3:4, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5; 5:9; 6:7; 8:30, 33; 1 Corinthians 4:4; 6:11; Galatians 2:16, 17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4; 1 Timothy 3:16; and Titus 3:7).

Additionally, to reduce “justification” down to simply 1st century social issues or who belongs in the covenant misses Paul’s deeper point in Romans 1-6. Paul’s point here is not simply that God wants both Jews and Gentiles saved. Paul’s point is how a guilty and condemned sinner (either Jew or Gentile) can escape the wrath of God (1:18; 2:5) and be forgiven and saved (justified) through faith in Jesus Christ. The lost sinner, Jew or Gentile, is not justified by works of law (3:20-28). The lost sinner is “justified by faith” (3:27-28; 5:1) because he has been “justified by his blood” (5:9).

But, when does this justification “by faith” and “by his blood” take place? It takes place initially when the lost sinner dies to sin and is baptized into Christ’s death (6:3-6). Paul writes: “for he that hath died is justified from sin” (6:7, emphasis mine). The starting point for Paul in Romans begins with the righteousness of God “revealed” (1:17) and the wrath of God “revealed” (1:18) toward all sinful mankind. Paul’s gospel of justification

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Paul writes: “but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

For a different interpretation of Romans viewed through the lens of a post-holocaust, new perspective, see Calvin L. Porter’s article titled “A Paradigm for Reading Romans: Dialogue Between Christians and Jews.” For a new perspective approach to Romans, see James D. G. Dunn’s commentary on Romans in the Word Biblical Commentary series.
is tied to the sin problem of mankind (3:10, 23), not to some alleged Jew-Gentile social/ethnic controversy over “Jewish badges of identity.”

“Righteousness of God.” What does Paul mean by the phrase “righteousness of God” (θεοῦ δικαιοσύνης ὑπὸ δικαιοσύνης θεοῦ)? N.T. Wright, for example, would have us believe that the primary meaning of this phrase refers to the character of God that is his trustworthiness and faithfulness. It refers to his covenantal faithfulness in action toward Israel in saving them, but it does not refer to his righteous justice given to anyone. Clearly, God is righteous himself and he demonstrates his righteousness in his own faithfulness (Romans 3:3, 5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 2 Corinthians 9:9). But the “righteousness of God” is also a reference to God’s righteous plan found in the gospel to make mankind right through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:17; 4:3-22; 5:17, 21; 6:13-20; 8:10; 9:30; 10:3-4, 6, 10; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 3:9; 5:21; Ephesians 4:24; Philippians 3:9; James 1:20; 2 Peter 1:1; 2:21).

As for the righteousness of an individual, N.T. Wright re-defines that as well to fit it within his NPP paradigm. For example, according to Wright, Paul is not giving up self-righteousness (“a righteousness of my own”) in Philippians 3:9; he is giving up “the status of orthodox Jewish covenant membership.” Like other biblical phrases, this phrase is reduced unnecessarily to fit the narrow meaning and paradigm of NPP advocates.

“Gospel of God.” What does Paul mean by the “gospel of God” (εὐαγγέλιον θεου)? N.T. Wright has much to say about the “gospel of God” from a NPP approach. Wright

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180 See also Paul’s words to the Jews in Acts 13:38-39.
181 NPP advocates accuse the “Old Perspective” approach of “reading back” into Paul the controversies of Luther. Who is really “reading back” into Paul? When I argue that Paul is addressing a sin problem in Romans 1-6 (a background clearly established by the text) and Dunn argues that Paul is addressing “Jewish badges of identity”, who indeed is “reading back” into Paul? NPP advocates are guilty of doing the very thing they accuse of others of doing. They accuse the “Old Perspective” of “reading back” Luther into Paul, while they themselves are “reading back” Sanders, Dunn, and Wright into Paul. We certainly do not need to “read back” anyone or anything into Paul. We need to “read forward” from Romans 1:1 to Romans 3:38 (and beyond) to find out what Paul means by “justification by faith”. Let us not forget that the “gospel of God” – God’s plan of salvation to all sinful mankind (1:16-17) – is the very first thing that Paul mentions in the book (1:1).
182 The phrase “righteousness of God” (θεοῦ δικαιοσύνης ὑπὸ δικαιοσύνης θεοῦ) is found seven times in Paul’s letters (Romans 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22; 10:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; James 1:20).
183 What Saint Paul Really Said, 96, 103. Wright discusses on pages 98-103 how that God’s righteousness is not imputed to anyone. We would agree at this point with N.T. Wright that God’s righteousness is not imputed to anyone via the perfect life of Christ (the Calvinist’s “imputed righteousness of Christ”). However, this does not change the point mentioned above that the “righteousness of God” can refer to God’s righteous plan in the gospel to make mankind righteous through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:17; 10:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 4:24; Philippians 3:9; 2 Peter 1:1).
184 See the article by K.L. Onesti and M.T. Brauch on the “Righteousness of God” and the article by C.C. Newman on “Righteousness.” Newman understands Paul to be in direct contrast to Sanders’ righteousness found in “covenantal nomism” (“Righteousness,” 1055-1056).
185 What Saint Paul Really Said, 124.
186 The phrase “gospel of God” (εὐαγγέλιον θεου) is found eight times in the New Testament; once in Mark (1:14), once in 1 Peter (4:17), and the rest in Paul’s letters (Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8, 9).
believes that the primary meaning of “gospel” is more about the lordship of Jesus Christ, and not so much a message about how a person can be saved or an order of salvation (ordo salutis). As with the other biblical phrases above, Wright’s “gospel of God” has been reduced to a primary point.

However, the good news of Paul’s “gospel” is not limited primarily to a message about the lordship of Jesus Christ. It includes a message about remission of sins through baptism (Mk. 16:15-16). For example, Philip preached the “gospel” to the Samaritans and to the Eunuch (Acts 8:4-13, 26-40), Peter preached the “gospel” to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:34-48; 15:7), and Paul preached the “gospel” in Macedonia (Acts 16:9-34). In all three cases, the “gospel” was a message about Jesus’ lordship and the need for baptism.

“Faith in Christ.” What does Paul mean by “faith in Jesus Christ” (πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ or πίστεως Χριστοῦ)? Is this phrase to be taken as an objective genitive; i.e., Christ is the object of one’s faith – the faith of the believer (faith in Christ)? Or, is this phrase to be taken as a subjective genitive; i.e., Christ is the subject of faith – the faithfulness or fidelity of Christ (faith of Christ)? Some NPP advocates would say that the primary meaning of this phrase is the “faith of Christ” or Christ’s own faithfulness. This primary meaning would keep the focus away from a faith-works dichotomy that many NPP advocates do not want to be present in Paul’s writings.

However, there are passages that clearly speak of Christ’s own faithfulness to God’s plan of justification (John 17:4) and there are passages that speak of the necessity for one to have faith “in” Christ Jesus in order to be justified (Acts 20:21; 24:24; 26:18; Romans 3:26). When “faith” and “Christ” are found together in Paul’s writings there is no primary focus on one or the other meaning that is then used in all other places. All “faith-Christ” passages must be considered and both noun and verb uses for “faith” must be considered.

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187 *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 40, 61, 133. N.T. Wright sets forth his idea about the gospel this way: “It is not, then, a system of how people get saved. The announcement of the gospel results in people being saved…” (p. 45). However, Paul writes that the gospel is to be “obeyed” (Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8) and Peter does the same (1 Pet. 4:17).

188 The phrase πίστεως Χριστοῦ in various forms is found in the following passages: Acts 24:24; Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16; 3:22, 26; Philippians 3:9; Colossians 2:5; and 1 Timothy 1:14.

189 See the ERV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NAB, NASV, NKJV, NIV, NRSV, ESV, etc.

190 See the KJV.

191 For the use of the noun pistis with reference to Christ see: Acts 3:16; 20:21; 24:24; 26:18; Romans 3:22, 26; 5:1-2; Galatians 2:16, 20; 3:22, 26; Ephesians 1:15; 3:12; Philippians 3:9; Colossians 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:13; 2 Timothy 1:13; 3:15; Hebrews 12:2; James 2:1; and Revelation 14:12.

192 For the use of the verb pistuo (believe) with reference to Christ see: Acts 9:42; 10:43; 11:17, 21; 14:23; 16:31; 18:8; 19:4; 22:19; Romans 9:33; 10:9-11; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 1:13; Philippians 1:29; 1 Timothy 1:16; 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 Peter 2:6-7; and 1 John 3:23; 5:1-13 (see also the many verses in the gospels, especially the gospel of John).

193 Francis Watson argues convincingly that the majority of “faith-Christ” passages refer to a person’s faith in Christ. He writes: “It is more plausible to suppose that the ten or so πίστεως passages that lack a reference to Christ should determine the sense of the two passages that include one” (*Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 241). See the bibliography for the scholars who argue for the subjective genitive (D.A. Campbell, G. Herbert, G. Howard), those who are argue for the objective genitive (A.J. Hultegren, R.B. Matlock, C.F.D.
Theological Concerns over NPP Agendas

Is the outcome or overall theological agenda of the NPP scriptural? A number of theological concerns are made by opponents of the NPP. Many of these concerns have to do with the NPP’s apparent rejection of “justification by grace alone through faith alone” – a major tenet of the Protestant Reformation shaped by John Calvin. Thus, many Reformed Calvinists are opposed to the NPP because it undermines their Calvinism. However, not being a Calvinist myself or wishing to defend Calvinism in any way, my concerns over the NPP lie elsewhere.

First, there is the concern over the NPP charge of anti-Semitism. Some NPP advocates like John Gager (in Reinventing Paul) hope to vindicate even Paul himself from the charge of anti-Semitism. Like Stendahl before him, Gager presents a Paul who does not say anything negative about Jews. Notice the self-contrived “law” that Gager writes about:

We can reformulate this insight as a law: Any statement that begins with the words, ‘How could a Jew like Paul say X, Y, Z about the law,’ must be regarded as misguided. In all likelihood Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is not speaking about the law as it relates to Israel but only about the law and Gentile members of the Jesus movement … when Paul appears to be saying something … that is unthinkable from a Jewish perspective, it is probably true that he is not talking about Jews at all” 

When Paul prayed for his fellow Israelites (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1-2), and when he used harsh words (Romans 2:4-10; 2:17ff; Philippians 3:1-3; Galatians 5:12) and harsh actions (Galatians 2:5) against them, he was not engaged in anti-Semitism (racism). He was opposing false religion. Some NPP advocates apparently do not know the difference between racism and opposing false religion. In fact, some of them do not want Judaism (1st century or modern) opposed at all.

As a result, NPP advocates weaken and water down the actions and words of the Jewish false teachers and the Jewish false religion that John the Baptist, Jesus, Stephen, and Paul

Moule), and those who do not opt for one interpretation against the other (B. Dodd, G.M Taylor, S.K. Williams).

194 Men like Dunn and Wright maintain their belief in Reformed doctrines. However, many Reformed theologians today, like John Piper and Cornelis P. Venema, are militant and adamant in their attack of the NPP because they see it as undermining Reformed theology. They view the NPP as a form of proto-Pelagianism because of its emphasis on obedience in staying in God’s covenant. They are doing all they can to defend their Calvinist position of “justification by grace alone through faith alone” as well as defend their belief in the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer. See Piper’s The Future of Justification and By Faith Alone edited by Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters. See also R.H. Gundry’s article “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul” (Biblica 66, 1985, pp. 1-38).

195 The charge by some scholars of anti-Semitism does not simply go back to Luther. Paul and other New Testament Christians are also charged with anti-Semitism; see the section on “Christian Anti-Semitism” in Zetterholm’s work (pp. 47-58).

196 Reinventing Paul, 44, 58.
so strongly confronted and condemned. J.A. Weatherly reminds us of the following important point: “Condemnation of some Jews on religious grounds is fundamentally different from prejudice against all Jews on racial grounds.”

Douglas Moo offers this important observation as well:

…the laudable efforts of Jewish and Christian scholars to come to a better understanding of each other should not be made at the sacrifice of exegetical integrity on either side…While I am convinced that no reasonable definition of ‘anti-Semitic’ can be appropriately applied to Paul, efforts to rescue him from such a charge by removing from his writings sentiments that appear to be there are misguided and ultimately self-destructive.

Second, there is the concern of evangelical ecumenism (inclusivism) promoted by the NPP. The NPP is clearly an ecumenical movement. Greater ecumenism between Protestants and Catholics, greater ecumenism within Protestant Churches, and greater ecumenism between “Christians” and Jews is one agenda of the NPP. It is thought by NPP advocates that all “believers” today can set aside their denominational “badges” that separate themselves (modern-day “works of the law”) and be one “Christian” Church based upon the NPP proper understanding of justification by faith in Christ. Dunn, for example, used the following illustration when he was discussing his view of the “works of the law”:

If it helps, some may like to compare the role of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) in Christianity today. These have very much the same fundamental role in Christian self-understanding as circumcision, table regulation and sabbath had in the Jewish self-understanding of Paul’s day. Even though we acknowledge the Quakers and the Salvation Army as Christian bodies, even so any attempt to define the boundary markers which identify and distinguish Christians as Christians will almost certainly give a primary place to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. If an unbaptized Christian is for most of us a contradiction in terms, even more so was a

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197 William S. Campbell charges Christian scholars since the days of F.C. Baur with negating Judaism. He claims that this practice was due to Christian “immaturity or insecurity or both.” According to Campbell, these scholars had a tendency to “ghettoize Jews geographically and to demonize them theologically but never to really associate with them positively” (Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity, 32-33).


199 “Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years,” 306.

200 The NT scholars of a more liberal persuasion (non-evangelical) are using the NPP to reach out to modern-day Jews in hopes of reconciling their long-standing differences between Christians and Jews. Some of these scholars are saying that the modern-day Jew is saved without faith in Jesus Christ. This is the position of such scholars like John G. Gager. He does not believe that Paul rejected Judaism or repudiated the Law of Moses, but that Paul considered Jews obligated to keep the Law. He believes that Paul’s enemies were “competing apostles” within the Jesus-movement, not Jews. He does not believe that Paul expected Jews to find their salvation through Jesus Christ; see Reinventing Paul, 10. Gager writes: “I advocate a new reading of Paul not simply as one possible alternative, as one contender alongside others, but as the only historically defensible one” (Reinventing Paul, 18).
Jew who did not practice the works of the law, circumcision, table regulations and sabbath.\textsuperscript{201}

N.T. Wright put it this way:

Paul's doctrine of justification by faith impels the churches, in their current fragmented state, into the ecumenical task. It cannot be right that the very doctrine which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong at the same table (Galatians 2) should be used as a way of saying that some, who define the doctrine of justification differently, belong at a different table. The doctrine of justification, in other words, is not merely a doctrine in which Catholic and Protestant might just be able to agree on, as a result of hard ecumenical endeavor. It is itself the ecumenical doctrine, the doctrine that rebukes all our petty and often culture-bound church groupings, and which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong together in the one family…The doctrine of justification is in fact the great \textit{ecumenical} doctrine.\textsuperscript{202}

Yinger also lists ecumenism as a positive effect of the NPP:

As a last benefit of the NPP to be mentioned, reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants over justification might just be possible. Since the Lutheran Reformation’s understanding of Paul and justification was one of the major elements leading to the split with Rome, the NPP’s re-evaluation of Paul and justification might show the two sides not quite so far apart on this matter as Luther thought.\textsuperscript{203}

Brenda B. Colijn makes use of the NPP in her chapter on “Justification by Faith (fullness).” As she closes her chapter, you can see in her remarks how she believes the NPP to be an advantage in facilitating ecumenism:

As Western society becomes more postmodern and pluralistic, Christians will need to consider carefully how they can work together for the sake of the kingdom. The covenantal context of the New Perspective may provide a framework for greater understanding between Catholics and Protestants. It holds together the Protestant emphasis on grace and the Catholic concern for the moral life. Because the New Perspective does not divorce justification from sanctification, the New Perspective may help the church maintain its commitments to both evangelism and social concern.

Paul’s vision is also essential for a modern church that is becoming increasingly multicultural. Like the 1\textsuperscript{st} century Jewish believers, European and American

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{201} The New Perspective on Paul, 110-111. The following items that Dunn includes as “boundary markers” to be set aside have been gathered from his writings and documented by Gerhard H. Visscher: baptism, the Lord’s supper, abortion, women priests, speaking in tongues, scriptural inerrancy, and papal infallibility. See “New Views Regarding Legalism and Exclusivism in Judaism: Is There a Need to Reinterpret Paul?” Koinonia: A Periodical of the Ministers of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Volume 18.2 Fall 1999: 15-42.
  \item \textsuperscript{202} What Saint Paul Really Said, 158.
  \item \textsuperscript{203} The New Perspective on Paul, 92-93.
\end{itemize}
Christians may need to be challenged by Paul’s description of an ever-faithful God who keeps his promises in creative and surprising ways. What badges of covenant membership might God want us to give up so that he can welcome new people into his family? As the center of gravity for the church moves from Europe and America to the Two-Thirds World, can we welcome the moving of God’s Spirit and willingly yield our privileged position? It will require humility for those who have been teachers to become learners again. But if we truly understand God’s grace toward us, we can do no less.

Third, there is the concern of the NPP social agenda which is similar to the point just mentioned. NPP advocates believe that there is an “inherent social dimension” to the doctrine of justification. The NPP doctrine of justification then is about promoting diversity, inclusiveness, and social justice for all who are in the group of “believers” (both “Christians” and Jews). While true unity-in-diversity has its place in the Lord’s church (Ephesians 2:11-21), the social agenda (or social gospel) of the NPP promotes a religious “unity” within a group that is, in fact, diverse in doctrine and practice. The NPP is simply a new argument in a long history of evangelical attempts at unity-in-diversity.

Fourth, there is the concern of removing the importance of the individual in the NPP scheme of things. The NPP is about focusing on the group (Jews and Gentiles), not on individuals (sinners in need of saving). The NPP “gospel” (following the approach of Stendahl) is not so much about the individual’s salvation from sin (guilt, forgiveness, etc.), as it is about something more relevant and more tangible to the group as a whole. Many NPP advocates focus so much on the sociological group aspects of Jews and Gentiles that the place of an individual coming to Christ is de-emphasized.

The problem with this approach is once again, reductionism; namely, reducing or limiting Paul’s writings to practical and sociological matters between the group of Jews and Gentiles. However, we must remember that the very first question asked by the audience on the day of Pentecost was a question involving the individual, not a question involving the group of Jews and Gentiles. The question was: “Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:47). This question was followed later in Acts with: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Yes, the Lord’s church is the corporate body or group of all the saved, but the individual must first decide if he wants to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24-26) before he can enter into this group.

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205 Dunn writes often of the “social function of the law.” See *The New Perspective on Paul*, 16.
206 Dunn believes that his NPP will help to combat “the nationalism and racialism which has so distorted and diminished Christianity past and present” (*The New Perspective on Paul*, 17).
207 Gary W. Burnett argues convincingly that Paul was concerned about the effects of the gospel on the individual, not just the group (Jewish and Gentiles). See his work, *Paul & the Salvation of the Individual*.
208 This NPP shift away from the individual’s concern for sin to the group’s concern for identity can be found in the remarks of Stephen W. Need: “Luther’s concern was with the personal salvation and justification of the individual and was opposed to the legalistic dimension of medieval Catholicism. By contrast, the ‘new look’ shows that Paul was concerned more with the practicalities of Jewish and Gentile Christians living together in his communities” (*Paul Today*, 99).
Louis DeBoer, who correctly describes the NPP controversy as an “intramural dispute between Evangelical Christians,” offers a fitting conclusion to these four concerns:

Now there is a common thread to all these concerns. There is uniformity to this agenda. These are all liberal concerns. Christians are concerned about truth. Christians are concerned about sin and the salvation of their fellow men, about their eternal standing before a just and a holy God. Liberals have other concerns. They do not believe in the gospel. They see no need for it because they do not believe in man’s desperate condition before God. Their concerns, like the Sadducees of old, are all related to this present world. The New Perspective is the latest form of theological liberalism.

New Perspective: An Appraisal

What can be said for and against the NPP? What, if anything, may Bible students take away from this new understanding of Paul that will help them to properly exegete the epistles of Paul?

First, the NPP calls the Bible student back to reading Paul through 1st century lenses and not through the lens of the Protestant reformers. We must always come to the Bible text with eyes wide open to its historical background and its original context. We must always let Paul speak to us as a 1st century, inspired apostle who is addressing the 1st century issue of salvation for Jews and Gentiles. We must never “read back” (a popular NPP phrase) into Paul’s words. It is agreed that Paul was not confronting Catholicism or Calvinism in his letters. Paul’s own words, not Luther, Calvin, or a NPP view of Paul, is what we want to come to know and understand. Of course, we have always tried to read Paul through 1st century lenses, but if the NPP can remind us once again to do this, that is fine.

Second, the NPP reminds us that the covenant between God and man (old or new) is an important relationship and both divine (grace) and human (faith) agencies are at work in maintaining that covenant. Clearly, grace and faith go together hand-in-hand in God’s plan to save mankind. Sanders has shown us that the principles of grace and faith were indeed alive and well in Judaism. No doubt, it was a joy and delight for many Jews in the

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209 We really have no business being a part of this intramural dispute among evangelicals.
211 It would be good to ask at this point: Is the NPP calling us back to look at the New Testament through 1st century lenses or through the lens of Sanders’ Judaism? If we are truly looking at the New Testament as one living in the New Testament period, then fine. But if we are looking at things through the eyes of Sanders, then we have simply exchanged one man-made lens (Luther) for another (Sanders).
212 The owners of the website monergism.com have posted many articles against the NPP because they do not like the idea of both God and man working together (synergism) to maintain a covenant relationship. Even Sanders has been charged with promoting synergism (Covenantal Nomism Revisited, 48-52). Barry D. Smith argues that Second-Temple Judaism practiced a synergistic soteriology whereas Paul taught a non-synergistic soteriology; see What Must I Do to Be Saved? Paul Parts Company with His Jewish Heritage.
1st century to worship God and obey his law. Much of what Sanders writes about God’s grace and Israel’s faithful works of obedience is scriptural and right on point.\footnote{Sanders, in \textit{Paul and Palestinian Judaism}, pointed out that Second Temple Judaism was a religion of both grace and obedience, but Sanders focused his attention on grace. In contrast, A. Andrew Das attempts to maintain a proper balance between grace and obedience in his article “Paul and Works of Obedience in Second Temple Judaism.”}

There is a clear \textit{continuity} of grace and faith in God’s plan of salvation between the OT and the NT. God saves mankind by his own grace through an obedient (work of) faith \textit{all throughout the Bible}, from the time of Noah (Genesis 6:8, 22), to the time of Israel (Exodus 19:4-6; 20:2-27; Deut. 7:6-11), and down to the NT church (Ephesians 2:8-9). This we have always taught. NPP advocates also rightly point out the importance of being judged in the last day according to our works.\footnote{Even Sanders recognizes this point; see \textit{Paul and Palestinian Judaism}, 515-518.} Of course, we have always said this as well in reference to such passages as 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Philippians 2:12, but if the NPP can reaffirm this Bible truth, that is fine (see more below under my “New Testament” perspective).

Not only is there a continuity of grace and faith from the Old Testament to the New Testament, but there is also a \textit{balance} between the two. God’s unmerited (but not unconditional) grace and man’s obedient faith are always found in balance. Salvation is never presented in scripture where one (grace) is present without the other (obedient faith). Paul writes, “For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace” (Romans 4:16), “we have had our access by faith into this grace” (Romans 5:2), “for by grace have ye been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8), and again, “the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:14).

There is a balance here between grace and faith that must be maintained. Salvation is not found \textit{primarily} in God’s grace, nor is it found \textit{primarily} in man’s faith. However, when Sanders presents his description of “covenantal nomism” as “getting in (election) and staying in (obedience),”\footnote{\textit{Paul and Palestinian Judaism}, 424.} some NPP advocates have come away from that description imbalanced and focused on the “staying in” of obedience. To them, salvation today is based upon a “new testament” covenantal-nomism and it is \textit{more} about law-keeping and \textit{less} about grace (even though they give lip-service to grace). To them, we are saved by law-keeping, period.

In this case, an imbalance toward New Testament works and law has occurred and the NPP definition of “works of the law” allows them to continue their focus on modern-day law-keeping. A word of warning is in order here for all who would focus \textit{primarily} on grace or focus \textit{primarily} on works. Numerous erroneous beliefs and practices are on record among God’s people in the past which can be traced to a misunderstanding and undue emphasis on grace or works (law).\footnote{For examples of an undue emphasis on grace among members of churches of Christ, see my paper presented at the 2012 ABS titled “The Impact of Calvinism on Churches of Christ.”}
Third, the NPP reminds us that the New Testament church is for both Jews and Gentiles\(^217\) and Paul had a special mission to the Gentiles.\(^218\) Of course, we have always taught this in reference to such passages as Ephesians 2:11-22, but if the NPP can reaffirm this Bible truth also, that is fine. The NPP also brings attention to the important social and ethnic issues (challenges) that existed between Jews and Gentiles in the 1\(^{st}\) century church. Of course, we have always been aware of this because of such passages as Romans 14:1 – 15:13, 1 Corinthians 8:1 – 10:33, Ephesians 2:11-22, and Colossians 2:18-23.\(^219\)

The NPP reminds us that there was a critical socio-religious issue between Jews and Gentiles involving circumcision and some of what Paul has to say in his epistles is geared toward addressing this issue (Romans 3:29; 9:24; Galatians 2:11-15). There is no question that some (Christian) Jews required Gentiles to adopt “works” of the Old Law in order to be saved (Acts 15:1-5; 1 Corinthians 7:18; etc.). There is no question that Paul addresses this particular Jew-Gentile controversy with the gospel of “justification” (Galatians 2:16; etc). However, the new definitions of “works” and “justification” offered today by the NPP was not brought to light by going back and examining afresh Paul’s epistles or particular NT words. The new definitions of “works” and “justification” were introduced in the 1960’s by men like Stendahl. It was the writings of Stendahl, Sanders, Dunn, and Wright which have given us the NPP, not a greater appreciation for and understanding of the Jew-Gentile controversy.

Fourth, the NPP reminds us that Christianity has a close connection with Judaism in that the first Christians were Jews. There is a Jewish context that is the antecedent to Christianity that must be understood. Of course we have always taught this in reference to such passages as Acts 3:26, 13:46, and Romans 1:16. And the NPP reminds us that there is some continuity between Christianity and Judaism as well as some discontinuity between the two.\(^220\) This continuity-discontinuity is found in Paul himself with reference to the Law (compare Romans 7:6 with 13:8).\(^221\) If the NPP can remind us of this Bible truth, that is fine (see more below under my “New Testament” perspective).

\(^{217}\) This appears to be the positive value of the NPP found by Steve Wolfgang in his lecture. He writes: “The ‘NPP’ does, however, have the advantage of focusing on issues which sound very much like what is actually reported and discussed in texts such as Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 3:7-8; John 8:31-58; Acts 9:15; 10:15, 35; 11:3,15; 22:21-22; Romans 2:17-25; 3:29-31; Galatians 3:13,15-29; 4:21-31; Romans 9:30ff; and ‘much more’” (Saved by His Life, 213).

\(^{218}\) See the article by W.P. Bowers on “Mission,” the article by D.R. de Lacey on “Gentiles,” and the article by S. McKnight on “Gentiles, Gentile Mission.”

\(^{219}\) I have personally been aware of these types of social/ethnic issues all my life. My upbringing in local churches with Hispanic members living in a predominately white culture reminds me daily of the importance of what Paul wrote in these passages. There is a constant need for patience, sacrifice, and a “give-and-take” attitude between brethren of mixed race and culture involving matters of personal scruple.

\(^{220}\) See the article by B. Crossfeld on “Torah” and the article by C.A. Evans on “Christianity and Judaism: Partings of the Ways.” The article by James W. Thompson titled “Paul’s Doctrine of the Law and the Stone-Campbell Movement” is a reminder to those who are acquainted with the Restoration Movement that while the Law has passed away as a binding covenant, the Law can be used for the “moral instruction” and “moral guidance” of Christians today.

\(^{221}\) In Paul and the Law, Brian S. Rosner offers a good overview of the three basic positions that Paul advocates with regard to the Law. Rosner reviews Paul’s repudiation of the Law, Paul’s replacement of the Law (with the Law of Christ), and Paul’s reappropriation of the Law in prophecy and wisdom.
Finally, some advocates of the NPP, like N.T. Wright, are opposed to certain aspects of Calvinism. For example, Wright does not accept the Calvinist doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.222 This is good, but have not Bible students capably and decisively answered Calvinism over the past 150 years without hearing of the NPP, let alone using it? And what of all those people who were converted out of Calvinism by sound, biblical arguments before the NPP ever came along?223

The fact is, Calvinism has been answered over and over again and no NPP was ever used to do it. We have thoroughly answered Calvinism by pointing out the proper definition of biblical words like grace, faith, law, and works, and by pointing out the proper relationship between them all. A proper understanding of the use of “works” in the NT will answer Calvinism without any use made of the NPP.224

While the NPP does in fact remind us of some important truths, there are several errors associated with it that we must consider. Because of these errors, the NPP, therefore, is not the way to approach New Testament studies. What follows are my reasons for this conclusion.

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222 In What Paul Saint Paul Really Said, Wright offers the following comment: “If we use the language of law court, it makes no sense whatever to say the judge imparts, imputes, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either plaintiff or the defendant” (page 98).

223 See my lecture given last year at the Alpharetta Bible Study titled, “The Impact of Calvinism on Churches of Christ.”

224 In my 2012 Alpharetta Bible Study lecture, “The Impact of Calvinism on Churches of Christ,” I documented numerous sources (articles, books) written by members of churches of Christ over the past 40 years who have a proper understanding of the “grace-works” and “faith-works” dichotomies of Paul. The understanding of Paul’s use of “works” by these authors was not influenced in any way by the contemporary NPP, and yet, they taught accurately Paul’s point in Romans and Galatians. The answer to Calvinism is not found in Sanders’ “covenantal nomism” (keeping grace and works together). Proof of this is found in Dunn who believes in “covenant nomism” and still espouses the Calvinist doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone without works. The answer to Calvinism is in understanding the different kinds of “works” mentioned in the NT, which do not play a role in man’s salvation and others which do not. Those “works” which play a role in man’s salvation are: belief (John 6:27-29; compare John 3:21), works of Abraham (8:39; compare Romans 4:12), working righteousness (Acts 10:35; compare Hebrews 11:33), and works worthy of repentance (Acts 26:20). Those “works” which do not play a role in man’s salvation are: working iniquity (Matthew 7:23; Luke 13:27), evil works (John 3:19-20; 7:7; 2 Timothy 4:18; Titus 1:16; 1 John 3:12; 2 John 11; 3 John 10; Revelation 2:22-23; 9:20; 16:11; 18:6), works of law (Romans 3:20, 27-28; 9:32; Galatians 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), works of man (Romans 4:2-6; 9:11; 11:6); works of darkness (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:11), works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19), works of boasting (Ephesians 2:9), wicked works (Colossians 1:21), our works (2 Timothy 1:9), works of righteousness which we did ourselves (Titus 3:5), dead works (Hebrews 6:1; 9:14), unlawful works (2 Peter 2:8), works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8), and ungodly works (Jude 15). Additionally, “works” are to be found in the life of the Christian which God will take into account in the judgment day (Romans 2:6-7,10; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 20:12-13; 22:12): good works (Matthew 5:16; Romans 2:10; 15:18; 1 Cor. 13:13-15; 2 Cor. 9:8; Galatians 6:4; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 1:6; Colossians 1:10; 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:10; 3:1; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14; Hebrews 10:24; 13:21; 1 Peter 2:12; Revelation 2:2, 5, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 2, 8, 14:13), the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58; 16:10; Ephesians 4:12; Philippians 1:22; 2:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; 2 Timothy 4:5; Revelation 2:26), doing good (Galatians 6:10), work of faith (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11), work of love (Hebrews 6:10; 1 John 3:18), working righteousness (Hebrews 11:33), a faith that works (James 1:4, 25; 2:14-26; 3:13), and good works toward the brethren (3 John 5).
First, consider the basic, yet unproven, assumption of the NPP regarding Luther. It is assumed by NPP advocates that Luther’s view of justification (in particular, works vs. faith) was different from Paul and early church interpreters because it was formed for the first time much later during the medieval age. Again it is assumed that Luther’s exegesis of Romans and Galatians was skewed and his understanding of the text was simply a product of his antagonism with medieval Catholicism. This, in fact, is not the case. Historically speaking, Luther’s understanding of justification (albeit wrong on some levels) was directly connected with early church interpreters. It was not simply a by-product of the polemics of his day.

When Luther placed justification in the realm of soteriology (individuals being saved from sin) and not ecclesiology (who is in the covenant), he did so following the same understanding of Clement and Ignatius. When Luther argued against perfect obedience to the Law, he did so following the understanding of Justin Martyr. When Luther argued for a dichotomy between faith and works, he did so following the understanding of Clement. Luther, like the early church interpreters long before him, did not describe the “works of the law” as “boundary markers.” Jordan Cooper has recently done research in this area and concludes:

When historical theology is entered into the discussion, it becomes clear that Luther was not driven merely by medieval debates about righteousness and sin. In the first and second centuries, in a context far different from that of late medieval Europe, the most prominent themes in Luther’s Pauline hermeneutic are already present.

Second, consider the liberal theological grounding upon which the NPP was first built. This is well documented. Krister Stendahl was a theological liberal arguing his case during a post-holocaust time of reparation between Protestant Christians and Jews. Sanders describes himself thus:

I am a liberal, modern, secularized Protestant, brought up in a church dominated by low christology and the social gospel. I am proud of the things that that religious tradition stands for. I am not bold enough, however, to suppose that Jesus came to establish it, or that he died for sake of its principles.

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225 This point is taken from Jordan Cooper, *The Righteousness of One: An Evaluation of Early Patristic Soteriology in Light of the New Perspective on Paul*. This new book by Cooper makes a strong case for Luther’s connection with early patristic understandings of justification, the law, and faith and works. The point here is not that patristic views are authoritative; they are not. The point here is that Luther’s views on these matters were not newly developed in his time. His views were in line with what “church fathers” said many years before.


227 F. David Farnell documents several examples of theological liberalism and historical-critical ideology in Sanders, Dunn, and Wright. These men are not conservative when it comes to such matters as NT book authorship, inspiration, the deity of Jesus, the historical record of Jesus, etc. See “The New Perspective on Paul: Its Basic Tenets, History, and Presuppositions.” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*. 16.2 (Fall 2005): 189-243.

228 *Jesus and Judaism*, 334.
Additionally, Sanders does not believe that Acts and all of the thirteen epistles assigned to Paul can be used to ascertain a “pattern of religion” for either Judaism or Paul himself.\(^{229}\) But what bearing does this theological liberalism have on the NPP? The theological liberal is often interested in placing modern Judaism in a better light and suggesting that Christianity is no better than Judaism. The NPP gives them the framework from which to launch this agenda.\(^{230}\) On this point, Donald Macleod offers the following observation:

Yet contrition for the Holocaust cannot by itself offer a total explanation for either the emergence of the New Perspective or the welcome accorded to it. As P.S. Alexander points out, ‘It is surely significant that most of these scholars have either been Christians of liberal Protestant background or Jews arguably influenced by liberal Protestant ideas.’ Such a background would provide little sympathy with classical Lutheranism. Instead, it would predispose them to see their own Liberalism reflected from the bottom of the rabbinic well. It would then be tempting to minimize the differences between Judaism and Christianity and in particular to play down any suggestion that the one faith is superior to the other.\(^{231}\)

There are two main liberal theological presuppositions which lie behind the practice of NPP: 1) following men like F.C. Baur, Wilhelm Wrede, and Albert Schweitzer, the historical-critical method is used to ascertain the meaning behind the NT text (form, redaction, and tradition criticism); and, 2) following modern Jewish scholars like Montefiore, Schecter, and Scheops (men who were opposed to Jesus’ presentation of the gospel and Paul’s description of Judaism), the picture of Judaism that is painted today is

\(^{229}\) Sanders referenced three blank pages in the index of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* as examples of “truth, ultimate” (page 627). Sanders also wrote this: “Thus in all the literature considered together one has Judaism as it spoke for itself during the period, not just Judaism as subsequent generations wanted it remembered (which is the case with Christianity).” *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 426. For several examples of Sanders’ liberalism, see the article by F. David Farnell.

\(^{230}\) This was the very point made to me after a two-hour interview with Daniel Patte, Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Patte told me that the NPP is an accurate assessment of Judaism and that he holds to a version of it himself. But, according to Patte, many in the NPP movement have not gone far enough. He believes that men like Dunn and Wright have not understood the full ramification of Stendahl’s thesis (i.e., Jews saved without Jesus Christ) because they continue to affirm that Jews have to be saved through Jesus Christ. Patte believes that because Jews are in a right covenant relationship with God already (“covenantal nomism”), they are completely saved without Jesus Christ. Patte told me that Jews are saved and we need to leave them alone and quit trying to save them through Jesus Christ. Patte believes that scholars like Robert Jewett set forth the correct understanding of Romans. Jewett believes that Paul’s point in Romans is that “all Israel is saved” completely without Jesus Christ (see Jewett’s article titled “The Law and the Coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Romans”). Other theological liberals who make this same point about Jews are John Gaston (*Paul and the Torah*, 1987), Krister Stendahl (*Final Account: Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 1993), and Stanley K. Stowers (*A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles*, 1994). More recently, John Gager sets forth the same understanding about Jews being saved without Jesus Christ in his book *Reinventing Paul* (pages 59-61, 152). See also the 2012 article by Reimund Bieringer and Didier Pollefeyt, “Wrestling with the Jewish Paul.”

one of a gracious God-loving Jew with little or no element of legalism.\textsuperscript{232} The observation offered by F. David Farnell is important to consider:

Though many historical critics were nominally Lutheran or Reformed in their views of Paul, their philosophically motivated proposals facilitated the rise of not only a “search for the historical Jesus” but also a “search for the historical Paul.” A fortuitous, well-timed convergence in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries of historical-critical ideologies, political correctness, and eisegesis of Pauline texts by such men as Sanders, Dunn, and Wright have led to the emergence and prominence of the NPP.\textsuperscript{233}

In addition to religious “political correctness” found in our seminaries today, the theological liberal is also interested in the “historical critical methodologies” of Paul. He wants to know the outward historical influences and inward psychological motivations that went into the making of Paul’s writings. He does not consider the upward influence on Paul. He does not believe that Paul in fact wrote by direct, inspired (God-breathed) revelation from Jesus Christ. As a result, modern scholars often argue that Paul addressed problems between Jews and Gentiles from the standpoint of his own Jewishness. Even some NPP scholars will focus on Paul the Palestinian Jew and others on Paul the Hellenistic Jew. However, these scholars often ignore the simple fact that Paul was writing ultimately as an inspired apostle who received his gospel from Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote: “For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12). Paul did not preach a gospel that originated from his Jewish background, nor was Paul taught his gospel by some man. Paul’s gospel came by “revelation of Jesus Christ.” Paul’s gospel was the gospel of Jesus Christ, not the gospel of a Palestinian Jew or Hellenistic Jew.\textsuperscript{234} This simple, yet important truth is often left out of the NPP debate.

Paul’s Christ-given gospel to the entire world must be considered. Paul’s gospel addressed the needs and attitudes of different kinds of Jews and different kinds of Gentiles in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century. All mankind, Jew or Gentile, had three things in common: they all had sinned, they all could not save themselves, and they all needed to obey the same gospel plan of salvation (Romans 1-3). However, Paul’s Christ-given gospel – the one gospel for all – made different arguments depending upon the various audience members being addressed. Some of Paul’s audience, in fact, included the hardened, self-righteous Jew (Romans 2:5, 23).

\textsuperscript{232} F. David Farnell gives several details of these two liberal presuppositions in his article titled “The New Perspective on Paul: Its Basic Tenets, History, and Presuppositions.”


\textsuperscript{234} Many NT scholars in and out of the NPP movement prefer to assess Paul from a sociological standpoint instead of addressing his divine inspiration. These scholars are liberal in their view of revelation and many of them do not believe in the full, plenary inspiration of the scriptures. They will talk about the social influences that went into Paul’s writings, but not his divine inspiration. They do this on purpose so as not to be cast into that unthinkable category of “fundamentalist.” Any perspective on Paul that does not maintain a high view of Paul’s divine inspiration is a perspective that must be rejected.
Paul’s inspired use of the OT and his understanding of the whole redemptive history must also be taken into account when we look at Paul’s negative statements to the Jews of his day. The large amount of extra-biblical material surveyed by Sanders can certainly give us some insight into what Jews believed, but Paul appealed to the OT for his arguments, not a body of uninspired rabbinic literature. He quoted the OT against “works of the law” and in favor of “justification by faith.” Paul’s inspired use of the OT must be given priority over Sanders’ uninspired interpretation of rabbinic Judaism. Hafemann offers this perceptive analysis:

But even adherents to the “New Perspective” on Paul, who have worked hard to renew our understanding of Paul within the Judaism of his day, have often not taken the Jewish matrix of Paul’s own thinking seriously enough as the decisive conceptual source for Paul’s thinking. Moreover, at the heart of the debate concerning the Law and the role of justification in Paul’s thought is the question of Paul’s understanding of redemptive history (cf. Gal 3-4; 2 Cor. 3:7-18; Rom 3:21-26; 9-11), which itself can only be solved by a renewed study of Paul’s use and understanding of the OT within the larger question of the relationship of Paul and his gospel to Israel as the old covenant people of God…

Third, consider that there are several problems with Sanders’ methodology in arriving at his overall picture of Jewish “covenantal nomism.” Sanders’ methodology in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* is flawed. Consider the following flaws:

1) Sanders is so interested in looking at a religion like Judaism as a whole (the holistic comparison) that he does not want to consider individual peculiarities within that religion. After discussing how previous scholars have offered inadequate views of Judaism, of Paul, or both, Sanders concludes that what is needed today is a comparison of “a whole religion with a whole religion.” While this approach by Sanders appears to be improved, it must be observed that his approach allows him to dismiss at any time any particular irregularity that he finds that does not fit the “whole” of the religion. If he finds some legalism in Judaism, for example, then he rejects it as an anomaly that simply doesn’t fit the “whole.”

Sanders wants to examine only what he believes to be homogeneous in a religion, not every theological proposition or concept within a religion. Sanders’ flaw is

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235 Read Romans 3-4 and Galatians 2-3 and see how many OT quotations Paul uses to make his point against “works” and in favor of “faith.” See also the article by M. Silva on the “Old Testament in Paul.”
236 “Paul and His Interpreters” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 678.
237 Sanders’ work in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* is large and detailed. The reader may find himself so lost in all the detailed information that he does not take notice of the flaw in Sanders’ methodology.
238 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 1-12.
239 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 12. Sanders would write later: “One of the difficulties of the discussion has been that Christianity, and thus the critiques of Judaism offered by Christian scholars, focuses on individual salvation, whereas Judaism has been more concerned with the protection and preservation of the group” (*Covenantal Nomism Revisited*, 26).
240 On the following pages of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* one can view Sanders’ “all-pervasive view” of covenantal nomism throughout Judaism: 147-148, 236-238, and 426-427.
found in his refusal to look at certain particulars that he does not want to see. We must remember that Paul was not attacking “a whole religion,” he was attacking the Jew and Gentile convert who was misusing “works of law.”

Thomas F. Best comments on this point:

A final problem lies in his determination to find a single, unifying pattern in such a vast array of material. Is it really possible to find such a pattern without abstracting from each of the diverse documents precisely the qualities which give them their identity and life? To put the question another way, is it not the distinctive features of his belief and daily ritual which give the Qumran covenanter his identity, and specifically his Jewish identity? And would he not himself be surprised to hear that he held the same “pattern of religion” as a Sadducee in Jerusalem or a post-Jamnia rabbi?241

Additionally, it must be noted here that Sanders treated his “holistic” approach to Palestinian Judaism differently from his “holistic” approach to Paul. He believed he could find a “whole in Judaism” but not so with Paul.242 Thus, Sanders’ flaw is found in his unfair and unbalanced approach to Jewish writings and New Testament books. Sanders writes:

…the nature of Palestinian Jewish literature lead to considering large blocks of it together, while rendering it almost impossible to isolate the thought of individuals comparable to Paul. On the other hand, Christianity was developing so rapidly that we could not reasonably take up ‘the New Testament pattern of religion’ as a topic. One would become so occupied in distinguishing the different types and patterns of religion in the New Testament that the hope of meaningful conclusions would be lost. We have from Paul’s hand (or mouth, if he dictated) a distinctive body of letters, and we had better not confuse the matter by attempting to consider James, Hebrews and the Gospel of John at the same time.243

Again, the comments of Thomas Best are helpful:

With respect to Sanders’ method of comparing religious traditions, the most serious problem is that he does not follow it himself. While the treatment of Judaism is both extensive and deep, the treatment of Paul is comparatively short, amounting to only 125 pages of a 650-page book. And these pages do not give a systematic survey of Pauline texts, but rather a running discussion with previous scholars, principally Albert Schweitzer, Bultmann, Kasemann, and Bornkamm. The subject matter does not arise from a fresh review of texts, but from Sanders’ definition of the “meaning” of a religion in terms of “getting in and staying in,” i.e., soteriology. It is ironic that this is precisely the way in

242 Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 12, 552.
which Sanders’ opponents Bultmann, Kasemann, and Bornkamm had cast the problem as well. Thus the discussion centers around Romans and Galatians—again, the favorite texts of the previous school of Pauline interpreters. What we have, then, is not the “whole religion” of Paul, but a presentation of his understanding of salvation and a discussion of other themes such as the role of the Law and the meaning of righteousness in relation to it. The presentation of the pattern of religion in Pauline Christianity is still waiting to be done.\(^{244}\)

2) Sanders works to show that ancient Judaism was not legalistic, but he works from his own definition and parameter for “legalism.”\(^{245}\) It must be remembered that there are different ways in which legalism can be shown. G.B. Caird offers this astute observation on Sanders:

In order to prove that Palestinian Judaism was not legalistic, he has resorted to tactical definition, defining legalism, i.e., as the doctrine that salvation must be earned by obedience to Torah. But there are other, broader senses of legalism, and Sanders’ argument does little to disperse the impression which the Mishna regularly makes on non-Jewish readers, that the Rabbis were deeply preoccupied with legal minutiae, almost to the exclusion of other concerns.\(^{246}\)

3) Sanders refuses to examine the gospels, the book of Acts, and some of Paul’s epistles.\(^{247}\) Sanders has his list of permitted documents that he is going to examine and certain Bible books do not make the list. He does not take into account the inspired picture of Judaism presented in the inspired biblical account of the New Testament. Surprisingly, Sanders does not even use the Old Testament to gain an accurate picture of Judaism.

For Sanders, or anyone, the Old Testament would certainly be the place to begin looking at a “pattern of religion” for the Jews because that body of literature is the very body of literature that shaped the legacy of later Judaism. Sanders, for example, rejected the Aramaic Targums in his survey because he believed them to be “early traditions” that are not reliable (pages 25-26).

But why reject the entire Old Testament as well, which would have provided an accurate and necessary antecedent to Second Temple Judaism? Why also reject the New Testament as Sanders does? Sanders does not believe that the New Testament is helpful for his study of Judaism. According to him, when one is looking at understanding New Testament passages he is “hardly in a position to learn much about Judaism for its own sake” (page 28). The methodology of any biblical scholar

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\(^{244}\) “The Apostle Paul and E. P. Sanders: The Significance of Paul and Palestinian Judaism,” 72.

\(^{245}\) Sanders writes: “As we have now come to expect, the emphasis on God's mercy is coupled with a strict demand to be obedient. But Israel should be ‘clean’ because God has sanctified the nation. Despite a strict legalism of one sort, the author’s view is not the kind of legalism which is summed up in the phrase ‘works righteousness,’ for salvation depends on the grace of God” (Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 383).


\(^{247}\) An examination of Sanders’ “Index of Passages” will bear this out.
like Sanders who refuses to include Old Testament books or New Testament books in a survey of Jewish religion is seriously flawed.

In other words, Sanders does not give much time to the biblical documents that actually speak of Jewish practices in the 1st century. W. Horbury comments:

> It is of some moment that, although he reckons his Jewish evidence to be representative enough to support an inference to St Paul’s time, Professor Sanders has not specifically aimed to describe pre-70 Judaism (p. 426). Hence he does not try to reconstruct what it meant to be at that time ‘as touching the law, a Pharisee,’ and neither Josephus nor the Gospels and Acts figures in his inquiry. He therefore passes by such further signs of a heightened obedience as Josephus’ description of his early religious quest, including the Essences and the ascetic Bannus … Perhaps, too, when all allowance has been made for new and original elements, the rigor both of the Synoptic and Pauline ethic may preserve some indication of types of first-century Judaism. Whatever the strength of this particular point, the signs of a tendency to rigorous obedience are more widespread than could readily be discerned from Professor Sanders’ book … St. Paul’s polemic on perfect conformity to the law appears to have points of contact with contemporary Judaism.\(^{248}\)

Thomas Best also observes:

> One final criticism must be raised, one which applies to both the Jewish and the Pauline parts of Sanders' work. This is that he never addresses a critical aspect of both bodies of material, their use of the Old Testament. For both the Old Testament is foundational; both develop their identity and behavior in response to the Old Testament text. Their respective appropriations and transformations of Old Testament materials are an indispensable key to understanding their identity and to effectively comparing them. But Sanders does not use it; it is striking that the Index of Passages has under two pages of Old Testament citations, against more than 23 pages of citations from other Jewish and early Christian literature.\(^{249}\)

> 4) Sanders argues at times from silence – what is not present in the Jewish literature. For example, he argues that all the elements of the covenant concept are not mentioned in the literature, but they must be there anyway.\(^{250}\) At other times Sanders


\(^{250}\) Sanders writes: “Not every single document studied contains every one of the motifs just listed. I Enoch, for example, is notably 'defective'. I believe that even in the various parts of I Enoch one can see enough to justify the assumption that the elements which are not mentioned are presupposed. Thus one can note the requirement of obedience and infer that something must have been given to be obeyed, even though the giving of the law is not rehearsed” (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 423).
argues that works-righteousness is *not* present in the literature, *so it must not be there*. Thomas F. Best is quick to point out how Sanders uses silence to his favor:

His insistence that the covenant-concept is central in the rabbinic literature, though virtually unmentioned, depends upon his ability to demonstrate that it was in fact in the background of the documents as the inescapable presupposition of their discussion on matters of ritual purification, means of atonement, and the definition of “work.” But in other areas he uses the argument from silence to cut the other way: Since a treasury of merits is not mentioned in the literature, such a concept was not a part of Judaism in this period.

5) Sanders is critical of many scholars before him who viewed Judaism as legalistic and he does not accept their methodology as valid. Yet, Sanders uses the same type of methodology of which he is critical. For example, he charges Paul Billerbeck with using numerous quotations from rabbinic literature which may or may not accurately reflect the consensus of rabbinic thought (page 42). But Sanders does the same type of voluminous quoting later in his own work. Another example is Sanders’ criticism of Matthew Black for mixing the beliefs of the (early / late) Pharisees with the (early / late) Rabbis (page 51). But, again, Sanders does this type of mixing later in his own work. Sanders’ flaw is noticeable in his being guilty of the very thing he criticizes in others.

6) Sanders admits to the assumptions necessary in using rabbinic (Tannaitic) material to assess 1st century Judaism. He assumes certain things about the dating, authorship, variety of meaning, and nature of the Tannaitic literature (pages 59-84). However, he proceeds without seriously considering the dangers of using this post-apostolic material for New Testament studies, namely, the late date of this material and the social and religious transformations found in this material that differ from 1st century Judaism. Rabbinic literature simply is not directly comparable to the material found in the gospel writers or in Paul’s epistles. Sanders’ flaw is in using late rabbinic material to assess 1st century Judaism and Paul’s teaching.

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251 Sanders writes: “There is nowhere in Tannaitic literature a reference to a treasury of merits which can be transferred at the judgment” (Ibid., 197).

252 Ibid., 72-73

253 See the article by B.D. Chilton on “Rabbis” for the transition from the Pharisees to the Rabbinic Judaism.

254 For caution in using rabbinic literature to understand Jesus, see the article by B.D. Chilton on “Rabbinic Traditions and Writings,” the article on “Rabbinic Literature: Talmud” by H. Maccoby, the article on “Rabbinic Literature: Mishnah and Tosefta” by J. Nuesner, the article on “Rabbinic Literature: Midrashim” by G.G. Porton, and the article on “Jewish Biblical Interpretation” by P. Enns. See also Chilton’s article on “Rabbinic Literature: Targumim and the article on “Midrash” by C.A. Evans.

255 S. Mason writes: “Perhaps the most important observation to be made about ancient Jewish groups is that our knowledge is defective. We can summarize what we find in the texts and hypothesize about interrelationships, but the quality and quantity of the evidence do not normally permit overwhelmingly probably conclusions…Nor can we be sure that an individual Pharisee or Essene behaved in a manner somehow typical of the group or as an individual. Much remains beyond our grasp” (“Theologies and Sects, Jewish,” 1229).
7) Sanders knows that the Rabbis differ with one another over the same topic being discussed. However, even though Sanders admits this, he moves forward and focuses on the “underlying agreement” he is looking for. The flaw here is not taking seriously these differences of rabbinic opinion and not allowing these differences of opinion to affect the total outcome of the “pattern of religion.” Which Rabbi are we to accept as true? Which rabbinic opinion is accurate? Sanders writes:

Our procedure in this, as in subsequent sections, is to examine the different types of statement and to determine whether they reveal an underlying agreement. If they do not, we shall have to be content simply to let the divergent statements stand as real differences of opinion. 

8) Sanders does not come to rabbinic Judaism to uncover the issues within rabbinic Judaism. He seeks to impose from without certain issues of Pauline scholarship and Paul (namely, the grace-works dichotomy) upon rabbinic Judaism to see if these issues are present in there. When Sanders does this, a true holistic comparison is not made, but rather a limited theological comparison is made.

Additionally, Sanders ignores the greater context in which a particular rabbinic statement is made because he is focused on finding his “covenantal nomism” first. He does not ask what is important and central within a piece of rabbinic literature. All he wants to know is what, in those writings, addresses his thesis of “covenantal nomism.” Sanders gathers sayings from diverse sources in Jewish literature, writes them down, organizes them, categorizes them, and then draws his conclusion about what “the Rabbis” teach. The flaw here is that Sanders gives no context for a given statement in its own setting in its own document. We are forced to look at a rabbinic statement and Sanders’ conclusion about that statement without the original intention, focus, issue, or concern of the rabbinic document as a whole.

9) Sanders downplays the role of perfect obedience found in some Jewish literature. This perfect obedience, would of course, lead some Jews to have a works-righteousness approach to serving God. Thus, Sanders emphasizes God’s grace and mercy and downplays the statements requiring obedience as he surveys the literature. His methodology is deliberately skewed to emphasize grace over

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256 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 85.
257 “We saw that the Rabbis were of the opinion…” (p. 109) is one of many examples throughout Sanders’ book.
258 The large number of quotations from rabbinic literature throughout Sanders’ book are too numerous to list here. Sanders uses the following method on just about every page in the main portion of his book: “(name of Rabbi) said:”
259 In his book *Torah and Life* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), Friedrich Avemarie pointed out that Sanders has given us a one-sided picture of ancient Judaism as a religion of grace. Unfortunately, his work is in German and not accessible to many English-speaking Bible students. Peter Stuhlmacher’s following comment includes a quote from Avemarie: “There are important rabbinic texts about the final judgment that do not allow us to speak simplistically about the principle of grace but rather require two optional views in rabbinic soteriology to be set side by side. In their deliberations about the final judgment the rabbis proceed from both a principle of election and a principle of retribution. Their soteriology ‘is based on two contrary principles, between which there is no fixed relationship, so that they can be constantly be
obedience. However, there can be found plain statements of the importance of perfect obedience in some of the Jewish literature examined by Sanders.

Consider two examples surveyed by Sanders: the literature of Qumran and Jubilees. In the Qumran literature, there are examples of the requirement of perfect obedience (1QS 3:9-11), yet Sanders downplays this perfect obedience and emphasizes God’s grace (pages 293-294). In Jubilees, the author points out the importance of perfect obedience (1:22-24; 5:12; 50:5), but Sanders once again downplays it and says that it is not a legalism of work-righteousness (pages 382-383).

10) Sanders admits in different places that some Jewish diversity (including legalism) existed in the time of Jesus and Paul. He admits that there is evidence of Jewish legalism. The flaw is in Sanders’ admission of Jewish legalism but his refusal to accept it as a part of his “pattern of religion.” Sanders writes:

The great usefulness of Weber’s legalistic Judaism and the temptation to retroject more recent arguments into the New Testament period do not, however, completely account for the persistence of Weber’s view. It persists because it appears to rest on solid evidence. The view that weighing fulfillment and transgression constitutes Rabbinic (or Pharisaic or Jewish) soteriology can apparently be supported by actual texts concerning weighing…The view is there in Billerbeck (= Rabbinic literature); it was held by the Rabbis of some period or another; they did not make it up de novo; therefore it may be safely applied to some group or another of Jews around the time of Jesus, give or take a few decades.

Again, Sanders understands the Pseudepigrapha IV Ezra to contain elements of legalistic works-righteousness. The flaw here is Sanders’ unwillingness to let IV Ezra be a part of Judaism’s total “pattern of religion.” He simply states that IV Ezra is an exception to his “covenantal nomism” and moves on. Sanders writes:

brought to bear in different proportions, either with, against, or apart from one another.’ Rabbinic judgments about grace and retribution in the final judgment therefore often remain in the balance … In view of all these pre- and post-Christian Jewish texts, it is not enough simply to call Judaism a religion of grace and to point to covenantal nomism. There are also serious comments about the end-time significance of (a treasure of) good works, which the faithful should store up during their lives” (Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification, 40-41).

See the article by A. Andrew Das titled “Beyond Covenantal Nomism: Paul, Judaism and Perfect Obedience.” Das demonstrates this point by surveying several examples of required obedience in the Tannaim; see Paul, the Law, and the Covenant, 12-69.

A. Andrew Das surveyed this literature and found examples of the importance of strict and perfect obedience in Jubilees, the Qumran literature, Philo, and the Tannaim. He concludes: “God’s forgiving grace and the strict demand of the law represent two opposing poles in Jewish thought that persisted in logical tension. It is all a matter of focus … Sanders was right to stress God’s grace and mercy in the system, but he stated matters too strongly when he denied that God commands strict obedience to the law” (Paul, the Law, and the Covenant, 44).

Jacqueline C.R. de Roo argues convincingly in her monograph that “works of the law” in Qumran meant deeds of the law and performance of the law, and that these works were thought to have had an atoning function, even at times vicariously (see Works of the Law at Qumran and in Paul).

Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 58.
…for there is only one question to be determined: whether or not the covenant maintains its traditional efficacy in the view of the author of IV Ezra. To anticipate the conclusion: the view argued for here is that it does not, that in IV Ezra one see how Judaism works when it actually does become a religion of individual self-righteousness. In IV Ezra, in short, we see an instance in which covenantal nomism has collapsed. All that is left is legalistic perfectionism… One has here the closest approach to legalistic work-righteousness which can be found in the Jewish literature of the period.\textsuperscript{264}

But, Sanders is quick to move away from Jewish diversity to a primary focus in order to establish his thesis. The flaw here is one of emphasis. His methodology is skewed to fit what he wants to primarily see in the rabbinic literature. He does not believe the minority view (his opinion) of Judaism being legalism is of any account in producing a “pattern of religion.” He concludes his discussion of “Judaism in the time of Jesus and Paul” this way:

Because of the consistency with which which covenantal nomism is maintained from early in the second century b.c.e. to late in the second century c.e., it must be hypothesized that covenantal nomism was pervasive in Palestine before 70. It was thus the basic type of religion known by Jesus and presumably by Paul. (One knows very little about the distinctive characteristics of Judaism in Asia Minor.) The possibility cannot be completely excluded that there were Jews accurately hit by the polemic of Matt. 23, who attended only to trivia and neglected the weightier matters. Human nature being what it is, one supposes that there were some such. One must say, however, that the surviving Jewish literature does not reveal them…On the assumption that a religion should be understood on the basis of its own self-preservation…we must say that the Judaism of before 70 kept grace and works in the right perspective, did not trivialize the commandments of God and was not especially marked by hypocrisy. The frequent Christian charge against Judaism, it must be recalled, is not that some individual Jews misunderstood, misapplied and abused their religion, but that Judaism necessarily tends toward petty legalism, self-serving and self-deceiving casuistry, and a mixture of arrogance and lack of confidence in God. But the surviving literature is as free of these characteristics as any I have ever read.\textsuperscript{265}

11) Finally, Sanders’ overall flaw in examining ancient Judaism is his belief that Jews were loyal to God and because of this loyalty God would save them all – “all

\textsuperscript{264} \textit{Paul and Palestinian Judaism,} 409, 418. On pages 427-428, Sanders gives his opinion as to why IV Ezra is not representative of Judaism or Pharisaism, but it is nothing more than an opinion. In contrast, A. Andrew Das demonstrates how 4 Ezra (2 Esdras 3-14) and other Jewish works like 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch, 2 Enoch, and the Testament of Abraham, all exhibit a works-righteousness attitude when there is a compromise or collapse of Judaism’s gracious framework. Das concludes: “it has become clear that whenever covenant, election, repentance, sacrifice, and/or atonement play a reduced role (if any at all), the demands of the law come to the fore” (\textit{Paul, the Law, and the Covenant,} 69).

\textsuperscript{265} \textit{Ibid.,} 426-427.
Israel will be saved."Sanders believes that Jews were loyal to God, thus, his picture of “common Judaism” is always cast in a positive light. In his article that revisited the topic of “covenantal nomism,” he presented three arguments in favor of “covenantal nomism.” Concerning his third argument, Sanders writes: “(3) The third argument is an appeal to history: Jews remained loyal to the God of Israel and loyal to one another.”

However, when you examine the NT picture of Judaism as a whole, can you honestly say that “Jews remained loyal to God”? The NT picture of Jews as a whole does not portray a Judaism loyal to God, but a Judaism in which God’s “wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16). The following quote from Sanders again shows his belief in the Jews’ loyalty to God:

One final word on legalism: there has never been a historical community of people who believed that they could save themselves entirely by their own efforts. That requires a conception of isolated individuals: not a national group, but individuals with no collective benefits, no solidarity with any form of saving history, standing entirely on their own face-to-face with a judgmental and unforgiving God. Such communities are a fiction created by polemic. If there ever were such a community, it would not have included first-century Jews. One of the main things that we know about them is that they were steadfastly loyal to their God and to their people. They identified themselves with one another and with the God who gave them distinctive laws and customs. They all knew that the people to whom they were loyal were members of a group chosen by God. They did not see themselves as isolated individuals.

Fourth, consider the reductionist approach to New Testament exegesis used by NPP advocates. For example, the relationship of God and the Jews is reduced to a covenant of grace. The law-keeping works (merit) of some Jews is not admitted or taken seriously. NPP advocates also use a reductionist approach to biblical hermeneutics as I have already discussed. “Works of the law” is reduced to things like Jewish circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and dietary restrictions. According to them, no meritorious law-keeping at all is in Paul’s picture, only the “social function” of the law. Clearly, ethnic and social issues between Jews and Gentiles abound in Paul’s writings (see above). But ethnic issues about Gentiles and defending his mission to the Gentiles are not the only concerns Paul has with his Jewish brethren.

Reductionism is not a sound approach to biblical studies of any kind. We must always use a holistic approach in our biblical studies which seeks to take all that the Bible says

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266 On the following pages in Paul and Palestinian Judaism one can view Sanders’ opinion that God will save all Israel without them coming to belief in Jesus Christ: 143, 178, 182, 204, 236-237, 249, 253-254, 333, 361, 369, 371, 378, 382, 396, 405-406, 408-409, 417, and 422.
267 Covenantal Nomism Revisited, 36.
268 Ibid., 55.
269 See Romans 14:1 – 15:13; 1 Corinthians 8:1 – 10:33; Ephesians 2:11-22; and Colossians 2:8-23.
on a particular subject. We must take all of what the Bible says about a matter before drawing a conclusion and let the Bible define itself and its own terms. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. We must never reduce biblical doctrine to a narrow interpretation to fit a particular theological agenda. What if Bible students begin using the same NPP lingo? Will these people begin to describe “works of the law” (like Dunn) and “justification by faith” (like N.T. Wright) as merely ecclesiological (church) statements of who belongs to God’s people?

The reductionist hermeneutic of the NPP advocate can be seen in how he reinterprets key Pauline texts. Everything is reduced to “Jewish ethnic identity.” For example, Galatians 2:15-21 is reinterpreted to mean that Jews are not justified by being Jewish (deeds that set a person off as an ethnic Jew), but by their confession of faith in Christ. Ethnic identity is irrelevant with regard to justification. Galatians 3:10-14 is reinterpreted to mean that Gentiles must not convert to Judaism in order to be saved. Any Jew who teaches that a Gentile must convert is under a curse and Gentiles must resist this pressure to convert.\(^{270}\)

In the same vein, Romans 3:21-31 is reinterpreted to mean that justification comes by faith in Jesus Christ without any regard for ethnic identity. No one ethnic group can boast in having a priority status with God. Romans 9:30 – 10:4 is interpreted to mean that Jews did not come to Christ because they believed that they could be part of God’s faithful people by faithfully cultivating their Jewish social identity. Jews were not faithful to Christ, but faithful to their ethnic (Jewish) identity. Philippians 3:3-11 is reinterpreted to mean that Paul was once confident that he had established a firm social identity within Judaism. After his conversion, Paul was confident in his participation with Christ. Paul believed that righteousness would come by his faithful life in Christ, not by his social credentials based upon deeds of the Law.\(^{271}\) This is the NPP reductionist hermeneutic.

Fifth, consider what is being made of ecumenism by NPP advocates. The NPP allows for evangelicals today to broaden their base of fellowship to include all who exercise their faith (alone) in Jesus Christ. What if Bible students using similar NPP arguments begin to do the same? Will they begin to call for us to lay aside our peculiar “badges of identity” like a cappella singing, the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins, or the Lord’s Supper each first day of the week?

Sixth, consider that some scholarly evangelicals who espouse the NPP are still Calvinists.\(^{272}\) Dunn and Wright claim to be Evangelicals. N.T. Wright is a Bishop in the Anglican Church. Dunn is a Presbyterian, trained for ministry in the Church of Scotland. Dunn defends the writings of John Calvin, the Reformed tradition, and the classic Westminster Confession of Faith. He writes:

\(^{271}\) Ibid., 94-97.
\(^{272}\) Terence L. Donaldson argues for “participation in Christ” as the center of Paul’s theology and closes his article this way: “it is clear that this new sphere of existence in Christ has been made possible by God’s grace alone, and that one enters it by faith alone” (“The Juridical, the Participatory and the ‘New Perspective,’” 241).
I affirm as a central point of Christian faith that God’s acceptance of any and every person is by his grace alone and through faith alone… I am astonished by and repudiate entirely the charge that ‘the new perspective on Paul’ constitutes an attack on and denial of that Lutheran fundamental. Anyone who reads that from my writings is reading in what he wants to see, not reading out what is there. The point I am trying to make is simply that there is another dimension (or dimensions) of that biblical doctrine of God’s justice and of Paul’s teaching on justification which have been overlooked and neglected, and that it is important to recover these aspects and to think them through afresh in the changing circumstances of today’s world. In a word, I seek not to diminish let alone repudiate the doctrine of justification (me genoito), but to bring more fully to light its still greater riches… Putting the point from Paul’s perspective, Paul was clear that justification is by faith alone: to regard any ‘works of the law’ as essential (in addition to faith) undermines ‘faith alone.’ The gospel principle is clear: ‘no one is justified by works of the law, but only (ean me) through faith in Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 2.16).

Some among us are beginning to introduce the NPP to members of the church and I ask, “Why?” Is it because you have found a few modern evangelicals like N.T. Wright who are opposed to certain elements of Calvinism? Is it because you believe that the NPP is somehow the death knell to Calvinism because it keeps grace and works together and shifts the argument away from Calvinism in Paul’s letters? If that is the case, do you actually think that if you introduce a church member to N.T. Wright, that he will take only the anti-Calvinism part of Wright’s theology and not the rest of it?

And, how can the NPP be the death knell to Calvinism when one of the original framers, James D.G. Dunn, is a thorough-going Presbyterian Calvinist? According to Dunn, when you shift the issue away from Jewish legalism (Luther’s reading of Paul), to Jewish exclusivism (the NPP’s reading of Paul) you still can maintain the Reformed doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. So, I ask, what have you gained in your arsenal against Calvinism by adopting the NPP?

Seventh, those who wish to espouse a NPP of the likes of Sanders and Dunn are in fact simply propagating the “old” view according to some scholars. Yes, that is correct. If you are promoting a NPP that still has Jews critiqued by Paul and Jews saved through Jesus Christ, then, according to NPP scholars like John Gager, you are still promoting the “old” view. According to Gager, you are not teaching a truly “new perspective” until you have removed all negative charges against Judaism and the Law and you have all Israel


274 Gager believes that men like Sanders and Dunn continue to propagate the “old” view of Paul because these men still have Paul critiquing Judaism and the Law. Gager writes of Sanders this way: “For all his efforts to undermine the traditional picture of Paul as an insightful critic of ancient Judaism, Sanders nonetheless speaks of ‘Paul’s critique of Judaism’… In the end, Sanders remains largely within the old framework and repeats its familiar themes” (*Reinventing Paul*, 47). Gager writes of Dunn this way: “In some respects, Dunn’s work represents a step backward from Sanders. His portrayal of typical Jewish attitudes approaches caricature… His emphasis on Jewish ethnic pride reverts to the outmoded, unhistorical dichotomy between Jewish particularism and Christian universalism. Here his position resembles the older view according to which Paul was fully justified in his critique of Judaism (*Ibid.*, 49).
saved without Jesus Christ. According to Gager, nothing short of complete acceptance of Judaism and the Law is a “new perspective.” So, a “new” perspective on Paul is actually very relative depending upon where you are on the theological spectrum of Pauline views. You may think you are teaching a “new perspective,” when in fact, you are simply advancing the “old perspective” with only slight modification.

Eighth, consider the big picture of how the NPP was born. We cannot simply look myopically at some historical information about how Jews thought they were “in by grace and stayed in by obedience” (Sanders’ “covenantal nomism”). We cannot take up with the NPP simply because we are told by Sanders that Jews, as a whole, were not legalistic. What is the big picture? The big picture is that the NPP is based upon one man’s (Sanders) historical-critical understanding of a large body of extra-biblical, non-inspired literature! And the use of this extra-biblical, non-inspired material is then imposed upon the NT text. This non-inspired material (the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea scrolls, and rabbinic literature), interpreted by a non-inspired scholar like Sanders is being used to (re)interpret Paul! Key Pauline texts are crammed through the Sanders-Dunn-Wright trajectory, and “viola!” out comes the NPP. This should shout a word of warning to us.

Is it the case that we cannot see Sanders’ “forest” for the NPP “trees”? It must be remembered that Sanders did not appeal to the gospels, the book of Acts, or Paul’s epistles when trying to assess a “pattern of religion” for the Jews. Let this sink in. He wrote 426 pages and examined the extra-biblical literature, but he did not examine the biblical literature! Douglas Moo reminds us of a simple, yet important point: “…the evidence of the gospels and Paul’s epistles should also ‘count’ in any assessment of first century Judaism.”

I agree that any Bible text should be studied in light of its historical context as much as one can do that. But when we are told by some that it is impossible to understand Romans, for example, without understanding the NPP, I ask: What historical documents will we appeal to (past, present, future) and which particular scholars will we appeal to (past, present, future) to find the correct historical context of a Bible text? Which NPP advocate will we go with to properly interpret Paul? Will it be Sanders, Dunn, Wright, or someone else? Will we one day have to have a New Perspective on Jesus; Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, Peter, or Jude, because scholars studying extra-biblical documents related to these men say that we need a new perspective about them?

Will our interpretation of the Bible text be constantly revised as non-inspired scholars develop new interpretations of non-inspired historical documents? If interpretations of Paul are constantly changing and then applied to the biblical text, would it even be possible to know the absolute truth about what Paul taught? Ultimately, God gives us

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275 “Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years,” 292.
276 Liberal scholars have already told us we need a New Perspective on Jesus because of what they have found in the Gnostic Gospels.
277 Zetterholm answers this question in the negative. He concludes his work on the various approaches to Paul this way: “Once we have dismissed the quest for the absolute, historical truth in the biblical texts as a
his word that can be fully understood on its own without dependence upon outside historical documents or scholars. Whatever happened to scripture interpreting scripture? Is that now passé?

A most troubling practice is being used by NPP advocates. They start with Sanders’ uninspired caricature of Judaism and his caricature is accepted without question (they don’t like Sanders’ caricature of Paul, so they reject it. Somehow Sanders got it right on Judaism, but got it wrong on Paul!). After accepting Sanders’ uninspired caricature of Judaism, they then add to that the man-made definitions of biblical words and phrases by Dunn and Wright. They accept without question Dunn’s definition of “works of the law” (see above) and Wright’s definition of “justification” (see above) and then proceed to exegete (?) Paul’s epistles. No serious appeal is made to standard Greek lexicons for definitions of biblical words and phrases, just an appeal to Dunn and Wright. What has happened to basic and good Bible study methods of interpreting scripture? Today, the NPP advocate starts with Sanders, Dunn, or Wright, and then proceeds authoritatively from there.

We are also told by some that we cannot truly understand Paul unless we get the other side of the conversation about 1st century Judaism from the NPP. There are at least three problems with this approach:

1) How many other matters about Paul can we not truly understand until we get the “other side of the conversation”? For example, using this reasoning, there would be matters in First Corinthians that we would never be able to understand because we do not have the Corinthian correspondence to give us the “other side of the conversation” (see 1 Corinthians 5:1; 7:1; 8:1; etc.).

methodological impossibility, what remains are the numerous interpretations more or less plausible…But who presents the real Paul? The question is probably wrongly posed: perhaps it is precisely in the multitude of these various interpretations that we may glimpse a blurry and elusive portrait of Paul. The general hermeneutical limitations when it comes to knowledge about the past make it crucial that we appreciate the multitude of interpretations…Thus different interpretations deal with different aspects of Paul, which together make up a more complete image of the apostle…This, I assume, is ultimately the way Pauline scholarship will develop. Through the interaction of various parallel and even contradictory interpretations, a new dominant paradigm will perhaps eventually emerge, built on other aspects than the dichotomy between Paul and the Judaism he was born into” (Approaches to Paul, 238-240).

Who among us will argue that a particular secular document (or set of documents) must be properly understood first before we can properly understand the Bible, thus making the secular document(s) like the 67th book of the Bible?

Where is the standard Greek lexicon that defines “works of the law” the way Dunn does and “justification” the way Wright does? Commentaries are now being rewritten to reflect NPP ideology. Will Greek lexicons soon be rewritten to include the NPP definitions of Dunn and Wright? Time will tell.

Read the books by NPP advocates and listen to their lectures and you will readily see how quickly they start with Sanders, Dunn, or Wright and then proceed from there. In days gone by, Bible students would start to exegete a NT passage with a standard lexical definition of a Greek word, a point of context, or by comparing scripture with scripture, but apparently that is no longer good enough for some.
2) The “other side of the conversation” given to us by NPP scholars brings us no closer to a better understanding Paul because these scholars simply do not agree among themselves as to how Paul is to be interpreted.\textsuperscript{281}

3) This approach undermines a basic premise that runs throughout scripture: scripture can be understood. Paul and other Bible writers spoke and wrote in such a way that we can get all the parts of the “conversation” necessary to understand God’s teaching for us today (Ephesians 3:4; 5:17). God did not reveal his word in such a way that demands one also read extra-biblical sources to get the “other side of the conversation.”

Finally, consider that we already have a New Perspective on Judaism and Paul – the New Testament – and this perspective does not match up with the modern NPP on many points. The New Testament gives us the following perspective on Judaism and Paul:

1) The picture of first-century Judaism was not uniform but diverse (or complex). Some “remnant” Jews faithfully lived and died serving God within the Old covenant.\textsuperscript{282} Other “remnant” Jews who were exposed to the NT gospel were willing to obey it when it was presented to them.\textsuperscript{283}

2) Many Jews self-righteously trusted in themselves,\textsuperscript{284} were hardened\textsuperscript{285} and blinded,\textsuperscript{286} refused God’s prophets,\textsuperscript{287} refused to enter the kingdom,\textsuperscript{288} and were disobedient to the NT gospel.\textsuperscript{289} These Jews were warned by Paul from their own prophets concerning their rejection of the NT gospel.\textsuperscript{290}

3) The basic problem for the unconverted Jew at this time was that he was given the Law, but he “kept it not.”\textsuperscript{291} He was a sinner who could no longer be justified by the Law of Moses.\textsuperscript{292}

4) Many Jews were attempting to be justified by a “law” system based upon self-righteous (meritorious and boasting) works\textsuperscript{293} or the works of the Law of Moses that

\textsuperscript{281} If Sanders’ “covenantal nomism” is so clear and obvious from Judaic literature and if a new reading of Paul is so clear and obvious from Romans and Galatians, then why so many “new perspectives” (plural)? Please tell me which one I am to pick. And please explain to me why I am to accept Sanders’ Judaism, but not Sanders’ Paul.
\textsuperscript{282} Luke 1-3 (see especially Luke 1:17, 67-79); Romans 9:27; 11:5
\textsuperscript{283} Acts 13:43; 14:1; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:4, 7-11, 18-21, 24-28; 19:1-7, 8-20; 28:17-24
\textsuperscript{284} Luke 16:14-15; 18:9-12; Romans 2:17-29; 9:31-32; 10:3
\textsuperscript{285} John 12:40; Acts 19:9; Romans 2:5-8; 11:7; 2 Corinthians 3:14
\textsuperscript{286} Acts 13:40-41; 28:25-27
\textsuperscript{287} Luke 11:48
\textsuperscript{288} Matthew 23:13; Luke 11:52
\textsuperscript{290} Acts 13:40-41; 28:25-27
\textsuperscript{291} Acts 7:53
\textsuperscript{293} Ephesians 2:9; Romans 4:5; 9:11; 11:6; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5
These disobedient Jews rejected Jesus — the stone — their only means of salvation. They also rejected those who preached Jesus to them.

5) Some Jews were willing to humbly submit to a “law” system based upon an obedient (work of) faith in Jesus Christ that does justify. Both Jews and Gentiles humbly obeyed the gospel. Some Gentiles (including proselytes who had converted to Judaism) were obedient to the gospel while others were disobedient. Both Jews and Gentiles who “turned unto the Lord” were members of the “church” and were called “Christians.”

6) Both Jews with the Law and Gentiles without the Law were sinners (“as many as have sinned,” Romans 2:12) in need of forgiveness, saving through faith in Jesus Christ, and obedience to the gospel. The basic need for all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, was (and still is) salvation from sin. The preaching of Paul and the other apostles met this need. The preaching of the early church was not simply a message in favor of Gentiles being included in God’s salvation, but also a message against Jews who would not obey Jesus.

7) The saving gospel of Jesus Christ was preached to both Jews and Gentiles. God, not being a respecter of persons, would save both Jews and Gentiles through Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles. God wants all mankind (both Jews and Gentile) to be saved the same way. All mankind is in need of God’s gospel that saves, all mankind faces God’s wrath because of their unrighteousness, all mankind will face God’s judgment by Jesus.

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294 Romans 3:19-21, 27-28; 9:31-32 (see especially 9:31); Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:2, 5, 10, 11, 21; 5:4; Philippians 3:6, 9
295 Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Acts 4:10-12, 25-28; 5:30-31; Romans 9:32; 1 Peter 2:7.
297 Acts 10:34-35; 20:21; Romans 1:17; 3:21-28 (see especially 3:27); 4:5, 9, 11, 13; 9:30; 10:4-6;
298 Galatians 2:16; 3:12, 24; 5:5; Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 11:7
299 Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 11:1; 14:1; 18:4; 19:10,17; 20:21; 1 Corinthians 1:24-31
300 Matthew 23:15; Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43
302 28:28-31; 1 Thessalonians 1:2 – 2:13
303 Acts 14:5; 17:32-33; 19:23-41; 24:24-25; Romans 11:30; 1 Corinthians 1:18-23; 1 Peter 2:7-8
304 Acts 11:19-26
305 Acts 2:38; 3:19, 26; 5:30-31; 20:21; 24:24; Romans 1:16 - 3:23 (see especially Romans 2:12-16; 3:9, 23); Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:13
307 Acts 6:11-14, 51-54; 21:21, 28
309 11:19-30; 13:5, 13-52; 24:24-25; Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:16; 1 Timothy 2:3-7; 3:16; 2
310 Timothy 1:9-11; 2:8-13; Titus 2:11-14
311 Acts 10:34-43; 15:11; Galatians 1:4
312 Galatians 1:4; 4:4-5
313 Romans 1:1,9,15-16
314 Romans 1:18-32; 2:17-3:18
Christ, all mankind stands under the condemnation of sin, all mankind will be justified by God’s grace, Jesus’ blood, and man’s faith in Jesus Christ apart from works (of law), all mankind (now as a Christian) is to live apart from a sinful life, all mankind can be a part of God’s called and elect children (remnant) of promise by grace through faith apart from works (of law), and all mankind (now as a Christian) is to live daily in service to God.

9) Some Jewish brethren (“they that were of the circumcision”) had to be convinced that Gentiles could be saved without compliance to circumcision.

10) Paul, before his conversion, was part of a group of Jews who zealously put Christians to death. He was a devout Jew and Pharisee who had confidence that he was blameless and righteous because of his own Jewish works of the Law. But he gave that up to obey Jesus Christ.

11) Paul was a sinner who was converted to Jesus Christ. He became a “disciple” of Jesus. He continued to practice (without binding on others) elements of Judaism when it was expedient, but he became a member of “the Way which they call a sect.”

12) Paul preached to Jews first even though he was given a special commission and call to preach to the Gentiles. He preached “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” When Paul preached to the Jews first and they rejected his message, he afterward went and preached to the Gentiles. Many Jews and Gentiles rejected Paul’s preaching and he was persecuted heavily by them for preaching the

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311 Romans 2:1-16
312 Romans 3:9, 23
313 Romans 3:19-31; 4:1-25; 5:1-21
316 Romans 12:1 – 16:27
319 Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 22:3-5; 23:1-6; 26:2-5; Galatians 1:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:3
320 Philippians 3:1-6, 9
321 Philippians 3:7-11
322 Acts 22:16; 1 Timothy 1:12-16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:3-7
324 Acts 9:26-30
326 Acts 9:2; 24:14-16
329 Romans 1:16
331 1 Corinthians 1:23
gospel. Paul defended his break with Judaism and his apostolic ministry in the midst of this persecution.

13) Paul pled with his unsaved Jewish brethren and with Gentiles to put their faith in Jesus Christ and obey the “righteousness of God” found in the gospel – a gospel revealed to him by Jesus Christ.

14) Paul preached that all have sinned and Jesus died for all mankind and provides all individuals, both Jew and Gentile with forgiveness of sins.

15) Paul preached salvation (justification) by grace conditioned upon an obedient (work of) faith in Jesus Christ. The salvation (justification) of mankind is not based upon man’s works or works of law. Salvation (justification) is based upon God’s grace through man’s faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian’s life of salvation in the Spirit will lead to walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

16) Paul, without being anti-Semitic, severely rebuked some Jews for holding to the Law and some Jewish Christians for binding circumcision and other matters of the Law on Gentiles. Paul used a harsh tone with Jews and Gentiles when necessary. He warned those who seek to be justified by the law that they would be severed from Christ.

17) Paul presented a positive picture of the Law that had passed away, but this Law could also be fulfilled in some respects both personally and in general. Paul taught that the once life-giving elements of Judaism that Jews had experienced for 1500 years (election, the Law, and atoning sacrifice) had been abolished. These

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334 Romans 9:1-5; 10:1-4
335 Romans 1:17; 3:21-22; 10:3 Philippians 3:9
336 Galatians 1:11-12; 1 Corinthians 2:1-16
337 Romans 3:9, 23; Galatians 1:4; 2:20; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14
338 Acts 26:20; Romans 1:5; 2:10; 4:16; 5:2; 16:25-26; Galatians 5:6; 6:10; Ephesians 2:4-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Titus 3:3-7
339 Ephesians 2:9; Philippians 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5
340 Romans 3:20, 27, 28; Galatians 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10
341 Galatians 2:16-21; 3:1-14; 5:3-6; Ephesians 2:1-10; Philippians 3:4-9; Titus 3:3-7; 2 Timothy 1:9; 3:15
342 Galatians 5:13 – 6:10
343 Romans 3:1-2; 9:1-5; 10:1-2; 11:1,28
345 Galatians 1:6-9; 2:4; 3:1; 4:8-20; 5:7-12; 6:12-13
346 Galatians 5:1-4
347 Romans 7:1-6; 2 Corinthians 3:4-18; Galatians 3:15-25; 4:21-31; Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:11-23
349 Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 9:8-9; Galatians 5:14
basic elements of Judaism have all been replaced and remodeled in Jesus Christ: election in Christ, the law of Christ, and the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

18) Paul preached that both Jews and Gentiles would be God’s people, the church “in Christ,” the new “Israel of God,” the “one body” of Christ, and “sons of God.” Both Jews and Gentiles entered the one body of Christ through baptism. After entering the body of Christ, circumcision was not to be set forth as a condition of salvation, nor was it to be a dividing factor between Jews and Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles were not to bind their scruples upon each other, including matters pertaining to the Old Law.

19) Paul preached that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are to live under the law of Christ and they are to live by “good works” of obedience. God will take into account all works, both good and evil, in the judgment day.

Conclusion

In closing, let me offer some reminders and cautions. I remind us that what often is read and discussed in the seminaries and among the evangelicals is not what we should be reading and discussing, and for good reason. The “new” things that are read and discussed in these places do not accord with Bible truth. The NPP is popular with scholars and seminary students. One of the chief reasons for this is the popularity of N.T. Wright. He is considered a brilliant scholar without being boring or pedantic. He is witty, entertaining, and he has the ability to popularize his views.

I caution Bible students about taking up with some aspect of the NPP. Some may want to focus on Sanders’ caricature of Judaism, but not on his perspective of Paul. Some may want to take the NPP on Judaism, but not the NPP on Paul. How can you agree with Sanders on Judaism, but disagree with Dunn or N.T. Wright on Paul? Dunn’s agreement with Sanders’ Judaism is what led him to have his understanding of Paul. The NPP understanding of Paul is directly related to Sanders’ particular understanding of Judaism and vise-versa. You cannot have one (the NPP Judaism) without the other (the NPP Paul). They stand or fall together.

350 Romans 8:33; 16:13; 2 Timothy 2:10
351 Romans 8:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2
352 Romans 3:24-25; 8:3; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:23-25; 2 Corinthians 5:21
353 Galatians 1:22; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:11-21; 3:6; 21; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:1
354 Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:11-21; 4:4-6; Colossians 1:18-22
355 Romans 3:29; 9:24; 10:12; 1 Corinthians 1:24; 12:13; Galatians 3:7; 28; 5:16; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 3:11
356 Galatians 3:26; 6:7
357 Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12
358 1 Corinthians 7:17-24; Galatians 3:26; 5:6; 6:15; Colossians 3:11
359 Romans 14:1 – 15:7; 1 Corinthians 8:7-13; 10:23-33; Colossians 2:16-23
360 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2
361 Romans 2:6, 9-10; 1 Corinthians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 11:15; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Timothy 4:14; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14
Others want to take the parts of the NPP that they already agree with and leave the rest. Through the years, errors have been propagated because of imbalance like this. A Bible student wants to focus primarily on a particular aspect of Paul’s teaching (e.g., faith, not works; the group, not the individual) and ignore or downplay some other aspect of his teaching (e.g., what Paul has to say about individuals being saved). Like the Pharisees of old, we need to be careful not to focus on what we want to emphasize and leave other matters undone (Mt. 23:23). I fear that some today, in an attempt to strain out the Protestant gnat, have swallowed the NPP camel (Mt. 23:24).

I caution Bible students about looking at Calvinist evangelical attacks against the NPP as evidence that the NPP is true. How can the Calvinists’ opposition to the NPP show us that we need the NPP? Yes, Calvinists (like our Baptist friends) have rightly recognized that the NPP, if correct, means that Paul was not teaching what they have always taught. And it is true that Paul was not teaching Calvinism. However, that does not mean that the NPP, if correct, means that Paul was teaching what we have always taught. We have not always taught some of the basic tenants of the NPP. So, we are going to change our teaching to match the NPP to which Calvinists are so opposed? What kind of convoluted approach to Bible study is that?

While some Bible students might find the NPP new and exciting (the final blow to Calvinism?), it is important to remember that the NPP for evangelicals has been around since the late 1970’s. The NPP is no longer new to some scholars. The NPP has grown old for some of them and is on its way out. They are already looking for something “newer” than the new perspective.362

Like Israel’s call for “a king like the nations” (1 Samuel 8), we all need to be careful not to pick up ideas that have already been around for years. I would caution anyone who desires to board this passing NPP bandwagon to keep in mind that as you hop on in the front, many evangelicals have already hopped off in the back, and you would do well to ask why. Additionally, read 1 Corinthians 1:12 again in light of this current discussion of Paul. Be careful in your quest to understand Paul that you do not inadvertently proclaim to others: “I am of Sanders,” “I am of Dunn,” or “I am of Wright.”

Collin Hansen offers the following insight that is helpful to us all:

Seminary is not reality. That much became obvious to me the moment I met my classmates and began looking over syllabi for classes on Greek, Hebrew, missions, and biblical theology. No congregational ministry can replicate the time seminary affords for intense focus on technical but important matters of theology. Professors toss around fascinating innovations and insights. Students, though often

362 Current Pauline studies are now focusing on understanding the Roman Empire, not Judaism, as the interpretive backdrop to Paul’s epistles. It is no longer about Paul and Judaism. It is about Paul and the Empire, or, Caesar verses Christ; see Jesus Is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies edited by Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modika (IVP Academic, 2013). See also Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society (Trinity Press International, 1997) edited by Richard Horsley.
downtrodden by the gravity and complexity of their tasks, suddenly shine as they behold great truths about God.

The average churchgoer will never have the time or inclination to focus on theology. Even in our most rigorous churches, the cares of this world interfere. Perhaps an encounter with a seminary graduate has convinced them that theology belongs to arrogant eggheads. As a result, what seems so important in seminary produces blank stares in the pews.

For evangelicals—Christians committed to a high view of Scripture—this is a discouraging scenario. More than that, it’s dangerous. Christian colleges and seminaries can grow detached from the churches they serve. Hazardous ideas can percolate for decades without so much as a nod from most churchgoers. And parents wonder why their undergraduate daughter or seminary son graduates with odd ideas about everything. So they blame the theologians and the cycle continues.363

Bible students that we are acquainted with today will most likely not know much about the NPP until someone among us believes it necessary to introduce it to them.364 Our aim should be to go to the scriptures first and then understand all of the NPP (not just Sanders’ Judaism) as best we can in light of what the scriptures teach. The NPP based upon a new understanding of Judaism does not accurately represent the inspired picture of Judaism found in the New Testament. Many elements of the NPP do not accurately represent Paul’s inspired message to Jews and Gentiles found in his epistles. So, I leave you with this closing admonition: *ad fontes*.

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364 I polled several gospel preachers in preparation for this lecture. Some of these men have post-graduate degrees in religion and are well read outside the Bible and they had not heard of the NPP. The NPP has been around some 30 years and these men had not heard of it! Could that say something about worth of the NPP for us, or lack thereof?


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**Bibliography for Further Study**

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**Bibliographies for NPP Study**

