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The New Perspective from Paul¹

Mark A. Seifrid

1. THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

IT IS A real question as to whether it is proper to speak of a “new perspective on Paul.” For at least thirty years New Testament scholarship—especially in the English-speaking world—has been occupied with it in one way or another.² The

literature on the topic shows no sign of abating. Whether one likes it or not, engagement is necessary. The implications of “the new perspective” for the reading of Paul (and, in fact, of the entire New Testament) are so fundamental that unless a new paradigm emerges it is likely to remain controversial for a long time to come. Its continuing attractions lie not merely in the questions it raises concerning the way in which Christians have read Paul, but also in the way in which it speaks to contemporary concerns about Christian life in the post-modern world. The proponents of

community, and the need for Christian ethical engagement in a way that we must take seriously.

Although it had significant precedents, the “new perspective on Paul” can be said to have had its birth in E. P. Sanders’s study *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.³ This comparison of Paul with early Jewish understandings of salvation gave Sanders’s work a measure of influence that none of his predecessors enjoyed and called for a fundamental revision of most contemporary Protestant interpretations of Paul. In some measure, therefore, it also challenged the reformational reading of Paul which informed them.⁴ We should by all means welcome this impetus to reexamine the apostle’s relationship to the Judaism of his day and to “the traditions of his fathers” (cf. Gal 1:14). The Protestant portraits of Paul against which Sanders reacted (and which often still predominate among Christian laity) were in need of revision. Even if one remains skeptical of the tendency of proponents of the “new perspective” to single out Luther as a myopic introvert, a reexamination of the reformational reading of Paul can be a healthy exercise.

What made this “new perspective on Paul” so revolutionary? In the first place, Sanders offered

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the “new perspective on Paul” point to the inclusivity of the gospel, the centrality of Christian

a new paradigm for understanding early Jewish soteriology, which he described as “covenantal nomism.” According to Sanders, with only minor exceptions, the early Jewish sources suppose that all those who belong to the covenant God established with Abraham are destined for salvation. Only those who rebel openly and without repentance are excluded from this covenant. The obedience that the law required, especially when it is seen within the context of repentance and sacrificial offerings, was only a matter of “staying in” the salvation already given to Israel, not a matter of “getting in” to the realm of that salvation.

As a result, Sanders called into question those portraits of Paul which imagined that his conversion had to do with relief from the demands of the law or anxiety over the securing of his eternal state through his good works. This was by no means the only picture of Judaism which Christian biblical scholarship had produced, but it was one of the most prominent by the end of the nineteenth century and served for many as the unexamined basis for the interpretation of Paul.⁵ Sanders pointed to many places in early Jewish writings in which God’s election of Israel was regarded as the sole and secure basis of salvation. In his reading of the materials, the concept of grace in early Judaism seemed to look much the same as that which many Christians attribute to Paul. Paul’s break with his past appeared inexplicable on the basis of the older way of interpreting him. The problem lay in the misconception of “grace.”

Initially at least, Sanders presented the gap between Paul’s past and present as a sort of “leap of faith.” Before his encounter with Christ, the Lord’s election of Israel provided the promise of salvation. Afterwards, he knew Christ only as the Savior of the world. Some new explanation had to be found for the change of direction in Paul’s life, and for the dispute he carries out in his letters with other Jewish Christians concerning the law, righteousness, faith, and the salvation of Gentiles. That new explanation had already been provided. Even before Sanders’s study, Krister Stendahl had raised

objections to the usual way of interpreting Paul’s understanding of justification as the freedom of forgiveness for a guilt-ridden conscience.⁶ The true purpose of Paul’s teaching on justification was the acceptance of Gentiles into the people of God as equals alongside their Jewish brothers and sisters. The doctrine had to do with *mission* not *salvation*.⁷ This conversion of Paul’s understanding of justification into a theology of mission has been taken up by virtually all the proponents of the “new perspective on Paul,” even if they sometimes affirm that for Paul justification *also* has to do with the salvation of fallen human beings.⁸ In varying ways, interpreters subsume Paul’s understanding of “justification” within God’s election of Israel, an election in which Gentiles now may share. According to this reading, Paul rejects the validity of “works of the law” for salvation, not because they are inadequate to fulfill the law, but because they are “boundary markers” which separate Jews from Gentiles, and thus contradict the universality of the gospel.⁹ Not the salvation of the individual, but the community of those being saved stands alone at the center of interest. In its *ethnic* concern the “new perspective” interprets Paul’s gospel in *ethical* terms. Most proponents of the “new perspective” regard the reformational understanding of the gospel as lacking ethical relevance, which they then seek to correct in a fresh reading of Paul.

It is a question, however, whether this reading of Paul brings us anything fresh. Who wouldn’t choose inclusion and acceptance over rejection and prejudice? Was an encounter with the risen Christ necessary for *this* change of mind? Is the image of early Judaism as exclusionary and nationalistic any more accurate or sympathetic than older views? In the end, the “new perspective” seems to offer nothing more than an old, insipid moralism. As we shall remind ourselves in a moment, Paul’s letters provide a quite different picture—one in which a real freshness and newness is present here and now within the fallen world. That is certainly the case with Paul’s conversion, as he describes it in his letters. His absolute break with his past

is paradoxically joined to his continuity with it. Otherwise he could not speak of Jesus as Israel's Messiah or identify himself with his Jewish brothers and sisters "according to the flesh." Nor is it explicable in merely moral terms. Paul describes it as an act of the Creator who caused light to shine out of darkness, and who so spoke and acted to create in his heart the light of "the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). Paul's faith was a gift given to him by God in Christ, in which he was granted "a new perspective" on the whole of life and the world, including his Jewish identity and "the works of the law" in which that identity was expressed. It is this "new perspective" from Paul which will guide our following reflections.

Before we turn to Paul, we must note another dimension of the current debate. Some representatives of "the new perspective" (along with others) find the basis of Paul's theology in a "salvation-historical scheme." Stendahl himself appeals to this category. It is no longer the time of the law, it is the time of Christ.¹⁰ Biblical revelation itself now appears to move from a narrow particularism to the universality of the gospel. This form of the new perspective calls into question not only early Judaism, but the Old Testament as well. We shall offer brief reflections on this problematic proposal later. Here it is sufficient to observe that an appeal to a mere temporal shift is hardly sufficient to explain the juxtaposition of the fallen world and the new creation which appears regularly in Paul's letters, or Paul's own break with his past. The "salvation-historical" element of Paul's theology (if the name is appropriate at all) is embedded within the larger framework of the justifying work of the Creator, whose effective word bridges past, present and future.¹¹

2. THE NEW PERSPECTIVE FROM PAUL

As we have noted, the "new perspective" proceeds from the view that early Jewish soteriology may be described as what E. P. Sanders has called "covenantal nomism." God's gracious election

of Israel *precedes* his giving the law which was to guide Israel's life, and which it was obligated to obey. Keeping the law is not a "getting in" to salvation, but a "staying in" a salvation already given. Although this interpretation of the Jewish sources has received decisive challenges in the last decade, many scholars have continued merrily to read Paul out of the paradigm that Sanders offered.¹² In so doing, they must overlook the apostle's own new perspective on the world. It is to this new perspective from Paul that we now turn.

2.1. PAUL'S NEW PERSPECTIVE ON GRACE

It is not at all clear that the way in which proponents of the new perspective use the term "grace" corresponds to Paul's new perspective on "grace." For the apostle, "grace" is not dependent merely on the temporal priority of God's choice of Israel. Grace is the justification of the ungodly (Rom 4:4-8). The objects of grace are "all" who have sinned, those who in radical rebellion and disobedience have turned away from God, the good and loving Creator (Rom 3:23). It is these whom God "justifies freely *by his grace* through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24). As is well-known, but often overlooked in recent discussion, God's justifying work takes place not merely *prior* to works, but *apart* from works (Rom 3:21, 28; 4:6). Boasting in the law is excluded (Rom 2:17, 23; 3:27), not because it entails an ethnic particularism—Paul's rhetorical dialogue partner in Rom 2:17-29 is quite happy to share his imagined benefits with others—but because it is empty and unconsciously curved in upon itself.¹³ According to the apostle—who appeals to Scripture—"there is no one righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10-11; cf. Ps 14:3 = 53:4). "Works of the law" do not justify because as particular, outward acts they do not fulfill the requirement of the law to love God and neighbor (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:10-14; see Rom 13:8-14; Gal 5:13-15). "Works" cannot create anew the persons who perform them (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:14-21). Abraham and David are not models of piety, but of the justification of the

ungodly (Rom 4:1-8). The grace of God in Christ arrives where sin and death reign (Rom 5:12-21). It is only the “wretched person” who knows God’s grace in Christ (Rom 7:7-25). The Spirit gives life only where the law has put to death (2 Cor 3:6). This dynamic is not unique to Paul. It runs like a thread through the Scriptural narratives of God’s dealings with Israel (e.g., Deut 9:4-5; Ps 78:32-39; Hos 11:8-11).¹⁴ God’s grace justifies the human being, fallen under sin and condemned. Admittedly Sanders, along with others after him, understands that God’s grace to Israel includes the forgiveness of Israel’s sins, but Sanders explicitly excludes from the scope of “covenantal nomism” any open and defiant rebellion against God, any sin “with a high hand,” a rejection of the Lord’s covenant. According to the apostle, it is precisely this place in which all human beings, including Israel, find themselves! It is here, and only here, that we find God’s grace. This radical, unfathomable grace is found in the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ, who is God’s amazing, unanticipated answer to our rebellion. It becomes clear then, that the category of “covenantal nomism” obscures the issues at stake between Paul and his Jewish Christian opponents, his Jewish contemporaries, and his own past. The concept is so flexible that with the proper qualifications, we might describe Paul’s theology itself as an expression of “covenantal nomism.” For the apostle himself, the law itself comes to fulfillment in faith.¹⁵ “Covenantal nomism” is simply not sufficiently defined to serve as a tool by which to compare Paul with early Judaism.

How, then, shall we describe Paul’s relationship to the Judaism of his day? In the first place, it is worth reminding ourselves that Paul’s statements about Judaism are essentially statements about his own past. His judgments are not abstract and detached. They are bound up with his encounter with the risen Christ and expressed in his personal history as apostle to the Gentiles. Even as the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul did not abandon his Jewish identity, even if he was willing at times

to set it aside (1 Cor 9:19-23). Near the end of his apostolic mission, as he writes to the church in Rome, he quite consciously identifies himself as a member of the nation of Israel (e.g., Rom 9:1-5). His break with his past was not an abandonment of it, but a coming to see it in a new light. In the same way, it is worth remembering that in Paul’s churches the debates over “Jewishness” and over the law were in some measure still an *inner-Jewish debate* over the significance of God’s work in Jesus, the Messiah. Those who insisted that the Gentiles must Judaize saw themselves as followers of the Messiah. They nevertheless maintained their “old perspective” on the requirement of the law. It was Paul who had come to a “new perspective” on the law, Judaism, and the entire fallen world in the light of the risen Christ.

It was not Paul alone who came to a “new perspective.” For others, too, the eschatological work of God in Christ brought clarity to matters that formerly had remained obscure. It forced decisions that had not been necessary in the past. This crisis already took place in Jesus’ open fellowship with “sinners.” It reappeared dramatically in the dynamic spread of the gospel among Gentiles in Antioch and beyond. According to both Luke and Paul, it was this dynamic “people movement” which precipitated debate and division within the earliest Jewish Christian community.¹⁶ The proponents of the “new perspective” are thus entirely correct to insist that there was an ethnic dimension to Paul’s gospel of the justifying work of God in Christ. Yet it was not merely the inclusion of Gentiles within the promise of salvation for Israel which was at stake. It was rather the question as to what it means to believe Jesus as Messiah. Was obedience to the law *also* necessary for salvation along with faith in Jesus? Prior to the “entrance” of the Gentiles, Jewish believers did not have to face this question. They believed in Jesus as Messiah and remained faithful to the law. They did so as a matter of course, as part of their heritage and identity. According to the witness of Acts, that was also the case *after* the disputes over Gentile

circumcision and the law broke out.¹⁷ Paul himself had no problems with continuing Jewish observance of the law.¹⁸ We shall return to this point, the significance of which the advocates of the new perspective largely have missed. At the moment it is important to see that it was the spread of the gospel among Gentiles, first in Antioch and then in the Pauline mission that required Jewish believers in Jesus to face the question as to precisely where salvation was to be found. Is it to be found in Jesus alone, or is it also necessary to perform the demands of the law in order to be saved? It was precisely on this question that Peter failed at Antioch and Paul found it necessary to confront him (Gal 2:11-21). The meaning of the gospel had to be clarified afresh in the light of the Gentiles' embrace of the gospel. This background is more informative than most representatives of the "new perspective" have realized. Gentiles were notorious not only for their uncircumcision and for ignoring the Sabbath and the food laws, but also for their immorality and idolatry. This sort of conduct, or, conversely, the absence of it, also served as a "boundary marker" separating Jews and Gentiles, as is clear from the inclusion of this concern in the "apostolic decree" of Acts 15.¹⁹ If, however, idolatry and immorality may be included among the "boundary markers," it is clear that "boundary markers" have do to with something larger than ethnicity. The issue at stake is the capacity of the law to effect obedience—and that of the human being to do good. Gentile circumcision is an emblem of a decided stance on this question. One lives either by the power of the crucified and risen Lord, or by the power of the law. Paul is no advocate of idolatry and immorality.²⁰ According to the apostle, the new creation—the circumcision of the heart worked by the gospel—transcends the law of Moses that bears witness to it and effects true obedience in the human heart. That Paul's adversaries did not raise the issue of Gentile vices suggests that the conduct of Gentile believers was often, although obviously not always, without reproach.

Furthermore, to suppose that the advocates of Judaizing regarded Gentile believers as "outsiders" almost certainly misrepresents their perspective. Their "mission" after all took place among the congregations of believers in Jesus as Messiah, and not, so far as we know, in the many synagogues across the Roman world. Just as the strict (and, most likely, Pharisaic) Eleazar once warned King Izates that to read the things of the law and yet not do them represented great injustice and impiety (*Ant.* 20:44), so the advocates of Judaizing pressed the demand for circumcision upon Gentiles as a completion of that which already had begun. They did so not because they regarded these Gentiles as "outsiders," but rather because they viewed them as "insiders." Gentile "sinners" had become believers in the Messiah of Israel. Who could allow this intolerable contradiction of faith in the Messiah and disregard for complete submission to the law to continue?

The significance of this situation should not be underestimated. One cannot rightly charge Paul's opponents with a conscious, crass reliance upon works for their salvation, nor imagine that Paul did so prior to his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. In fact, so far as I can see, no Jewish writing from this period can be fairly construed in this way. If nothing else, the work of Sanders and others on early Judaism may well have sharpened our vision to see more clearly what the New Testament actually says about the early Judaism in which it is rooted. One can hardly imagine that the Judaism reflected in the pages of the New Testament was devoid of any conception of the grace of God, a theme which appears regularly in the Hebrew Scriptures. Indeed, in the very opening of the first Gospel, John the Baptist warns Pharisees against false confidence and presumption upon election (Matt 3:7-9). The self-righteous Pharisee at prayer in Jesus' parable in Luke 18:9-14 (who perhaps stands out as a characteristic image of them in the mind of most Christians) does not "boast" in self-achieved works but relies—however mistakenly—upon the grace of

God.²¹ Likewise, when Paul describes his identity as a Pharisee in Gal 1:14 and Phil 3:5-6, he does not recall a status based upon a bare appeal to works, but rehearses the privileges of his birth and national heritage, which his personal zeal only appropriated and actualized. *Only in retrospect*, that is, only in his new perspective, in the light of faith in the crucified and risen Messiah did he come to see that status as a fatal overestimation of himself as a fallen human being.

In other words, Paul's letters themselves suggest that in early Judaism an unresolved tension existed between the concepts of "grace" (or "election") and "works." This conclusion concerning early Judaism has been established elsewhere.²² Even when "works" were regarded as prerequisite to sharing in the age to come, a right standing with God and the hope of deliverance were attributed to God's mercy. The sources show that this could take place in diverse ways, ranging from the strict monergism of Qumran to the unconscious synergism of the Psalms of Solomon. It is understandable, then, that some early Jewish writings, especially the combative, apocalyptic writings, display diluted understandings of grace or an overestimation of the human being (even under grace), which stand at a clear distance from the hope of the Hebrew Scriptures.²³

At least three crucial observations emerge from this observation on the tension between "grace" and "works" in early Judaism. First, judging from the Lukan report in Acts, the earliest proclamation *announced* Israel's guilt and the need for forgiveness given through the crucified and risen Jesus. The call to faith in Jesus *clarified* the situation of the human being and the nature of God's grace in Jesus. Whatever those who heard the message might have thought about Israel's election and God's grace beforehand, it was the proclamation of Jesus that either brought them a fresh clarity concerning their faith, or called into question what they had believed and thought beforehand.²⁴

Second, the relationship between "faith" and

"works" was not resolved by a higher principle of grace or of human moral autonomy. This view was common in liberal Christianity, which regarded Christianity as the "absolute religion."²⁵ According to the witness of the apostle and the entire New Testament, in contrast, the demand of the law and the promises of God do not meet in a higher idea, but in an event, namely, the cross and resurrection of the Messiah.

Third, Paul's statements concerning grace, faith and works, the law, and the gospel *are directed to those who profess to be Christians*. The apostle invariably clarifies matters and draws distinctions in light of the cross that had become obscured in the minds of his readers and his opponents. As we have noted, Gentile acceptance of the gospel precipitated questions that might otherwise have remained unexplored. As proponents of "the new perspective" have been quick to point out, the apostle generally speaks of faith, works, circumcision, and the law when addressing the question of the place of the Gentiles within the people of God.²⁶ As we have seen, the issue at stake here was not *simply* ethnic or racial. The meaning of the cross and the resurrection, the identity of God, and the nature of faith are bound up with the place of the Gentiles within the people of God. The apostle's amazement at the Galatians and the anathemas he pronounces in his letter to them are in large measure intended to awaken his readers to the nature of actions of which they were otherwise unaware. They did not imagine that they were "withdrawing from the One who called them by grace" (Gal 1:6) or that in accepting circumcision they invalidated their relationship to Christ (Gal 5:4). The Jewish Christians who had instructed them had no intent of nullifying the cross, only of providing the grace offered there with what they regarded as its necessary supplement. Even the "boasting" which Paul rejects in Romans presupposes that the law had been given to Israel as a gift (Rom 2:17-24; 3:27-31). It is a false boasting because it misunderstands both human fallenness and the place of the creature before the Creator,

but Paul's argument by no means suggests that his Jewish contemporaries *consciously* made claims to self-righteousness (Rom 2:17-29). His subsequent statement that his Jewish contemporaries, "not knowing God's righteousness, sought to establish their own righteousness," does not represent an analysis of their psychological state, but a theological judgment on their aims he reached in the light of the cross (Rom 10:3). His description of righteousness as a "wage" which is a "debt" to be paid by God to the one who "works" (Rom 4:4-5) entails a distinction between "works" and "grace" that one simply does not find in rabbinic writings. One can certainly find affirmations of a coming reward for works and the study of Torah (e.g., m. Abot 2:14-16; m. Abot 6:5), but these are set in the context of statements concerning appeal for mercy (m. Abot 2:13), the nothingness of the human being (m. Abot 3:1), and even love for God apart from reward (m. Abot 1:3). Paul is able to distinguish sharply between "works" and "grace," only because of the event of the cross and resurrection, in which the law and its demands come to fulfillment. It is unlikely that he imagined that Jews or Jewish Christian readers thought of their relationship with God entirely in terms of a contract. Here as well as elsewhere he *is clarifying* for his readers the implications of making salvation contingent on the "works of the law." The same may be said for his brief, defining statement later in Romans, "if [the existence of a remnant] is by grace, it is no longer by works, since then grace is no longer grace" (Rom 11:6). Again and again, Paul finds it necessary to distinguish between grace and works, between law and the gospel. The misunderstanding which he combats did not entail the supplanting of grace by works, but a mixing and dilution of one with the other, a confusion that was largely unconscious and unconsidered. This problem was not unique to early Judaism but was also present in earliest Christianity. It is a problem with which we Christians still must wrestle within our own hearts. Paul's response to it is nothing other than his "new perspective" given to him in

his encounter with the crucified and risen Christ.

2.2. PAUL'S NEW PERSPECTIVE ON WORKS

The rethinking of Paul's teaching on justification has brought with it a rethinking of his ethics, particularly the relationship between justification and final judgment.²⁷ The increasing discussion of this question may be regarded as the most significant recent development of "the perspective." Is it true that the message of justification which brings the forgiveness of sins is sufficient for salvation? Is this message Paul's message?

As we have noted, E. P. Sanders already drew a distinction in early Jewish understandings of salvation between "getting in" (by God's electing grace) and "staying in" (by some measure of obedience).²⁸ Some of the more prominent representatives of the "new perspective" have been ready to suggest that Paul himself operates with the same understanding of salvation. One is initially justified by faith, but one's works shall finally count toward salvation in the final judgment.²⁹ Or, in another scheme, justification is nothing other than God's judgment that we are truly human persons, who have faith and are faithful to him.³⁰ The fresh recognition that according to the witness of Paul (as well as the rest of the New Testament) believers must face an unqualified final judgment is welcome. Protestant interpreters too often have regarded such unwelcome words as hypothetical statements or have relegated them to secondary status ("a judgment for rewards"). Nevertheless, the radical revisionism of the "new perspective" has failed to recognize the full dimensions of what Paul means when he speaks of the gospel as "God's power for salvation." The "circumcision of the heart" by the Spirit is nothing other than God's eschatological act, the new creation of the human being.³¹ The new obedience of the believer is nothing other than the newness of the resurrected life at work in the present.³² The life we grasp by faith in Jesus Christ brings a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). God's justifying work in the crucified and risen Lord brings us *beyond final judgment*

to the new creation and brings the gift of the Spirit and the life of the resurrection to us *here and now*. We are carried through the final judgment by the life beyond judgment which we possess in Jesus Christ. Here there is a separation of the person from their works that only the gospel can effect (1 Cor 3:15). Those unwilling to accept this paradox will never understand the radical confidence of Paul in the lordship of the risen Christ, who by his power will cause all those whom he has purchased and won to stand at the final judgment (Rom 14:4, 5-12). This must be said against all those who would have it otherwise: Christ's lordship is *without qualification* a saving lordship. Judgment comes only to those who reject the crucified and risen Lord. The criterion of the final judgment is nothing other than the gospel itself.³³

2.3. PAUL'S NEW PERSPECTIVE ON ISRAEL

One of the primary concerns of representatives of "the new perspective" has been to provide an adequate account of the *communal* dimension of Paul's gospel. Sanders's work gave further impetus to this concern, which was already present in Stendahl's essay. In his original work, Sanders left the question hanging as to how Paul's faith in Christ as Savior of the world was to be reconciled with his former pursuit of the law. Yet Paul's debate with his early Jewish contemporaries had to be explained somehow. One of the solutions to this problem was to argue that it was not the salvation of the individual, but the salvation of Israel which was the primary concern of Paul's gospel. The nation saw itself as still enduring the exile to Babylon, still left in its guilt and awaiting the fulfillment of promise. That promise, Paul announced, was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him the exile of Israel came to an end. At the same time, the apostle radically redefined "Israel" in Jesus and his resurrection. It is no longer *ethnic* Israel which shares in salvation, but an *inclusive Israel*, the whole people of God, Jew and Gentile alike.³⁴ It was this inclusivity which proved to be a stumbling block to Paul's contem-

poraries. They could not accept the idea that Gentiles could be saved without Judaizing.

Ironically, this reading remains an essentially psychologizing interpretation of Paul who now laments not his own guilt, but that of the nation. Consequently, it cannot deal adequately with Paul's conversion as the *unexpected reversal* of his aims.³⁵ Here again, the new perspective on Paul cannot comprehend the new perspective *from* Paul. It is likewise difficult to think that most first-century Jews, especially the religious leaders saw *themselves* still in guilt and exile. In the Gospels, the resistance to John the Baptist's call to repentance, the complaints of the Pharisees concerning Jesus' free association with "sinners," and the attempt of the religious leaders to maintain the *status quo* all speak against this interpretation of early Judaism. The strong attraction which Judaism held for Paul's converts in Galatia and elsewhere is hard to explain if Israel as a whole was generally lamenting its condition.³⁶ Early Jewish writings similarly give evidence of variety and nuance in Jewish self-understanding in this period.³⁷ The Scroll of Fasting (*Megillat Ta'anit*), for example, marks the celebration of Hasmonean *victories* within Jewish life, days of celebration on which one was *not* to fast. There had been moments of triumph after the return to the land, even if the prophetic promises had not yet appeared in their fullness. The same perspective appears in the Maccabean literature.³⁸

Furthermore, the idea that the "exile" of the people of God simply ended with Jesus' resurrection overruns Paul's realistic understanding of the continuing reality of sin and suffering which continues both within the creation and the lives of believers. The wretched person of Rom 7:7-25, the groaning of the creation (Rom 8:17-39), and the hope of Israel's salvation (Rom 11:25-27), speak against this sort of idealization of Jesus' resurrection. Salvation-history here as usual becomes a tool by which the present conflict between the fallen world and the new creation is made manageable and subordinated to an ideal. The recognition

of our creaturely existence in all its concreteness and particularity is lost in a larger scheme. Yet it is this recognition that we are mere creatures which constitutes our salvation according to the apostle. God's work at Babel is not finished in this fallen world. Salvation does not erase the distinction between Jew and Gentile. It transcends it in the crucified and risen Jesus. Our confession of the Creator's unfathomable ways with us as Jews and Gentiles, giving us over to disobedience in order to work our salvation, is an essential element of our salvation. Only by doing violence to the apostle can we force him into supersessionism. He expects the Gentile mission to come to an end and the salvation of Israel "in the flesh" as the Creator's last act on the stage of human history (Rom 11:25-27).

We already have noted another fundamental problem with the "new perspective." According to virtually all its representatives, Paul's teaching on justification was intended to defend the right of Gentile believers to share in the blessings of salvation which Jews had come to regard as their private possession. In rejecting the "works of the law" Paul was rejecting a nationalistic claim, the placement of "boundary markers" around the grace of God.

Again this claim is highly problematic. To reject the idea that Israel was to be separate from the nations and the particular object of God's saving help is to reject the most basic element of the message of the Old Testament (e.g., Exod 20:1-3; Lev 11:44-45; Deut 7:1-6). Indeed, within Scripture Israel's salvation and well-being almost always arises from the destruction of its enemies in the most violent ways. Israel celebrates the drowning of the Egyptians. It is called to annihilate the seven nations which inhabit the promised land: the divine command makes the current strife in Gaza look like child's play (Deut 7:1-2). The psalms often rejoice in the destruction of Israel's enemies, not least in the graphic, imprecatory psalms (e.g., Ps 137:1-9). Admittedly, these texts present their own theological problems, which

deserve careful reflection. In any case, it is clear that the Old Testament presents anything other than an unconditioned universalism. There is an inner tension within the Hebrew Scriptures, in which the nations are both the objects of salvation and the objects of judgment. Israel, likewise, stands between idolatry in its mingling with the nations and pride in a false form of separation from them. According to Paul, that tension is resolved in the crucified and risen Christ. The nations enter into salvation only as conquered enemies (Rom 15:9; Ps 18:50; cf. Eph 4:8; Ps 68:19). Representatives of the "new perspective" wish instead to find the resolution in *an ideal* of universalism, which if followed out consistently, calls the message of Scripture itself into question.

One might also ask what would have been so bad about becoming Jewish. Would an ethnic "boundary marker" have been so very wrong? Paul's opponents in Galatia issued the invitation and laid out the welcome mat to his converts to take on circumcision and all its imagined benefits. They might well have thought of themselves as the vehicles through whom the ancient promise that the Gentiles would stream to Zion was being fulfilled.³⁹ The rhetorical figure with whom Paul debates in Rom 2:17-24 might be condescending, but he is unquestionably disposed to do good to his Gentile neighbors by imparting to them the wisdom of Torah. It should not escape our notice that Judaizing was a problem in Paul's churches precisely because it was attractive to his Gentile converts. If the problem merely had involved a demand from Jewish Christians that Gentile Christians must be circumcised, it conceivably would have ended if the Gentiles rejected, or at least resisted their demands. But that is not what Paul's letter to the Galatians is all about: Paul charges the Galatian Gentiles themselves, not the agitators, with "withdrawing from the one who called you" (Gal 1:6).

Finally, Paul use's of the expression "works of the law" in Galatians 2-3 and Romans 3-4 makes it quite clear that such "works" are *also* bound

up with the issue of true piety and standing with God.⁴⁰ It is this implicit claim to righteousness, *not merely ethnic implications*, which brings Paul to reject the “works of the law.” The apostle is quite happy that Jewish believers in Jesus continue in their observance of the law (e.g., 1 Cor 9:20), and even defends the practices of conservative Jewish Christians, although he is careful to define them as *adiaphora* (Rom 14:1-23).

3. THE “NEW PERSPECTIVE” IN PERSPECTIVE

The “new perspective on Paul” still has much to learn from the new perspective *from* Paul. In the understanding of the most fundamental elements of Paul’s theology, grace, works, and the people of God, representatives of the “new perspective” have failed to come to grips with the message of the apostle. This misunderstanding of Paul plays itself out in the failure of the “new perspective” to articulate its most basic concern for the formation of an inclusive community in the practical realism of the apostle. Whose culture determines the form of community life? Does unity demand uniformity? What place remained for Jewish practices in an increasingly Gentile church? It is precisely at this point that Paul becomes a defender of “the weak” Jewish Christians within the church at Rome. According to the apostle, the unity of believers is found *in Jesus Christ alone* and as long as the gospel spreads, must be accompanied by an outward diversity. Paul does not ask that believing Jews become indistinguishable from believing Gentiles.⁴¹ He rather sees that the common worship of God through Jesus Christ by *Jews and Gentiles* is a sign of hope, the presence of the eschaton (Rom 15:5-6). Paul is a defender of “ethnic boundary markers”! He insists only that we see them in the light of faith in Jesus Christ, in whom there is “neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal 3:28). Community, for Paul, does not rest in outward conformity to one another. The only true community is the community of justified sinners.⁴² From the apostolic perspective, the “new perspective”

is a failure, because it has misinterpreted the one article by which the church—of Jews and Gentiles—stands or falls.

ENDNOTES

¹Address given at the Northeast Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Auburn, MA, April 5, 2008, and at the Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Fergus Falls, MN, January 12, 2009. An earlier form of this essay appeared as “Die neue Perspektive auf Paulus im Lichte der neuen Perspektive des Paulus,” *Theologisches Gespräch* 31 (2007): 75-88. It also formed the basis of a useful discussion with Prof. Christof Landmesser’s graduate *Sozietät* at the Universität Tübingen.

²Among the many useful, critical responses to the “new perspective on Paul” see Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); Brendan Byrne, “Interpreting Romans Theologically in a ‘Post-New Perspective’ Perspective,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001) 227-42; Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Jews* (Library of Pauline Studies; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

³E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). This work was followed by a series of essays and monographs, in which Sanders himself embraces the “new perspective” that he elicited with his original work. See E. P. Sanders, “Jesus, Paul and Judaism,” *ANRW* 25, no. 1 (1982): 390-450; *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); “Paul on the Law, His Opponents, and the Jewish People in Philippians 3 and 2 Corinthians 11,” in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity 1* (ed. P. Richardson and D. Granskou; Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University, 1986), 75-90; *Paul, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991); *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (Philadelphia: SCM/Trin-

ity Press International, 1992).

⁴The effect of Sanders's work was varied. It did not spawn a single "new perspective," but a *variety* of perspectives on Paul. Yet, so long as this diversity of views is not overlooked, the common concern to revise the reformational reading of Paul, or at least to revise the history of its effects makes it legitimate to describe these new interpretations of Paul collectively as the "new perspective on Paul."

⁵On the interpretations of Judaism in critical biblical scholarship see Roland Deines, *Die Pharisäer: Ihr Verständnis im Spiegel der christlichen und jüdischen Forschung seit Wellhausen und Graetz* (WUNT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

⁶Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215. See now, too, his latest word on the subject, in which all the current concerns we have named above reappear. Krister Stendahl, *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Stephen J. Chester has nicely shown that Luther does not import his *Anfechtungen* into his reading of Paul. Indeed, the introspective conscience and preoccupation with one's spiritual state appear to be more characteristic of the modern era, and of the Puritans in particular. See Stephen J. Chester, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of Martin Luther: The Impact of Luther's *Anfechtungen* on His Interpretation of Paul," *Biblical Interpretation* 14 (2006): 508–36. See further Wilfried Härle, "Rethinking Paul and Luther," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006) 303–317; "Paulus und Luther: Ein kritischer Blick auf die 'New Perspektive'" *ZThK* 103 (2006) 362–93.

⁷Not infrequently it is argued that Paul *came* to his understanding of justification as a defense of the acceptance of the Gentiles which already had taken place. The roots of the argument go back at least to William Wrede. Is "justification" merely an ad hoc argument, a *Kampfeslehre* with only secondary implications? Even Jürgen Roloff, who ascribes considerable significance to Paul's understanding of justification gives priority in Paul's thought to baptism and the reception of the Spirit—but then treats

baptism and the gift of the Spirit as operating independently of the justifying work of God in Christ and the word of the gospel. See Jürgen Roloff, "Die lutherische Rechtfertigungslehre und ihre biblische Grundlage," in *Frühjudentum und Neues Testament im Horizont Biblischer Theologie* (ed. Wolfgang Kraus, Karl-Wilhelm. Niebuhr, and Lutz Doering; WUNT 162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 275–300, esp. 282–85.

⁸Despite his qualification that *in abstraction* Paul may be read to support a Reformational understanding, Francis Watson remains firmly rooted in this interpretation of Paul, even in his revised work. See *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 344–50.

⁹Michael Bachmann, *Sünder oder Übertreter: Studien zur Argumentation in Gal 2,15ff.* (WUNT 59; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) argues that "works of the Law" should be understood as "regulations of the Law" (and not the deeds of obedience which follow them). See also Michael Bachmann, "Keil oder Mikroskop? Zur jüngeren Diskussion um den Ausdruck 'Werke' des Gesetzes," in *Lutherische und neue Paulusperspektive Beiträge zu einem Schlüsselproblem der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion* (ed. Michael Bachmann and Johannes Woyke; WUNT 182; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 69–134. At least in his earlier work, he then appeals to salvation-historical categories to interpret Paul's break with the past: one must not transgress the standards of the new era in Christ, hence the regulations of the Law are not in force. As we have noted above, this solution is hardly satisfactory. Nor is it clear that one can separate "regulation" (or "demand") from obedience. Paul's argument in Gal 3:10–14, for example, presupposes this connection. Giorgio Jossa (*Jews or Christians?: The Followers of Jesus in Search of Their Own Identity* [trans. Molly Rogers; WUNT 202; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 89–102) similarly combines salvation-history with the proclamation of Christ's lordship as the determinative factors in Paul's theology.

¹⁰E.g. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, "Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre in der gegenwärtigen exegetischen Diskussion," in *Worum geht es in der Rechtfertigung-*

slehre: *Das biblische Fundament der "Gemeinsamen Erklärung" von katholischer Kirche und lutherischem Weltbund* (ed. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Thomas Söding; QD 180; Freiburg: Herder, 1999), 106–30; Bachmann, *Sünder oder Übertreter: Studien Zur Argumentation in Gal 2,15ff.*; Terence Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

¹¹On this question see especially Käsemann's response to Stendahl: Ernst Käsemann, "Justification and Salvation History," in *Perspectives on Paul* (trans. M. Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 60–78 = "Rechtfertigung und Heilsgeschichte im Römerbrief," in *Paulinische Perspektiven* (2nd. ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972), 108–39. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn has recently reviewed the exchange between Stendahl and Käsemann, "Juden und Heiden: Aspekte der Verhältnisbestimmung in den paulinischen Briefen, Ein Gespräch mit Krister Stendahl," in *Lutherische und neue Paulusperspektive*, 19–39.

¹²At least two major studies highlight its weaknesses. The first of these, a Tübingen dissertation by Friedrich Avemarie, investigates the significance of Torah in relation to "life" (both now and in the age to come) in the Tannaitic literature. See Friedrich Avemarie, *Tora und Leben: Untersuchungen zur Heilsbedeutung der Tora in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 55; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996). Over against the systematic presentations of Ferdinand Weber and Paul Billerbeck, whom Sanders had also subjected to a scathing critique, Avemarie easily demonstrates that the rabbis could speak of a variety of reasons for God's giving the Torah (for Israel's obedience to God and conformity to his character, as the mediatrix of creation and its preserver, for the joy and benefit of the human being, etc.) not merely that of acquiring merit and eschatological reward. At the same time, Avemarie's study shows that the "principle of retribution" remains basically unqualified in various statements in the rabbinic materials. See especially Avemarie, *Tora und Leben*, 291–445, "Erwählung und Vergeltung. Zur optionalen Struktur rabbinischer Soteriologie," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 108–26. Just as the "works righteousness" which Weber and

Billerbeck derived from the materials represented a distortion, so Sanders's synthesis (encapsulated in the expressions "covenantal nomism" and "staying in [sc. the covenant]"), which subordinates every statement to God's saving election of Israel, represents an illegitimate reduction of the materials. Rabbinic "theology" is aspectual in nature. It allows a tension between "election" and "retribution" to stand. Attempts at systematization in either direction do violence to the material. We shall return to this observation, which has enormous potential for explaining debates over the Law in earliest Christianity.

A second major study by the late Mark Adam Elliott, entitled *The Survivors of Israel*, examines the soteriology of a number of early Jewish apocalyptic writings, together with the Qumran materials, thus covering another portion of the materials included in Sanders's study of early Judaism, which now, strange to say, appears relatively short in comparison with the combination of the other two. See Mark Adam Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* runs 556 pages, Avemarie's *Tora und Leben*, 596, Elliott's *Survivors of Israel*, 664. Largely on account of the nature of the materials themselves, Elliott offers a more sharply profiled thesis than does Avemarie. Against the prevailing tendency to read Israel's election simply in nationalistic terms, Elliott argues that the history and literature of the second Temple period give evidence of "movements of dissent" which regarded the majority of the nation as apostate. The writings which such sectarian groups produced tended to speak not of a single, static covenant between God and Israel, but, in diverse ways, of covenants which were regarded as conditional and individualized in nature. For the sectarians, not only the exodus from Egypt, but also the flood narrative revealed the pattern of future salvation, which Elliott characterizes as "destruction-preservation" soteriology. The dissenters expected not the final salvation of Israel as a whole, but their own vindication over against the apostate nation. In this framework, the sort of "covenantal nomism" Sanders described has

evaporated into a sectarian exclusivism.

Elliott's work represents a fresh challenge to the assumption that first-century Judaism can be adequately explained by the form of Judaism which we find in the rabbinic materials. Quite clearly, some of the writings which Elliott examines could very well draw lines between insiders and outsiders within Israel on the basis of proper adherence to the Law. The apocalypses, Jubilees and the Qumran material provide him with the best evidence. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, are more debatable. In my judgment, the Psalms of Solomon also provide evidence of an exclusivistic soteriology. In this respect, Elliott's work again shows how tremendously flexible and, therefore, inappropriate Sanders's category of "covenantal nomism" turns out to be, since Sanders finds a way to subsume everything he examines into his paradigm, aside from the telling exception of 4 Ezra. On this topic see D. A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume I: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; WUNT 2/140; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 544-45. The "sectarian" writings, with their exclusivistic soteriology must somehow, too, be comprehended within any legitimate picture of first-century Judaism. Elliott's work effectively reopens an old debate which goes back at least to George Foot Moore's description of a "normative Judaism" drawn primarily from the haggadic materials. For an early critique of Moore which points to the significance of the pseudepigrapha, see Frank C. Porter "Judaism in New Testament Times," *Journal of Religion* 8 (1928): 30-62. Moore's portrait of Judaism stood in stark contrast with Wilhelm Bousset's *Die Religion des Judentums*, who took the apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic materials to be representative of a stream of an "unofficial" and "populist" piety, which flowed alongside the "official" teaching. See Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther und Reichard, 1903). The third edition, which was reworked by Hugo Greßmann, appeared as *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (HNT 21; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

1926). Although Moore distanced himself from any claim to have provided a comprehensive description of early Judaism, his work was generally treated as if he had done so. In placing basically all of "Palestinian" Jewish literature under the large umbrella of "covenantal nomism," Sanders effectively attempted to settle that question, a question which Elliott's work reopens. This is so despite Elliott's challenge to Bousset's claim that the pseudepigrapha remained essentially "nationalistic" in orientation. See *The Survivors of Israel*, 45-46.

While discussion of the *Sitz im Leben* of the "sectarian" writings is inevitably endless, the nuanced description of first-century Judaism which Roland Deines has offered has much to commend it. Roland Deines, *Die Phariseer ihr Verständnis im Spiegel der christlichen und jüdischen Forschung seit Wellhausen und Graetz* (WUNT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 534-55; "The Pharisees Between 'Judaisms' and 'Common Judaism,'" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume I*, 443-504. There are good reasons for assuming the basic validity of Josephus's description of first-century Judaism as being comprised of three streams: Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes, of which the Pharisees were by far the most influential group. They should not, however be regarded as a closed, exclusive "sect," but an inclusive movement which existed for the nation as a whole. Among the people there was wide approval of the Pharisaic ideal of adherence to the Law, but varying degrees of conformity in practice. It was a broad enough movement that it could encompass a number of sectarian groups (who produced and consumed various apocalyptic writings) without being identified with any one of them. If this description of early Judaism is roughly correct, it reveals that under certain conditions or in the face of certain questions, it was quite possible for pious Jews to insist upon adherence to the Law as a condition for final salvation. In doing so, furthermore, they by no means dismissed or negated divine election or grace, but simply viewed it as ultimate and prior to human works. The Law is the Lord's gift to Israel, the means by which it shares in life. Again, with the proper qualifications, we

might describe them all as examples of “covenantal nomism.”

¹³The argument of Rom 2:17-5:11 shows that Paul does not presuppose that his Jewish dialogue partner *consciously* boasts in himself. Quite the opposite. The boasting which Paul rejects is a boasting in God (Rom 2:17). Its self-incurvation emerges only as Paul exposes its unrealistic and optimistic estimation of the human being, and sets it in contrast with the boasting in *hope* of the glory of God which is present through and in Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1-5). Before all else, we must remind ourselves that Paul writes for Christians in Rome, whom he instructs and warns concerning their own weaknesses. We shall return to this point.

¹⁴On this topic, see Otfried Hofius, “‘Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen’ als Thema biblischer Theologie,” in *Paulusstudien* (WUNT 51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 121–47.

¹⁵E.g., Rom 2:17-19; Rom 8:1-11; 1 Cor 7:19.

¹⁶Acts 11:19-26; 15:1-29; Gal 2:11-21.

¹⁷E.g., Acts 21:18-26.

¹⁸E.g., Rom 14:1-23; 1 Cor 7:17-20; Gal 5:6; cf. Acts 16:1-3.

¹⁹Acts 15:20,29; 21:25.

²⁰Wlfrid Härle makes this point nicely in “Paulus und Luther: Ein kritischer Blick auf die ‘New Perspective,’” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 103 (2006): 370.

²¹“God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of the people, greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or like this toll-collector. I fast twice a week. I tithe all that I acquire” (Luke 18:11-12). Simon Gathercole’s interpretation of boasting and of Rom 1:18-3:20 in particular therefore has to be qualified: it is not at all clear that Paul’s dialogue partner in Rom 2:17-29 consciously trusts in his own works by trusting in the Law. See Simon Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 197-215.

²²See n. 12.

²³Early Jewish Christian apologetic outlined the contours of this hope (e.g., Acts 3:17-26; 5:30; 13:16-41).

²⁴Various texts in the Gospels and Acts suggest that for

some faith in Jesus was the fulfillment and confirmation of their hopes (e.g., Matt 13:51-52; Luke 1:5-7, 1:25-40; John 1:19-21).

²⁵As, for example Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*.

²⁶The argument that the absence of justification language in the Thessalonian correspondence shows that Paul developed his teaching only later, or that it served only a secondary role for him fails on this account. His teaching on justification is in fact directed to specifically Jewish objections to the acceptance of the Gentiles. His mission among Gentiles is predicated on the doctrine that he elsewhere develops. That the Gentile believers in Thessalonica “wait for God’s son from heaven, who delivers *us* from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10) is nothing other than the message of the justifying work of God in Christ expressed in other language. The Jewish apostle and his Gentile converts together hope in Jesus, the risen Son of God, and in him alone. Against, e.g., Jürgen Roloff, “Die lutherische Rechtfertigungslehre und ihre biblische Grundlage,” in *Frühjudentum und Neues Testament im Horizont Biblischer Theologie* (ed. Wolfgang Kraus, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, and Lutz Doering; WUNT 162; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 275–300.

²⁷The developing discussion already has presented problematic readings of Paul. See James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (WUNT 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 63–88; Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* (SNTSMS 105; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999); and especially Chris VanLandingham, *Judgment & Justification in Early Judaism and the Apostle Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006). Despite its very helpful emphasis on the theocentric character of biblical references to the “day of the Lord,” the recent work by Nicola Wendebourg offers no clarity on the question of works. See Nicola Wendebourg, *Der Tag des Herrn: Zur Gerichtserwartung im Neuen Testament auf ihrem alttestamentlichen und frühjüdischen Hintergrund* (WMANT 96; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003). Matthias Konrad’s relegation of Paul’s statements concerning the judgment of believers to a secondary status is not

convincing. His appeal to outward, ethical “boundary markers” as sufficient for Christians does not deal adequately with the apostle’s conception of sin. See Matthias Konradt, *Gericht und Gemeinde: Eine Studie zur Bedeutung und Funktion von Gerichtsaussagen im Rahmen der paulinischen Ekklesiologie und Ethik im 1 Thess und 1 Kor* (BZNTW 117; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2003). Paul Rainbow’s proposal is somewhat distant from debates on the “new perspective,” yet problematic in its own right. Leaning rather too much on Augustine and Aquinas, he attempts to find a middle way between a Reformational reading of Paul and a Tridentine one. See Paul Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005). The deeds of Christians do not supplement the perfect righteousness of Christ (imputed to us) in any way. But as fruits from a new tree they are *necessary* for a claim to righteousness, which will be examined in final judgment. Everything hangs on the meaning of “necessary,” which Rainbow interprets in terms of demand (rather than as a natural necessity, as the metaphor already implies: good trees produce good fruit, the sun necessarily shines). His confusion approximates the temporary confusion of Melancthon (which Rainbow cites approvingly): on this question, see Mark Seifrid, “Luther, Melancthon and Paul on the Question of Imputation: Recommendations on a Current Debate,” *Justification: What’s At Stake in the Current Debates* (ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) 137-152. A similar confusion inheres in Don Garlington, *The Obedience of Faith* (WUNT 2/38; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991); Don Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (WUNT 79; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994).

²⁸See the early response to Sanders by Robert Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” *Biblica* 66 (1985): 1–38. Although Gundry’s assessment of early Judaism misses the significance of Paul’s “new perspective” on his past, and thus may somewhat misrepresent early Jewish views, the essay as a whole is quite valuable.

²⁹So, recently, J. D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (WUNT 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 63–72.

³⁰N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 121, 148.

³¹Rom 2:25-29; 2 Cor 3:11-18; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11-15; Gal 6:15.

³²Rom 6:4-5; 8:1-3; Gal 6:15.

³³See, e.g., Mark 3:28-30; John 3:16-21; 12:44-50; Acts 3:17-26; 17:31; Rom 2:16; Rom 14:7-9; Heb 2:1-4. Recent works on the topic have largely ignored this fundamental element of the apostolic witness.

³⁴Others have embraced this interpretation in various forms, but the primary advocate has been N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*. Brant Pitre has taken up the “end of exile” paradigm in a qualified way, interpreting it in terms of the Assyrian exile of the ten tribes. Jesus understood his death as bringing the final tribulation to an end, and thus gathering these tribes from among the nations. This reading is not to be dismissed as a whole. The question remains, however, as to what place this form of continuing exile held in the thought of contemporary Jews. See Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of Exile* (WUNT/2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

³⁵See Gal 1:13-17; Phil 3:4-7; 2 Cor 4:4.

³⁶Paul’s argument, for example, that the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one is the “mother” of believers presupposes that the earthly city bore considerable influence in the minds of his converts (Gal 4:21-31). His declaration that the present Jerusalem “is enslaved with her children” is an unexpected assertion, not a commonplace of which his readers were aware.

³⁷Often the piety of some group within Israel is decoupled from the outward condition of the nation. The “sin” of the people is no longer absolute and all-encompassing. Those who are obedient may await the future with confidence, e.g., “We praise you from our exile because we have turned away from our hearts all the unrighteousness of our fathers who sinned before you” (Bar 3:7). The Qumran community regarded itself as the remnant, delivered from the continuing guilt of the nation, even if they entered a new exile

in their separation from Jerusalem (e.g., CD 1:1-17; 3:10-21). Furthermore, early Jewish materials often present the exile as having ended in some sense or another, even if they also regard it as continuing or recurring. The book of Judith speaks directly of the end of the exile (Judith 4:1-5; 5:17-19). Tobit appears to envision a two-stage conclusion to the exile. By God's mercy some return from the exile and rebuild the Temple in an imperfect way; later all return from exile and rebuild Jerusalem in splendor (Tobit 14:1-9). Quite understandably, those in the land could regard themselves as not being in exile (as, apparently, 2 Macc 1:1-2:18). A mishnaic saying ascribed to Abtalion, who lived in Jerusalem under Herodian rule in the first-century B.C, warns teachers of the Law to guard their words so that they may not become guilty of the punishment of exile. Despite the nation's subjugation to Rome, Abtalion obviously did not regard himself to be in exile (m. 'Abot 1:11). The form of the Passover Seder recorded in the Mishnah is even more significant, since it may reflect something of the common thought of first-century Judaism. A father is to instruct the son concerning the redemption from Egypt from Deuteronomy 26, "beginning with the disgrace and ending with the glory" (Deut 26:5-9). No mention is made of the description of exile in Deuteronomy 28-32 (m. Pesa 10:4). In the Diaspora itself, Philo can speak of God himself as 'homeland, kinsfolk and inheritance' and regard the exile as the Jewish colonization of the world, even though he also expects an end of exile. See Philo, *Quis Heres*, 26-27. Abraham (who perhaps represents Diaspora Jews like Philo) acknowledges God as his homeland, kinsfolk, and inheritance, even though he is a pilgrim and a wanderer. Philo's expectation of an end of exile appears in *De Praemiis et Poenis*, 162-72. Josephus treats the exile typologically. It ended after 70 years, only to be followed by subsequent 'exiles,' including the one he himself experienced (*Ant.* 4:314; 10:112-113; 10:247-277; 11:1-4). Like Jeremiah, he regards exile as having a positive effect and seems to lack an expectation of a return. See L. Feldman, "The Concept of Exile in Josephus," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (ed. J. Scott;

Leiden: Brill, 1997), 145-72.

³⁸E.g., 1 Macc 13:41-42; 14:4-15; 2 Macc 10:1-9.

³⁹Cf. Isa 2:1-4; Mic 4:1-3.

⁴⁰See Rom 3:27 on "boasting" and cf. Rom 2:17-20; further, the connection with Rom 4:1-8; also Gal 2:15, 17 on "sinners" and "sin." Moreover, much of the interpretation of these passages is dependent on how one understands "justification," which transparently is rooted in the cross (Gal 2:20!), and therefore has to do with something more than ethnicity.

⁴¹Against Daniel Boyarin, who nevertheless inadvertently places his finger on a fundamental weakness of the "new perspective." It reads Paul precisely in the universalistic manner that Boyarin rightly despises. See Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (University of California, 1994).

⁴²Dietrich Bonhoeffer's, *Life Together* (trans. & introduction John W. Doberstein; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954) remains a classic on this question, even if one must qualify his problematic identification of the word of God and the church.