

Another Look at the New Perspective

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MY GOAL IN this essay is to defend a traditional Reformed view of justification in light of the challenges of the “new perspective on Paul.” Before I launch into such a defense I want to raise a fundamental question. Does one’s view of the new perspective on Paul

life and death, and I will argue here that they were right to think so.

THE SANDERS REVOLUTION AND THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

A “Lutheran” or “Reformed” view of Paul dominated Protestant biblical scholarship up until the publication of E. P. Sanders’s massive *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977.¹ Sanders vigorously dissented from the standard view of Judaism promulgated in NT studies, arguing that the notion that Judaism was a legalistic religion was a myth. Other voices preceded Sanders. Both Claude Montefiore and George Foote Moore argued for a kinder and gentler Judaism, but their contributions, though appreciated, did nothing to change the prevailing consensus.² Krister Stendahl wrote his influential “The Apostle Paul and the Intropective Conscience of the West” before Sanders’s major opus.³ This essay had an influence that outstripped its size, especially post-Sanders. Stendahl argued that the notion that Paul suffered from a guilty conscience was the product of reading him through the lenses of the experience of Augustine and Luther. A careful reading of the Pauline litera-

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matter? Luther rightly saw that the most important question in life is whether we can find a gracious God, and our understanding of the law and justification play a central role in our quest. A right view of the law and justification, according to the Reformers, is inextricably tied to a right view of the gospel. Hence, the issues before us must not be relegated to the realm of academic jousting. They impinge upon the very heart of the gospel and directly relate to the issue of our eternal salvation. How we answer the questions before us will

affect what church we join and *whether* and *how* we proclaim the gospel to unbelievers. The Reformers believed the issues before us were matters of

ture demonstrates, says Stendahl, that Paul had a robust conscience. Indeed, Paul was not converted to a new religion. He was called as the apostle to the Gentiles. Not surprisingly, then, justification was not central in his theology; what truly animated Paul was the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God.

The view of Judaism defended by Sanders in 1977 was an idea whose time had come in a post-Holocaust world. Scholars were keenly aware that they had judged Judaism from an adversarial standpoint instead of appreciating its distinctive contribution. More specifically, Sanders argued that the notion that Judaism was a legalistic religion was a blatant distortion of the historical sources. Protestant scholars were reading Judaism through the lenses of Luther's conflict with the Roman Catholicism of his day. Sanders argued that an accurate reading of the Jewish literature presented a very different picture of Judaism than what was painted by Protestant scholars. If we look at the pattern of religion in Judaism (including the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and Tannaitic literature), a clear pattern emerges according to Sanders. Sanders describes that pattern as *covenantal nomism*. Israel belonged to the covenant by means of the grace of God, and so Israel got into the covenant by grace and stayed in the covenant by observing the law (hence nomism). Still, their observance of the law did not involve a weighing of merits, as if one had to do more good works than bad to be saved. Nor was Israel guilty of works-righteousness, for all those who repented of their sins and offered sacrifice would be saved.⁴ The signature word for Judaism was *grace*, not works. Protestant scholars had blindly imposed a caricature of legalism upon Judaism, which, astonishingly enough, had nothing to do with what Judaism really was.

Sanders (and those who proceeded him) are to be thanked for provoking us to re-examine what the Jewish sources actually say. Furthermore, Sanders spares us from a caricature of Judaism, where (in popular circles at least and in some

scholarly circles as well) Jews and Judaism were too often presented as pettifogging legalists who were constantly preoccupied with their own righteousness. Nevertheless, as is so often the case, Sanders over-reacted. His own reading of the Jewish evidence wasn't as objective as he claimed and even seemed to be colored by Christian presuppositions. For instance, Jacob Neusner, though he endorsed some of Sanders's conclusions, noted that the concerns which Sanders brought to the Jewish sources were imposed from without—from Sanders's own theological preconceptions. Furthermore, Neusner complains that he doesn't care if Sanders and others think that Judaism is ritualistic, for, as a Jew, he has no concern about what a Protestant liberal thinks of his religion.⁵ Such a response is instructive, for Sanders's work is premised upon the notion that legalism is bad. But Neusner reminds us that it is only bad if one has a Christian perspective. What is "good" and "bad" depends upon one's religious standpoint as well.

Even more important, Sanders's reading of the Jewish sources is debatable. Mark Elliott in a detailed work argues, contra Sanders, that only a remnant will actually be saved on the final day, and the remnant consists of those who have kept the law.⁶ Hence, works seem to play a more vital role for final salvation than Sanders suggests. Friedrich Avemarie conducted a careful survey of Tannaitic literature, noting that election and works stand in an unresolved tension in the literature.⁷ In some cases the emphasis appears to be on election and grace, and in other instances upon the works of human beings. A clear verdict supporting a gracious pattern of religion cannot be verified. Similarly, Andrew Das and Simon Gathercole maintain that final vindication according to works plays a significant role in Jewish literature, and Das, in particular, notes the demand for perfect obedience regularly appears.⁸ Finally, the first volume on *Justification and Variegated Nomism* illustrates that some Second Temple writings conform to Sanders's paradigm, but there are also quite a few

instances where we find a focus on works-righteousness and covenantal nomism does not fit.⁹

How should we assess the recent scholarship that questions Sanders's paradigm? Obviously, I cannot demonstrate in a short essay that Sanders's view is mistaken. Still, the contemporary debate over covenantal nomism in Second Temple Judaism is illuminating for our purposes. Too many today *assume* that Sanders's view is correct, acting as if it has been demonstrated that the Judaism of Paul's day promoted a theology of grace and was not a religion of works-righteousness. In fact, no consensus exists on the nature of Second Temple Judaism. Not surprisingly, scholars assess the evidence differently, so we do not have an open and shut case on the view of salvation in the Judaism of Paul's day. One cannot simply wave Sanders's book in the air and proclaim that the debate is over, for there is significant evidence that some sectors of Judaism promoted works-righteousness.

A further conclusion follows. If some modern scholars see a focus on obeying the law for salvation in Judaism, there is no reason to doubt that Paul may have done the same. Indeed, we must be open to what is historically new and creative. Even if virtually all of Paul's contemporaries thought Judaism was a religion of grace, it is historically possible that Paul advanced another viewpoint, and this would in part explain the disjunction between Judaism and Christianity in subsequent history. Another possibility presents itself as well. Judaism may have been *theoretically* a religion of grace but in *actuality* practiced legalism. Scholars may protest that this is an irrational last resort kind of argument and say, "Where is the evidence?" Scholars, however, face the danger of being tone deaf to everyday life. Those of us who have grown up in the Christian church know that legalism is rife in our churches, even though we have a theology of grace. Our theology of grace has a funny way of getting squeezed out in practice. The same could be true of Judaism as well.

RE-THINKING THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

WORKS OF THE LAW

So far I haven't provided any evidence that Paul himself thought Judaism was legalistic. Before examining some evidence in Paul, however, one text from the gospels will be brought in: Luke 18:9-14. I would argue that these are the words of the historical Jesus, and hence reflect his viewpoint in the late 20s or early 30s A.D. But even if someone were to say that these are not the words of Jesus, they reflect the view of early Christians. The passage is well-known and the details do not need to be rehearsed here. What is quite evident is that the Pharisee was full of pride and expected a reward because of his religious practices, which exceeded the demands of the law. Astonishingly, Jesus proclaims that the tax-collector was justified rather than the Pharisee, showing that one's standing before God is in view. The Pharisee's religion was a form of self-exaltation, and it seems that he viewed his obedience as earning a final reward. Since he viewed his obedience as deserving a final reward, he was guilty of legalism. Why did Jesus criticize the works-righteousness of the Pharisee? He did not raise the issue for theoretical and academic reasons. He uttered the parable because self-righteousness and legalism were a practical problem faced by his contemporaries. The NT isn't in the habit of engaging in a polemic over matters that have nothing to do with everyday life.

This brings us to Paul. Let's begin by thinking of "works of law" (*erga nomou*). New perspective readings typically claim that works of law refer to boundary markers that separate Jews and Gentiles, focusing on purity laws, circumcision, and Sabbath.¹⁰ The new perspective has actually, whether or not one agrees with its interpretation of works of law, reminded us of something very important here. The division between Jews and Gentiles, and the inclusion of the Gentiles was a very important theme for Paul. It is evident from reading Galatians, Romans, and Ephesians (which I take to be Pauline) that the inclusion of the Gen-

tiles into the one people of God through Christ was a major issue for Paul. A defense of the old perspective does not lead to the conclusion that we can't learn anything from the new perspective.

Let's assume for the sake of argument that the new perspective view of works of law is entirely true, so that works of law focuses on boundary markers instead of the whole law. If this is true, Paul teaches that one does not receive the Spirit or justification by virtue of being Jewish (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5). One is saved by faith in Christ or by the faithfulness of Christ.¹¹ Even if the new perspective interpretation of works of law is correct (which I will argue shortly is improbable), it is likely that notions of merit were still in the hearts and minds of those who kept the boundary markers. Such a conclusion appears to be borne out by the universality of human experience. It seems probable that Jews who kept the boundary markers did not merely think, "We are saved simply because we are Jews, because we belong to the people of God and are included in the covenant." They quite likely thought as well: "Those who aren't keeping the law are sinners and are failing to do what the law commands." Typically, when there is ethnic tension between two groups, say the German and the Irish, Germans don't think they are better than the Irish simply because they are German and keep German customs. Almost inevitably they also think of themselves as morally superior to the Irish. It is doubtful that people 2000 years ago thought differently about such matters. Indeed, the parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector suggests they didn't.

In any case, the notion that works of law is restricted to or focuses on boundary markers should be rejected.¹² Evidence from both Galatians and Romans indicates that works of law refers to all that is commanded in the law. The phrase itself is most naturally taken to refer to the entire law, so that it designates all the commands or deeds required by the law (Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). Paul slides easily from "works of law" (*erga nomou*) to "law" (*nomou*) and the latter term almost cer-

tainly refers to the entire law. Hence, in the same context where Paul speaks of works of law (2:16), he insists that righteousness does not come via the law but by God's grace (2:21) and speaks of dying to law (2:19). Interestingly, when Paul queries whether the Spirit is received by works of law or by hearing with faith (3:2, 5), he inserts in the midst of the argument a contrast between the flesh and the Spirit (3:3). The contrast is illuminating, for it reveals that the problem with works of law is a reliance on self-effort and human autonomy instead of the supernatural work of God's Spirit, suggesting a focus on doing the law and on one's own moral accomplishments. The wording of Gal 3:10 is particularly important. Works of law are further defined by the words "all things written in the Book of the Law." This is the closest Paul comes to a definition of works of law, and the emphasis is clearly on keeping the whole law (cf. 5:3). The law focuses on *doing* all that is contained in it (3:12; cf. 6:13), and is described in terms of a covenant given to Moses with all the statutes contained therein (3:17). The law is closely related to "transgressions" (Gal 3:19), and it is quite unlikely that such transgressions can be limited to boundary markers. The law's role as a custodian cannot be limited to those precepts that divide Jews from Gentiles (3:24-25), and this is borne out in Galatians, for the Galatians desire to be "under the law" (4:21). It is artificial to segregate "law" from "works of law" in Galatians, and hence it is most convincing to define works of law as referring to all the deeds required by the law. But if that is the case, then it clearly follows that the Galatians were attempting to be justified by their performance of the law, and such an interpretation squares with the Reformers' reading of Galatians.

Romans also supports the idea that "works of law" refers to the entire law. The phrase occurs twice in Romans and in both places Paul asserts that righteousness is not obtained by works of law (Rom 3:20, 28). Is there a focus on boundary markers? No. The summary statement about sin folded between 3:20 and 3:28 assists us in deter-

mining why righteousness does not come via works of law, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). This is simply another way of saying that no one can be righteous by the law. And what is the reason? Human sin—the failure to do everything required by the law. Such a reading of works of law is confirmed by the larger context in which 3:20, 28 occur (2:17-29 and 3:9-20). In 2:17-29 the Jews are charged with transgression of the law. Paul does not criticize them for their nationalism per se or for excluding Gentiles from the promise. The advantages listed in 2:17-20 and 2:25 are not sinful per se, for the covenantal advantage the Jews enjoyed was not something that was inherently wrong. It was a gift of God. Paul clarifies, however, that Jewish privileges turn into the wrong kind of nationalistic pride if they are not accompanied by obedience. The sins mentioned are *moral* infractions of the law: stealing, adultery, and robbing temples (2:21-22). And when circumcision is raised as a topic, the Jews are not rebuked for excluding Gentiles (2:25-29). The problem seems to be a magical conception of circumcision so that they conceived of it as protecting them from God’s wrath. Paul insists, however, that circumcision is of no avail if they don’t keep the law as a whole. Again, the sins of the Jews are moral violations of the law. In the same way, Paul summarizes in 3:9-18 with a catena of OT texts the sins of all, both Jews and Gentiles. Doubtless exclusivism and nationalism are sinful, but the focus in the context lies elsewhere. Paul rejects the idea that anyone is righteous and that anyone does what is good (3:10-12). The sinfulness of all is betrayed by the poisonous speech that degrades and savages others (3:13-14). Nor is sin restricted to the area of speech but it expresses itself in evil actions like the shedding of blood (3:15-17). The fundamental and root sin is the failure to fear God (3:18). Both 2:17-29 and 3:9-18 help us to define works of law, for when Paul says that the works of the law do not justify in 3:20 he is *summarizing* the previous argument. And we have seen that in the previous verses that the Jews are indicted for

moral violations. Indeed, the logic of 3:20 is most naturally understood to support this view. Works of law do not justify because (*gar*) through the law comes the realization of sin.

The understanding of works of law defended here is strengthened by Paul’s use of the term “works” in Romans. In chapter 3 the phrase “works of law” (*erga nomou*) appears twice (3:20, 28), but in chapter 4 the term “works” (*erga*) occurs alone (4:2, 6, and note the verbal form [*ergazomai*] in 4:4, 5). It is quite clear that the term “works” cannot refer to the boundary markers of the law, for Abraham did not live under the law. Clearly the word “works” refers to deeds or actions in general. Abraham wasn’t justified by working for God but because he believed in the God who justifies the ungodly. Furthermore, there is clearly a polemic against legalism here—one that was implied with the use of works of law in 3:20, 28. If Abraham did the requisite works for justification he could boast (4:2), i.e., he could brag that he had accomplished such a feat. But Paul rejects such a notion, for Abraham was not right with God by doing but by trusting (4:3). Verses 4-5 make this even clearer. In v. 4 an illustration from employment is used. If one receives wages on the basis of works, then payment is not a gift but a debt. Verse 4 illustrates concisely the principle of works-righteousness or merit. Those who meet the standard and do the required work deserve to be paid. If one does the works demanded for justification, then they are rewarded with life eternal.¹³ N. T. Wright recognizes a polemic against legalism here, though he downplays it by saying it is a secondary motif.¹⁴ Against Wright it doesn’t seem to be secondary at all, for Paul emphasizes this theme in vv. 2-5. Righteousness can’t be obtained by works since all are sinners (3:23). Even Abraham himself was ungodly (4:5), for he was an idolater like the rest of his family (Josh 24:2). Hence, righteousness comes not by working for God but by trusting in God. Here is the heart and soul of the gospel. Right-standing with God is a gift granted to those who trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ (3:21-26).

Many of those who endorse the new perspective claim that boundary markers are an issue since Paul brings up circumcision in 4:9-12. I agree that the inclusion of the Gentiles is an important theme in Romans 4, but the inclusion of the Gentiles is not the primary theme in 4:1-8. In the first section of the chapter we have an old perspective argument against works-righteousness. The new perspective sees something important when it focuses on the inclusion of the Gentiles, and we should embrace that truth, but if it rejects the insights of the Reformers and the old perspective, it sunders what God meant to be kept together.

Others follow Richard Hays, claiming that 4:1-8 is actually about inclusion of the Gentiles by translating 4:1, “What shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?”¹⁵ This rendering should be rejected for two reasons. First, vv. 2-8, as noted above, do not focus on issues of ethnicity and exclusion of Gentiles but on works versus faith. Second, it is more likely that the verse should be translated, “What shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?” If Hays were correct we would expect the inclusion of “we” (*hēmas*) as the subject of the infinitive. Given its absence it is more natural to take “Abraham” as the subject, and hence the reading proposed by Hays should be rejected.

We have seen that Paul engages in a polemic against works-righteousness in 4:1-5 as he discusses the case of Abraham. The forgiveness David received, recounted in vv. 6-8, also does not fit with a new perspective reading. David celebrates his forgiveness—his “righteousness apart from works” (v. 6). The term “works” here certainly does not refer to the boundary markers. David did not need forgiveness because of a failure to receive circumcision or because he violated food laws or because he did not keep the Sabbath. Nor is there any evidence here that David’s nationalism or exclusion of Gentiles is in mind. In Psalm 32, cited in Rom 4:7-8, the focus is on David’s moral failings—most likely his murder of Uriah and his

adultery with Bathsheba. This text clearly supports the old perspective. Righteousness is received as a gift, not on the basis of works that are accomplished. Paul ties righteousness and forgiveness very closely together in vv. 6-7, showing that righteousness here is another way of talking about forgiveness of sins.

Another crucial passage to understand the meaning of “works” (*erga*) in Paul is Rom 9:30-10:8. Some new perspective proponents see a focus on ethnocentrism and nationalism in these verses.¹⁶ Space is lacking to delve into the text deeply. We should notice immediately that the term used is “works” not “works of law.” Furthermore, nothing is said about boundary markers in the near context. The text does not breathe a word about circumcision, food laws, or Sabbath. Paul emphasizes in these verses a polarity between *doing* and *believing*. Israel’s problem is not identified as their exclusivism but as lack of faith (9:32). Apparently they believed they could be righteous by their works (9:32). This is the most natural way to read 10:3 as well. Israel tried to establish its righteousness by works instead of resting on God’s righteousness which is a gift granted to those who trust him (10:3). Israel attempted to establish righteousness based on performance instead of relying on the righteousness that is available by faith in Christ (10:6-8). The Reformers constantly emphasized that human beings try to secure their righteousness based on their performance rather than trusting in what God has done in Christ, and such a reading fits with what Paul teaches in Romans. Is it anti-Semitic? Absolutely not. Paul doesn’t reflect on a problem unique to Jews, but a problem shared by all human beings.

Philippians 3:2-9 also reflects a polemic against works-righteousness. Paul warns the Philippians about opponents who threaten the gospel. Is part of the emphasis on ethnocentrism? Probably. The opponents clearly advocated circumcision (Phil 3:2), and membership in Israel was apparently important to them (3:5). The goal in exegesis is to listen to every text fairly. The new perspec-

tive rightly emphasizes the sociological dimension of certain texts. We can be grateful for such a reminder, especially in the western world which is fiercely individualistic. Still, there is no need to posit an either-or here. Paul does not merely refer to ethnic badges; he also zeros in on what one *does*. He emphasizes that he observed the law as a Pharisee (3:5), that his zeal manifested itself in the persecution of the church, and that his righteousness under the law was blameless (3:6). The reliance upon the flesh (3:3-4) cannot be restricted to boundary markers but also pertains to activity, to what one has accomplished. Indeed, Paul specifically contrasts “a righteousness of my own” with “righteousness from (*ek*) God” (3:9). The latter is a gift bestowed by grace for those who believe. The former focuses on self-actualization and human performance and hence panders to pride.

The later Pauline letters also support what is often called the old perspective.¹⁷ Now some think these letters (Ephesians, the Pastorals) are not genuinely Pauline. I would differ with this assessment, but even if they were written by a later Pauline disciple they would show how one of the first Pauline disciples understood the Pauline teaching and applied it to a new generation. What is quite striking is how these letters fit with how the Reformers understood Paul. The contribution of the new perspective is not absent (though the Reformers saw this too!), for Eph 2:11-3:13 emphasizes the inclusion of the Gentiles into the one people of God. When the issue of works arises, however, Paul does not use the term works of law but simply the word “works” (*erga*). For instance, in Eph 2:8-9 salvation is presented as a gift, not the product of one’s own effort. Paul specifically rules out works to exclude all boasting (Eph 2:9). The text attains Calvin’s goal of lucid brevity. If salvation is obtained by one’s own works then one could boast about one’s contribution. Since salvation, on the contrary, is by faith, there is no room for human boasting. Clearly Paul included these words because some were tempted to boast in their works and to look to them as the basis of their salvation. So too, in 2

Tim 1:9 salvation is ascribed to God’s eternal purpose and grace rather than human works. Such a statement fits with Rom 11:5-6 where God’s electing grace, as Luther emphasized in his debate with Erasmus, is tied to salvation by grace instead of works.¹⁸ Finally, Titus 3:5 points us in the same direction. Works are clearly defined in terms of accomplishing “those things which we did in righteousness.”¹⁹ And salvation is not obtained by such works but by God’s mercy.

To sum up, works of law refers to the entire law in Paul, and Paul’s use of the related term “works” shows that he engaged in a polemic against works-righteousness. Justification cannot be merited or earned by works but is given to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

CALLED AND CONVERTED?

Krister Stendahl argued that Paul was called as an apostle to the Gentiles, but he was not converted to a new religion.²⁰ Others have followed Stendahl in this judgment. I will argue here that Stendahl’s position is unpersuasive, that it is more in accord with the evidence to say that Paul was both called and converted. But before addressing this issue textually a couple of preliminary observations should be made. Paul didn’t operate with the modern category of “religion,” and so even to speak of changing “religion” is a bit distorting. Paul clearly believed that faith in Christ fulfilled the OT scriptures, and that he stood in line with the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The law and the prophets were fulfilled through God’s righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21). Jesus as the Messiah fulfilled the covenant made with David (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8). Paul was convinced that he served God just as his ancestors did (2 Tim. 1:3). It would be quite misleading to think of Paul as repudiating the faith enshrined in the OT scriptures. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Paul believed that he was called, like the prophets were called of old, to proclaim the gospel. In Gal 1:11-17, where Paul relates his call to be an apostle, he draws on the language of the

call of Isaiah (Isa 49:1) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:5) as prophets. The emphasis in the text is clearly on Paul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. There is no doubt that Paul on the Damascus Road was called to ministry.

The question before us, then, needs a sharp profile. It is not terribly helpful to ask if Paul converted to a new religion, for Paul would not see his faith in Christ as a departure from OT revelation but as a fulfillment of OT teaching. Nor is there any dispute on whether Paul was called as an apostle to the Gentiles. The question that must be posed is this: did Paul believe that before he met Christ on the Damascus Road that he was headed for eschatological destruction rather than eschatological salvation? The answer I will argue is "yes." There is clear evidence that Paul believed that he was called *and converted* and hence saved from eschatological judgment on the Damascus Road.

Several pieces of evidence need to be considered here. Paul certainly believed that his faith in Christ fulfilled the OT, but that is not the same thing as saying that Paul in his own personal life was truly a member of God's people before Christ appeared to him since up to that point he had failed to believe in the Messiah which the OT scriptures predicted. In Gal 1:13-14 Paul speaks of his "former life in Judaism" (v. 13), his persecution of the church, and his zeal for the ancestral traditions before the revelation of Christ on the Damascus Road. What is telling is that Paul describes Judaism as part of his *past* life. Since he encountered Jesus Christ, he did not consider himself to be part of Judaism but as belonging to the church of Jesus Christ. Only after the Damascus Road did Paul consider himself to be part of God's true assembly, the *qāhāl* of the Lord. Paul did not think he was genuinely a member of the people of God when he was trying to destroy the church. This is confirmed elsewhere in Galatians, for Paul insists that those who proclaim or receive another gospel are anathema (1:8-9), i.e., they will face eschatological destruction. This is the same anathema that Paul pronounces over his fellow-

Jews who refuse to believe in Christ in Rom 9:3. Some interpreters, of course, argue that Paul does not require Jews to believe in Christ in Romans 9-11. Space forbids wrestling with that question here, but there are compelling reasons to conclude that the Jews, according to Paul in Romans 9-11, had to believe in Christ to be saved.²¹

Philippians 3:2-9 also supports the idea that Paul was converted. The opponents were almost certainly Jewish, for they advocated circumcision (Phil 3:2). In this case it even looks as if they believed Jesus was the Messiah. But this was not enough for Paul, since he identifies them as "dogs," i.e., unclean animals who were not part of the people of God (cf. 2 Pet 2:22; Rev 22:15). In considering the opponents Paul reflects on his past as well, itemizing the reasons (Phil 3:5-6) why he could place his "confidence in the flesh" (3:4). Part of that confidence could be traced to Paul's former persecution of the church, and his ardent devotion to the law (3:6, 9). But a dramatic change occurred. After encountering Christ, Paul enjoyed righteousness from God rather than his own (3:9). He "lost" his past life but "gained" Christ (3:7-8). Paul alludes here to the words of Jesus who spoke of those who "gained" the whole world but "lost" their soul (Matt. 16:25-26). The clear implication is that Paul, when he was persecuting the church and clinging to his own righteousness, was lost in terms of eschatological salvation. After the Damascus Road he enjoyed true righteousness from God and was truly part of the people of God.

When Paul considers his persecution of the church, it seems quite clear that he was an unbeliever before the Damascus Road. He considered himself unworthy to be an apostle because he persecuted the church (1 Cor 15:9; cf. Eph 3:8). His new life is ascribed entirely to grace (1 Cor 15:10). First Timothy 1:12-16 particularly supports the idea that Paul was converted. Again some scholars (wrongly in my judgment) dismiss this text as inauthentic, but even if the letter was by a later Pauline disciple it reflects one of the earliest commentaries on what happened on the Damascus

Road. Paul identifies himself pre-Damascus Road as “a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent” (v. 13). Further, he describes himself as “the foremost” of sinners (v. 15). Was Paul a believer when he was blaspheming and persecuting the church? Clearly not, for he emphasizes here that “Christ Jesus came . . . to save sinners” like him (v. 15). Before Paul’s conversion he was a sinner, and unsaved, for he “acted ignorantly in unbelief” (v. 13). When Jesus appeared to him, however, he was a recipient of “mercy” (v. 13), “grace,” and “love” (v. 14). Indeed, Paul views his conversion as exemplary of the salvation of those who would put their faith in Christ and receive “eternal life” (v. 16). Apparently Paul did not have “eternal life” before the Damascus Road, when Jesus appeared to him he was saved.

When we put the accounts together that speak of Paul’s call on the Damascus Road, the evidence that he was both called and converted is compelling. Before Jesus appeared to him, Paul belonged to Judaism, persecuted God’s true assembly, trusted his own righteousness, put his confidence in the flesh, had worldly gain, was unworthy to be an apostle, was insolent, a blasphemer, and a persecutor. But on the Damascus Road he experienced the grace and mercy and love of God, gained Christ, was righteous by faith, turned from unbelief to belief, enjoyed eternal life, and was saved.

JUSTIFICATION²²

The idea that justification does not play a central role in Pauline theology did not begin with the new perspective, for we already see such judgments in Wrede and Schweitzer.²³ Sanders picks up the same theme from Schweitzer, seeing participation with Christ rather than justification as the center of Paul’s thought.²⁴ Dunn maintains that Luther misunderstood Paul in formulating his view of justification.²⁵ My aim here is not to defend justification as the central theme of Paul’s theology, though it is more central than its detractors claim.²⁶ For instance, some maintain that we do not find the theme in Paul’s earliest letters, such

as 1 Thessalonians,²⁷ but the idea of final vindication is present conceptually, and hence the notion that the idea of justification is absent is exaggerated. Paul clearly teaches that believers will escape God’s anger at the last judgment because of the saving work of Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). Similarly, in 1 Cor 15:1-5 forgiveness of sin is achieved through Christ’s cross and resurrection (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-21), and this constitutes the heart of the gospel.²⁸

How should the verb “justify” (*dikaioō*) be defined in Paul? It refers to God’s judicial verdict which announces that those who belong to Christ (those who are united to Christ in his death and resurrection) are not guilty before God.²⁹ God’s eschatological verdict has been declared in advance for those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, but his declaration is hidden from the world and those who belong to Christ cling to this verdict by faith.³⁰ Those who are justified are guaranteed that they will be spared from God’s wrath on the day of judgment (Rom 5:9). God will announce to the entire world on the last day the verdict that those who belong to Christ are not guilty. God’s verdict is effective, not in the sense that “justify” means “make righteous” as Augustine thought, but in the sense that those who trust in Christ are truly righteous in God’s sight since they are united with Christ.

The forensic and legal character of the term “justify” (*dikaioō*) derives from the verbal form of *tsadeq* in the OT. Judges should declare the righteous to be innocent and condemn the wicked (Deut 25:1; cf. 2 Sam 15:4; 1 Kgs 8:31–32; 2 Chron 6:23; Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23).³¹ Judges do not “make” anyone righteous. They pronounce on what is in fact the case—if they are judges who have integrity. God as a righteous judge will determine on the last day whether Paul is acquitted or condemned (1 Cor 4:4). In the same way, a declaration of righteousness is obviously intended in the expression, “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13). Romans 8:33 is clearly forensic, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It

is God who justifies.” On the last day at the divine tribunal all charges will be dismissed against those whom God has chosen because God’s declaration is the only one that matters in the courtroom.

What about the noun “righteousness” (*dikaïosynē*) and the phrase “righteousness of God” (*dikaïosynē theou*) in Paul? Before answering that question, we must step aside briefly to correct a view of righteousness that veers off course. It is quite common in scholarship to find scholars saying that righteousness language in Paul never has the idea of punishment but relates only to salvation. But this view is clearly mistaken. Romans 3:5 teaches that God manifests his judging righteousness at the eschaton. In addition, the day of eschatological wrath in 2:5 is described as the “revelation of “God’s righteous judgment.” Indeed, there are good reasons to think that in Rom 3:21-26 Paul uses the term righteousness to denote both the saving (vv. 21-22) and the judging righteousness (vv. 25-26) of God, so that both the saving and judging righteousness of God meet at the cross. In this way God is both “just” (judging righteousness) and “the justifier” (saving righteousness).

Perhaps the failure to see any reference to judging righteousness stems from an overemphasis on the covenantal dimensions of righteousness, for God’s judging righteousness demonstrates that righteousness also has to do with conformity to a norm, and norms and relationships should not be separated from one another.³² Often those who support the new perspective say that God’s righteousness should be defined as his faithfulness to the covenant.³³ The OT background plays a vital role here, for in the OT righteousness occurs in Hebrew parallelism with God’s truth, mercy, and salvation (Ps 31:1; 36:10; 40:10; 71:2; 88:10-12; 98:2-3; 143:1; Isa 46:13; 51:5-8). A very important distinction must be recognized at this point. God’s saving actions (his saving righteousness) *fulfill* his covenantal promises, but this should not be confused with saying that that righteousness should be *defined as* covenantal faithfulness.³⁴ It

would be a mistake, for instance, to argue from the parallels in the Hebrew text that “mercy” means “truth,” “salvation” means “mercy,” and “righteousness” means “truth,” as if every word has the same definition. If every term has the same meaning as the other terms with which it appears in parallelism, then we are virtually saying that every word has the same meaning, which is quite unlikely.³⁵

I will argue here that when Paul uses the word “righteousness” and “righteousness of God” in theologically weighty texts he refers to the gift of God granted to believers. In other words, the noun is forensic just like the verb. Paul often says that human beings are righteous by faith (e.g., Rom 1:17; 3:22, 26; 4:3, 5, 9, 13; 9:30; 10:4; Gal 2:16; 3:6, 11; 5:5; Phil 3:9).³⁶ In such contexts righteousness by faith is contrasted with righteousness by works. Righteousness is obviously a gift in these texts, for it is not the one who works but the one who believes who is righteous before God (Rom 4:4-5). Nor is faith conceived of as a “work” that merits a declaration of righteousness. Faith saves because it looks entirely to what God has done for believers in Christ. It rests on Christ’s death and resurrection for forgiveness of sins and justification (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:25). Believers are righteous because they are united to Christ in his death and resurrection.³⁷

The forensic character of righteousness is also supported by the connection forged between righteousness and forgiveness, and righteousness and reckoning. David’s forgiveness of sins is also described as his justification—his being in the right before God (Rom 4:6-8). The term “righteousness” cannot refer here to David’s ethical transformation. It calls attention to the wiping clean of David’s slate, so that he now stands in the right before God by virtue of the forgiveness of his sins. Paul often teaches that righteousness is reckoned (*logizomai*) to believers. God counts or reckons to believers something that they do not inherently possess, i.e., he counts them as righteous before him (Rom 3:28; 4:3-6, 8-11, 22-24; 9:8; Gal. 3:6). Indeed, such righteousness

is counted to those who believe, not to those who work. God does not “count” sins against those who have put their faith in Christ (2 Cor 5:19). This is a strange reckoning or counting indeed when those who have done evil are considered to be righteous. This fits with the notion that believers have received “the free gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17).

Should “the righteousness of God” (*dikaiosynē theou*) also be understood as a divine gift *from* God, so that it is forensic (esp. Rom 1:17; 3:21–22; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21)? My answer is yes but further explanation is necessary. That the “righteousness of God” refers to a divine gift is clear in Phil 3:9, where Paul speaks of “the righteousness from God” (*tēn ek theou dikaiosynēn*). The righteousness is not Paul’s own, deriving from his observance of the law. It is a righteousness from God himself, obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:9, then, provides an important clue as to how we should interpret God’s righteousness (*dikaiosynē theou*) in Rom 1:17; 3:21–22. It refers to God’s saving righteousness, given as a gift to those who believe. The lack of the preposition “from” (*ek*) in the texts in Romans is not decisive, for in both instances the same subject is treated: the saving righteousness of God that is given to those who believe.

There are good reasons to think that the genitive “of God” (*theou*) in the phrase “righteousness of God” denotes a righteousness *from* God and a righteousness that *belongs to God*.³⁸ Romans 1:16–18 is instructive here, for in short order Paul mentions God’s power, his righteousness, and his wrath (vv. 16–18). Each of the genitives should be identified as a genitive of source. God’s anger and power and righteousness all come from him. At the same time the genitives also describe qualities that belong to God. There is no need to choose between a genitive of source and a descriptive genitive here. God is powerful, righteous, and wrathful, but the point of the text is that God’s power, his righteousness, and anger are given to or poured out upon human beings.

Some might object that the alleged parallel

between righteousness of God in Romans and Philippians does not work, precisely since Philippians refers to righteousness *from* (*ek theou*) and Romans only of the righteousness of God (*theou*). But we should not impose upon Paul a technical terminology, so that we demand that he use the exact same phrase in every instance. Paul could certainly communicate the same truth with slightly different wording. Most important, the remarkable parallels between Romans 10 and Phil 3:2–9 indicate that in both texts the righteousness of God has the same meaning. The commonalities between the two texts preclude the idea that a wedge should be driven between the meaning “righteousness of God” simply because Philippians adds the preposition (“from,” *ek*). The following parallels should be noted: (1) Israel had a “zeal for God” (Rom 10:2), and Paul expressed his “zeal” in persecuting the church (Phil 3:6). Paul’s criticism of Israel in Romans 10 matches his indictment of his former life in Philippians 3. (2) Paul contrasts righteousness by law and righteousness by faith (Rom 10:4–8; Phil 3:9). (3) More specifically, we see a parallel between Israel’s quest to establish its own righteousness (Rom 10:3), which is a “righteousness that is based on the law” and Paul’s focus on “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law” (Phil 3:9). The remarkable similarities in subject matter which tie Romans 10 and Philippians 3 together strongly suggest that righteousness in Romans 10 does not have a different definition from what we see in Philippians 3. In the latter text, righteousness clearly is a gift given to sinners—a declaration that those who have failed to keep the law but who have trusted in Jesus Christ stand in the right before God. In other words, Philippians emphasizes that righteousness is a gift *from God*. The same gift character of righteousness is also in view in Romans 10, but Romans 10 also suggests that the righteousness *given by God also belongs to God*.

If the parallels between righteousness of God in Philippians 3 and Romans 10 stand, we can go further. If righteousness refers to the gift of God

in Romans 10 it is highly unlikely that Paul means anything different in Rom 1:17; 3:21–22 since he uses the exact same expression in every instance. When Paul refers to God’s righteousness in declaring sinners to be in the right before him by faith in Christ, he has in mind the gift of righteousness—God’s declaration that sinners are not guilty. Paul would confuse the readers if in some instances he used the term “righteousness of God” to refer to a gift of a righteous status from God and in others of a divine activity that transforms believers. The simplest hypothesis is that righteousness should be assigned the same meaning in texts that address the same subject. Otherwise, Paul would need to explain much more clearly that he was offering a new definition.

2 Corinthians 5:21 confirms that righteousness refers to a divine gift.³⁹ God made Christ to be sin, even though he was without sin, so that believers would “in him ... become the righteousness of God.” Believers by virtue of their union with Christ in both his death and resurrection (cf. Rom 4:25; 6:1-10) enjoy a righteousness that is given to them. This righteousness is clearly a gift, for it is given to them by God by virtue of the cross work of Jesus Christ. The gift character of God’s righteousness is explicated by 2 Cor 5:19, for there Paul explains that it includes the forgiveness of sins. The connection between forgiveness of sins and God’s righteousness reminds us of Rom 4:6-8 where, as we saw, Paul forged a close link between “righteousness” and forgiveness of sins. Here the link is between forgiveness of sins and “God’s righteousness.” The connection between these two texts (Rom 4:6-8; 2 Cor 5:19-21) suggests that the noun “righteousness” and “God’s righteousness” refer to the gift of righteousness from God. In other words, we have a clue here that “righteousness” and “righteousness of God” refer to the same reality. And that is just what we would expect. Paul doesn’t have to add “of God” every time he speaks of righteousness. Often it is clear in context that he speaks of righteousness which is a gift of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 also explains

how God could grant the gift of righteousness to those who are sinners. The gift of righteousness is secured through Christ’s death on the cross. God “made him to be sin” so that those who are wicked could become righteous. An interchange between Christ and sinners is posited here, so that Christ takes the place of sinners.

Romans 3:25-26 also explains the rationale for Christ’s death.⁴⁰ The terms “propitiation” *hilastērion* and “blood” (*haima*) point back to the OT cultus. Scholars have ardently debated whether *hilastērion* means “expiation” or “propitiation.”⁴¹ The debate presents a false dichotomy, for both forgiveness and the turning aside of God’s wrath are in view. A reference to God’s wrath is contextually grounded, since Rom 1:18 announces the revelation of God’s wrath and 2:5 describes the final judgment as the day of God’s wrath.

The words following “propitiation” substantiate the interpretation offered here. Paul explains that Christ was set forth as a mercy seat to demonstrate God’s righteousness.⁴² The context reveals that by “righteousness” Paul refers to God’s justice, since the text immediately speaks of the sins God passed over previously. In other words, God did not punish fully the sins committed before Christ and his failure to punish calls into question his justice. Paul maintains that God looked ahead to the cross, for there his wrath was appeased since Christ took upon himself the sins of human beings. Romans 3:26 confirms this reading. God is demonstrated through the death of Christ to be both “just and the justifier” of those who put their faith in Christ. God’s justice is satisfied because Christ bore the full payment for sin. But God is also the justifier, because on the basis of the cross of Christ sinners receive forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Romans 3:21-26 is crucial, for we discover here that both the judging and saving righteousness of God meet at the cross.

Some dissent from the interpretation defended here arguing that the revelation and manifestation of God’s saving righteousness apocalyptically in history supports a transformative righteousness

(Rom 1:17; 3:21).⁴³ Certainly God's righteousness is an eschatological revelation, but it does not follow from this that it involves transformation. God's saving gift of righteousness has been revealed and manifested through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gift of righteousness certainly leads to a transformed life (cf. Romans 6) and is the basis of new life, but it does not follow from this that righteousness should be defined as being made righteous.

Others support a transformative view by appealing to Rom 6:7 where Paul says that those who have died with Christ "are justified of sin" (Rom 6:7). There are good reasons, however, to question such an interpretation. We have already seen that the verb "justify" (*dikaioō*) is forensic. Hence, to posit a different definition here is unlikely. This is not to say that God's declaration of righteousness and a changed life belong to two discrete compartments. The judicial and the transformative are related to one another without being precisely the same thing. God's declaration that sinners are in the right before him is the foundation for a changed life. A similar argument can be made regarding the parallel between the "ministry of righteousness" and the "ministry of the Spirit" in 2 Cor 3:8–9. It was unthinkable for Paul to say that one could be righteous in God's sight without being transformed by the Spirit. And yet it does not follow that the transforming power of the Spirit and righteousness are precisely the same.⁴⁴ Too many of those who defend the transformative view argue for identity of meaning from parallelism of terms. Such an approach is flawed, for it collapses the meaning of words so that they become virtually indistinguishable.

Believers are justified, therefore, on the basis of Christ's work and because they are united with him in his death and resurrection. Justification does not describe the ongoing work of the Spirit in believers. The ground of justification is not the moral transformation of believers, even though the transforming work of the Spirit is necessary to receive eternal life.

CONCLUSION

The new perspective has reminded us of a truth that could be easily forgotten. Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ. Ethno-centricism, racism, and exclusivism are contrary to the gospel. At the same time, the Reformers were right in their proclamation of the gospel, and hence the new perspective has over-reacted. There was legalism in Judaism, for all human beings, including the Jews, are prone to establish their own righteousness based on performance. We have seen in a number of Pauline texts that Paul engages in a polemic against those who attempted to attain righteousness by works. Krister Stendahl rightly emphasized that Paul was called on the Damascus Road to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He is right in what he affirms but wrong in what he denies. Paul was both called and converted on the Damascus Road. He was not only summoned to preach to the Gentiles, but he was also called out of darkness into God's glorious light. Finally, I have argued that righteousness language in Paul is fundamentally forensic. Believers are now in a right relationship with God. This is not a legal fiction, for believers truly stand in the right before God since they are united to Christ in both his death and resurrection. Our righteousness does not lie in ourselves; it is found in Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

ENDNOTES

¹E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

²See George Foote Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921): 197–254; Claude G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul* (London: Max Goschen, 1914).

³Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78–96.

⁴After the destruction of the temple repentance alone sufficed for forgiveness.

⁵Jacob Neusner, "Mr Sanders' Pharisees and Mine: A

- Response to E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991): 73-95, esp. 94-95.
- ⁶Mark A. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
- ⁷Friedrich Avemarie, *Tora und Leben: Untersuchungen zur Heilsbedeutung der Tora in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 55; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996).
- ⁸A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001); Simon J. Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
- ⁹D. A. Carson, Peter O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).
- ¹⁰James D. G. Dunn “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1983) 95-122; idem, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14),” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985) 523-42; idem, “Yet Once More—‘The Works of the Law’: A Response,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 46 (1992) 99-117; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 238.
- ¹¹I would argue that “faith in Christ” is in view. For a recent discussion of the whole question, see Michael F. Bird and Preston Sprinkle, ed., *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009).
- ¹²James Dunn began his research restricting works of law to boundary markers and then conceded that it refers to the whole law, though he still sees a focus on boundary markers.
- ¹³I would argue that there is nothing wrong with such boasting or merit if human beings meet the standard. The problem with all people since Adam is that they are prone to trust in their works even though they are sinners and fall badly short of God’s standard. Paul’s fundamental argument, therefore, is not against legalism but disobedience. Since disobedience is a fact, the attempt to secure righteousness by works is a false path and rooted in human delusion about our goodness.
- ¹⁴Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 192.
- ¹⁵Richard B. Hays, “‘Have We Found Abraham to Be Our Forefather according to the Flesh?’ A Reconsideration of Rom 4.1,” *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985): 76-98.
- ¹⁶E.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, 1988), 581-83.
- ¹⁷I. Howard Marshall, “Salvation, Grace, and Works in the Later Writings in the Pauline Corpus,” *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996): 339-58.
- ¹⁸See Martin Luther, *A New Translation of “De Servo Arbitrio (1525)”: Martin Luther’s Reply to Erasmus of Rotterdam* (trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston; Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957).
- ¹⁹This represents my translation.
- ²⁰Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 7-22.
- ²¹See especially R. Hvalvik, “A ‘Sonderweg’ for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11:25-27,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38 (1990): 87-107.
- ²²Here I have revised what I wrote on righteousness in my *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).
- ²³William Wrede, *Paul* (Lexington, KY: American Theological Library Association, 1962), 122–23; Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: H. Holt, 1931), 225.
- ²⁴Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 502–8.
- ²⁵Dunn, “Yet Once More,” 2. Dunn understands justification by faith to speak especially against pride in one’s nationality, race, or culture. He does acknowledge truth in the old perspective as well.
- ²⁶For a defense of the cruciality of justification, see Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).
- ²⁷I would defend the notion that Galatians was written early, but such a view is contested.
- ²⁸Rightly Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 49, 85–100; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The*

“Lutheran” Paul and His Critics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2004), 353–66.

²⁹The forensic reading is common in the history of interpretation, see more recently, Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 261–96.

³⁰See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “By Faith, Not By Sight”: Paul and the Order of Salvation (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 79–108.

³¹The legal character of righteousness is apparent elsewhere in the OT (Job 4:17; 9:2, 14–15, 20; 13:18; Ps 51:4; Isa 43:9, 26).

³²See esp. Mark A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, vol. 1 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 415–22.

³³See N. T. Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3, *Romans* (ed. D. M. Hay and E. E. Johnson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 33–34, 39; 1997: 113–33; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 340–46.

³⁴See especially Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 286–96.

³⁵Against the view that righteousness is centrally a matter of ecclesiology rather than soteriology, Paul A. Rainbow (*The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification*. [Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster, 2005], 104, n. 22) rightly says, “We do not gain a relationship with God by being counted among his people; rather, we find a place among his people by virtue of his acceptance of us.”

³⁶Some of these texts use the verbal form, but that is precisely my point. The verbal and noun forms should not be sharply distinguished.

³⁷For the importance of the resurrection in the Pauline conception of righteousness, see Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification, and the New Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 40–59.

³⁸The genitive denotes source and is also descriptive. Our grammatical categories can mislead us if we begin to think that the genitive must be restricted to only one category. Such a decision imposes our grammatical distinctions upon the text treating them as if

they have fallen from heaven.

³⁹Rightly Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 454–56.

⁴⁰The interpretation of Rom 3:21–26 is a subject of intense debate. For an explanation of the interpretation offered here and interaction with the literature, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 176–99.

⁴¹In support of expiation and the notion that judgment is merely the natural result of sin, not the expression of God’s personal wrath, see C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Moffatt New Testament Commentary; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 21–24; idem, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 82–95. Supporting a reference to propitiation are Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 144–213; Roger R. Nicole, “C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1955): 117–57.

⁴²Many scholars argue that the word *hilastērion* refers to mercy seat here (see, e.g., Richard H. Bell, “Sacrifice and Christology in Paul” *Journal of Theological Studies* 53 [2002]: 17–19). Some think such a reference excludes the idea of propitiation (e.g., Bell). Such a conclusion is mistaken. If the proper steps were not taken in the sanctuary, God’s wrath would flame forth (cf. Lev 10:1–3).

⁴³For those who support a transformative view, see Ernst Käsemann, “The Righteousness of God’ in Paul,” in *New Testament Questions of Today*, translated by W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress 1969), 168–82; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus* (FRLANT. 2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966). For a summary of the various views that also details some of the differences among the various writers noted here, see Joseph Plevnik, “Recent Developments in the Discussion concerning Justification by Faith,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 2 (1986): 47–52.

⁴⁴See Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 287–88.