



**Reference guide for**  
**UNDERSTANDING**  
**THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL**  
**IN LIGHT OF THE**  
**THE HISTORIC PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE**

# Quick Reference Chart

Lutheran/Reformed Perspective      New Perspective

Works of the Law (What is Paul talking about?)	human effort to do good works in order to meet God's standards; the idea that humans can merit salvation from God by their good works alone	"badges of covenant membership" or criticizing Gentile believers who had begun to rely on the Torah to reckon Jewish kinship.
Human Effort & Good Works	Paul's rhetoric as being against human effort to earn righteousness.	Paul has nothing negative to say about the idea of human effort or good works, and saying many positive things about both. Many statements in Paul's writings that specify the criteria of final judgment as being the works of the individual.
Meaning of "Pistis" (Faithfulness/Faith)	A belief in God and Christ, and trust in Christ for salvation with faith that he will save you.	Faithfulness, meaning firm commitment in an interpersonal relationship.  Synonymous with "obedience" when the people in the relationship held different status levels (e.g. a slave being faithful to his master).

Far from being equivalent to “lack of human effort”, the word seems to imply and require human effort. The interpretation of Paul’s writings that we need “faithfully” to obey God’s commands is quite different from one which sees him saying that we need to have “faith” that he will do everything for us.

Meaning of  
“Charis”  
(Favor/Grace)

Charis means “Grace” and it is understood to refer to the idea that there is a lack of human effort in salvation because God is the controlling factor.

“Favor” is a better translation, as the word refers normally to “doing a favor”.

Paul speaks of how God did us a “favor” by sending Jesus, he is saying that God took the initiative, but is not implying a lack of human effort in salvation, and is in fact implying that Christians have an obligation to repay the favor God has done for them.

Does not teach that Christians earn their way to heaven outside of the death of Christ. Forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ is necessary for salvation. But, that forgiveness demands effort on the part of the individual (cf. Paul in Phil. 3:12–16)

The Atonement

Penal substitution atonement theory and the belief in the “finished work” of Christ have been central.

Other theories of the atonement are more central to Paul’s thinking

# Where Did this New Perspective Come?

The philosophical currents behind the New Perspective perspective

- a. Science and sociology in 20th century.
  - A. Modernity: Science as a worldview
    - The failure of The enlightenment project to produce through Scientific investigation to morally stable and cohesive meta-narrative.
    - End of 20th century the modern confidence in scientific objectivity that is the claims that we could replace the “myths of religion” with “objective” scientific explanations of our world.
      - What undermined it
        - New communication theories,
        - the discovery of the subconscious,
        - rapid shifts in scientific theory
        - In short the hermeneutic of suspicion Nietzsche Freud and Marx.
      - Conclusion - science was subject to its own subjectivity – we see only what we are prepared to see and discover only what our present technology allows.
        - It’s mechanical answers left no room for moral questions.
          - humanity was an animal subject to his nature groundable in the supposed objectivity of Evolutionary theory..
      - as a consequence, Western philosophy plunged into relativism that concluded that the only truth we can know is what we individually perceive.  
Epistemological subjectivity.
    - B. Sociological process:
      - Such individualistic relativism isolates everyone in his or her own personal truth
      - The secular answer was the claim that we could understand each other if we shared similar experiences. Yet the more we compared our lives, the more we discovered that our experiences – even if we are in the same communities, churches, or families – are radically different.
      - The need for a common framework to understand others’ experiences led to the conclusion that the way for us to have common understanding of our world is through shared stories.
      - Shared stories are the shared experiences that allow us to understand our world with a common perspective.
      - Thus each culture frames its own meta-narratives though the stories they tell. Such meta-narratives form the basis for interpreting individual experiences and allow us to live in community.
- b. Inside the Church (during 20th century)
  - A. Influence of science and sociology in religious studies progressed into three strains of thought.
    1. Religious Rational materialism:

- liberal theologians infected by Modernity and driven by the fundamental assumptions of the enlightenment project claimed that Scripture was myth that could be replaced by scientific understanding.
  - when science lost its claim of objectivity. Religion was just a coping mechanism resulting from our evolutionary biology.
2. Existential individualism
    - After World War II, “Neo-orthodox” theologians claimed that the Bible could be understood existentially (i.e., individually) by the unique work of the Spirit in each person yet this was framed apart from the historical truth claims of the Bible.
    - This individualistic view of faith was eventually seen to be feeding the interests and appetites of self.
  3. Communal relativism
    - Contemporary (Often liberal) theologians turned to teaching that faith is formed in community. Highlighting the fact that ancient people understood themselves in relation to the community with a strong sense of social identity.
    - These theologians described the social process as if it were an answer to the question, of authority and origin.
      - The process: A shared narratives of each culture/community - forms the doctrine and practices of that community - that creates its religion - that, in turn, informs its worldview. The worldview then upholds the possibility structure that gives credence to the shared Narrative - that reinforces the doctrine and practices that creates the religion, that teaches the worldview.
      - This assumes the Bible is not divine truth provided by heaven, but is simply a socially constructed, cultural product that provides a narratives by which individuals can operate in community.
      - From this view, Christianity supposedly is no different from any other cultural product. Like all religions it creates its own “truth” with its own stories – there is no transcendent truth, all religions are human projections. Beneficial for society in so far as it’s practical benefits.

What does all of this have to do with the New Perspective on Paul?

1. NPP Expects many of the assumptions of Communal relativism.
  - NPP follow the methodological assumptions of the community emphases in contemporary philosophy. They do not accept Wholesale the relativism of the “faith-is-formed-in-community” philosophies.
  - The sociological methodology is accepted - some of the logic of social construction plays into their understanding of how ideas work in communal thinking. Informing the logic of how a first century Jew “might possibly” think and argue.
2. NPP rejects many of the tenets of existential individualism

- They are alarmed over the compromising and ineffective nature of modern church communities (particularly in England) due to the influence of secular culture, often highlighting the influence of hedonistic consumeristic individualism.
  - NPP observe how hard it is to distinguish between the secular culture and the protestant often Evangelical church on cultural and even ethical matters.
  - NPP look in Scripture and see a calling to live as a covenant community that is distinct from the culture, united to Christ, united to each other, and transforming the world.
- They React to what perceived as bad influences on the Church
  - Two commonly cited examples
    1. individualistic, autonomous, perspective leading to an overzealous adherents to laissez-faire capitalism and a lack of awareness and action towards the poor and oppressed.
    2. Baptist/Revivalistic approach: overly focused on producing personal professions of faith, without personal following Christ (obedience) or community involvement (Examples: Billy Graham crusades)
  - NPP believe they are calling the Church to be the community the Bible requires
    1. by their correcting bad doctrinal teachings resulting from cultural influences like individualism and interpretive left over from reformation.
    2. by a teaching the central place of the biblical narrative (larger redemptive story)

### What Are Some Good Emphases of the New Perspective?

- Many of those who advocate the New Perspective are seeking to bring Biblical correction to what they believe are misunderstandings in present expressions of Christian belief.
- The goal is to steer the Church toward greater fidelity.
- Some of the concerns of the New Perspective are valid,
  - 1) We are not saved alone.
    - NPP rightly critiques much of the North American expression of Christianity.
      - NAC can make faith merely a personal fire insurance policy that requires
        - a. no obligation to others,
        - b. little concern for the world,
        - c. little obedience to God beyond what satisfies our own pleasures.
    - We are saved as part of a community with concomitant loves, obligations, and identifications.
  - 2) Saving faith is not alone.
    - NPP reminds us that we are part of a great story in which God is calling a covenant community to Himself in order to glorify Himself and transform this world for His glory.
    - Our calling inherently includes works of obedience.
    - Our calling necessarily includes works of obedience.
    - We have no assurance of the validity of our faith where there is no fruit to our faith.

### 3) The Bible is not propositions alone.

- NPP values the Bible's use of narrative.
  - The Bible is not simply a systematic theology textbook.
    - Attempts to force all the Bible into easy doctrinal categories can create an unhealthy rationalism. We can lose the Plot of Scripture by over-systematizing the theological propositions of Scripture.
    - This loss of story is often accompanied by a loss of Beauty. The Bible becomes a tool for religion not God's revelation for transformation.
  - The Bible as a textbook view does not adequately express the human experiences, divine interventions, and salvation story by which God communicates His covenant love throughout redemptive history.
- The emphasis on the drama of redemption in Scripture can help theologians and pastors better describe what the Bible teaches on its own terms, especially in ministry to a generation is powerfully moved by narrative.

### Evangelical response to philosophical assumptions and focus

#### 1. Respect and lean from NPP focus on community and critiques of individualism.

Evangelicals have understood that Biblical faith, cannot and should not be understood ONLY individualistically.

#### 2. We uphold view of God's written word as a authoritative word that comes from outside

- We understand God's inspired and transcendent word both because of His Spirit in us and because we are part of the body of Christ. The stories of the Bible are descriptions of experiences that enable Christians across all ages to understand the unchanging propositions of Scripture.
- God placed us in the church community not merely to satisfy our needs, but because the community – as each member does his or her part – helps us understand and apply the truth of Scripture.
- Neither faith (doctrine) nor true religion (ethical practice) are socially constructed by the community. The expression of a faith and the understanding of a religion are not possible apart from the plausibility structures that a community helps support. Such plausibility structures includes the saints who have gone before us, as well as the saints that are around us. Thus, such plausibility structures are necessary for the normal human development of a religious community,
- Yet all human structures even structures of thought (ie. plausibility structures) should be brought into submission. come under the authority of God's written word. A word given to us from outside ourselves, so we may, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;" (2 Cor 10:5 KJV)

3. All things considered adherence to NPP are to be considered brothers in the Faith.
  - All rights of brotherhood extend it to them, particularly in
    1. personal loving, honorable treatment and diligent brotherly accountability.
    2. As well as The church's disciplinary oversight and the church's ear, ie. A willingness to be corrected by entering into honest sincere dialogue about the best way to interpret Paul and his thought.

# Essential Beliefs

Essential beliefs of the Old Perspective and new Perspective alterations

- Not every NPP scholar agrees on every point, the following may serve as a general outline of core beliefs that remain fundamental to the NPP claim(s).

## Understanding of Judaism

A. Old Perspective Understanding of Judaism:

1. Jews of the 2nd temple period believed that they could obtain favor with God in salvation by doing the works of the law. Judaism was a religion that believed that human beings are basically good and that one can merit
2. Judaism understood acceptance with God by doing good works. Paul evidenced this mentality in Phil 3:4-9 where we read of his life before conversion when he had “confidence in the flesh” (v 4), “gain” (v 7), “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law” (v 9).

B. New Perspective Understanding of Judaism:

1. First-century Judaism: a religion of Covenant Grace.

- a. Fundamental premise in the NPP is that Judaism was a religion of grace.

"On the point at which many have found the decisive contrast between Paul and Judaism - grace and works - Paul is in agreement with Palestinian Judaism... Salvation is by grace but judgment is according to works'...God saves by grace, but... within the framework established by grace he rewards good deeds and punishes transgression." (Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, p. 543)

"We have misjudged early Judaism, especially Pharisaism, if we have thought of it as an early version of Pelagianism,"

(N T Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said, p. 32).

- a. Old Perspective rebuttals

"While one may enthusiastically endorse the 'new perspective' dictum that first-century Judaism was a religion of grace and acknowledge that it represents an important corrective of earlier caricatures, it is hardly pedantic to point out that more precision is needed before such a statement can illuminate a discussion of the 'Lutheran' Paul. Pelagius and Augustine - to take but the most obvious examples - both believed in human dependence on divine grace, but they construed that dependence very differently"

(Stephen Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New on Paul, pp. 261-262).

Westerholm points out, 1.) although first century Judaism may have believed in grace, it becomes even more important to establish why they believed in grace and how this effected their view of salvation. 2.) the NPP seem quick to jump to the conclusion that first-century Judaism was in agreement yet likely not a

monolithic understanding held by all. 3.) it may not be same understanding of grace found within the NT and Paul's theology.

## **Pattern of the Jewish religion**

### A. Covenantal Nomism: The Pattern of the Jewish religion

#### 1. Definition: Covenantal nomism

"Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression." (E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, p. 75)

Sanders argues Covenantal Nomism is universal "pattern of religion" found in Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism.

If covenantal nomism was operating as the primary category under which Jews understood the Law, then when Jews spoke of obeying commandments, or when they required strict obedience of themselves and fellow Jews, it was because they were "keeping the covenant," rather than out of some legalism.

"one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant."

- E.P. Sanders

As long as a Jew kept the covenant, he remained part of God's people.

#### 2. How does one keep the covenant?

Sander's tells us "the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments." All of Judaism's talk about "obedience" is thus in the context of "covenantal nomism" and not legalism. As a result, Judaism is then not concerned with "how to have a right relationship with God" but with "how to remain his covenant people."

#### 3. The importance of Boundary Markers

What if you were a Jew in the diaspora and you could not do any of the temple regulations. How could you keep the covenant? Jew needed some way to be obedient and outwardly show their distinctiveness as a people. This is what made the "boundary markers" so important of a concept in the NNP view.

Boundary markers are ways that the dysphoria Jews can keep the covenant. Boundary Markers is a terms to describe a set of observances such as circumcision, food laws, the sabbath etc. that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. One could distinguish who was a Jew or Gentile by seeing who followed these laws. Partially for dysphoria Jews (Jews living outside Israel),

boundary markers marked out the boundaries of identifying who were and were not God's people.

NPP proposes that Paul came to do away with these "boundary markers" so that Jew and Gentile would be unified and so that the Abrahamic covenant could be actualized (Gen 12:2-3, where all nations are blessed).

## **Saul of Tarsus**

### Old Perspective on Saul of Tarsus

1. Saul was not unlike any other Jew. He evidenced the works mentality in Phil 3:4-9 where we read of his life before conversion when he had "confidence in the flesh" (v 4), "gain" (v 7), "a righteousness of my own that comes from the law" (v 9). Taking Acts 9 into account with Phil 3 hints at Saul being power hungry, desired prominent position and the praise of men in his persecution of Christians.

### New Perspective on Saul of Tarsus

Paul, before conversion, was more of a zealot for his nation (Israel) and their special place in God's plan than a devout Jew who was trying to earn his salvation.

He grew in the Jewish diaspora, living outside Israel in Tarsus a town in modern day Turkey. Thus the background that Paul was exposed to prior to his conversion. Was one where the Jews did not believe that their works helped them attain salvation, but it was their "nationalistic boundary markers" (i.e. circumcision, food laws, sabbath, etc.) that kept them within the people of God. Thus, doing works, along with the boundary markers were used to keep themselves within the boundary of God's people

After Paul's conversion he was changed, but he was still a Jew. Everything he knew as "Saul," the Pharisee, did not just go away. It was radically changed due to his encounter with Jesus. Paul was not fighting legalism, but was instead fighting Jewish Christians' being exclusionary often based on a national pride that separated the Jews from the Gentiles.

## **What Paul finds wrong with Judaism:**

### Old Perspective on What Paul finds wrong with Judaism:

Jews were seeking to attain favor with God by doing good works rather than seeking forgiveness from their sin by exercising faith in the death of Christ. For Paul the Jews' basic problem was soteriological, not ecclesiological.

### New Perspective on What Paul finds wrong with Judaism:

NPP vary in what they believe Paul found wrong with Judaism.

E.P. Sanders

Our analysis of Rabbinic and other Palestinian Jewish literature did not reveal the kind of religion best characterized as legalistic works-righteousness. But more important for the present point is the observation that in any case that charge is not the heart of Paul's critique... Doing the law, in short, is wrong only because it is not faith. In itself obedience to the law is a good thing... and is faulted only when it seems to threaten exclusiveness of salvation by faith in Christ. (Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism 1977 p. 550)

Sanders summarizes his point, "this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity," (p. 552).

NT Wright, saw "national righteousness" as the problem.

If we ask how it is that Israel has missed her vocation, Paul's answer is that she is guilty not of "legalism" or "works-righteousness" but of what I call "national righteousness," the belief that fleshly Jewish decent guarantees membership of God's true covenant people," (NT Wright, The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith, p. 65).

James Dunn agrees with Wright

"Paul was reacting primarily against the exclusivism that he himself had previously fought to maintain," (James Dunn, "Paul's Theology," The Face of New Testament Studies, p. 336).

Old Perspective rebuttal

A pressing question, "If Judaism preached good Protestant doctrine after all, then what could Paul possibly have found wrong with it?" (Stephen Westerholm Perspectives Old and New on Paul, p. 250).

## More Exegetical issues

### I. Pistis - Faith

- An ongoing debate related to the "new" perspective has been over Paul's use of the Greek word pistis (πίστις, meaning "trust", "belief", "faith", or "faithfulness").

#### A. Old perspective on faith

- Writers with a more historic Lutheran and Reformed perspective have typically interpreted this word as meaning a belief in God and Christ, and trust in Christ for salvation with faith that he will save you. This interpretation is based on several passages, notably the epistle to the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:9).
- E. P. Sanders has conceded that Ephesians 2:9 teaches the traditional perspective.

## B. New Perspective on faith

- Recent studies of the Greek word *pistis* have concluded that its primary and most common “Roman” meaning was faithfulness, meaning loyalty or firm commitment in an interpersonal relationship.
- As such, the word could be almost synonymous with "obedience" when the people in the relationship held different status levels (e.g. a slave being faithful to his master).
- In this line of thinking it is not equivalent to "lack of human effort", the word seems to imply and require human effort.
- The interpretation of Paul's writings that we need "faithfully" to obey God's commands is quite different from one which sees him saying that we need to have "faith" that he will do everything for us.
- This explains why and how James could teach, "faith without works is dead" and "a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone" (Js. 2:24), while also teaching mere belief places one on the same level as the demons (Jam 2).
- The "new" perspective argues that James was concerned with those who were trying to reduce faith to an intellectual subscription without any intent to follow God or Jesus, and that Paul always intended "faith" to mean a full submission to God.

## Old perspective rebuttal

- This debate gets confusing given the reformers were adamant that faith is not intellectual assent. Which gets at the James' point.
- While asserting Paul used *face in* in at least three ways. 1.) With the definite article before *Pistis* The Faith meaning creedal doctrine used in the pastoral letters.. 2.) saving faith - *Pistis* (faith) as a full trust in the person of Christ and his work on our behalf. 3.) *Pistis* used as - NPP uses *It* - “faithfully” follow Christ which the reformers called sanctifying faith. The last two must be interpreted by context no grammatical clues.

## II. *Pistis Christou* – 'faith in', or 'faithfulness of'

- the *pistis Christou* ("faith of Christ") debate. Paul several times uses this phrase at key points in his writings and it is linguistically ambiguous. The translation issue deals with if it is a verbal genitive vs the adjectival genitive in various places.
  1. Verbal genitive
    - The verbal genitive assumes that the head noun is verbal, it finishes the verbal idea.
    - In the case of *Pistis Christou* the verbal genitive can be either subjective or objective.
      - it may refer to our faith in Christ ("objective genitive"),
      - It may refer to “faith of Christ” or Christ's own faithfulness to God ("subjective genitive")
  2. adjectival genitive
    - More common tenses in Greek

- The 'adjectival genitive' is debated for *Pistis Christou*. It is unsure if a proper name can be used as an adjective. NPP point to the fact that Christ is not a proper name to Paul as Jewish believer, he understand Christ as a title.
  - It may even refer to our Christ-like or "Christic faith".
- The subjective genitive reading (faith/faithfulness of Christ [toward God]) may function in a manner similar to the adjectival one in the overall schema of Paul's thought, by making a point equally about Christ's faith/fulness and about the Christian's too.
  - In the case of Gal 2:16 at least
  - It is a big difference to say, "we are justified by Christ's faithfulness" referring to the one-off event of the cross. (Subjective) And "we are justified by Christlike or "Christic" faithfulness", referring to the faith in God we now share that may be compared with his. (Adjectival).
  - The theological implications are real. With the adjectival we have Paul saying in 2:16 that saving faith extends to even a general belief in monotheism. (monotheistic Pluralism ie. Muslims and Jews are saved by their faith)
- There is wide disagreement within the academic community over which of these is the best rendering and over if the use of the genitive changes given context.
- To stress the issue just look at Gal 2:20b.
  - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (NIV)
  - I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (NET)
  - I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (KJV)
  - The NET Bible translation became the first mainstream English Bible translation to use a subjective genitive translation ("the faithfulness of Jesus Christ") of this phrase.
  - KJV also chooses the subjective genitive but preserve the ambiguity of the genitive in its phrasing.
    - Such ambiguity is in line with Jesus as the Word of God incarnate is both the object and subject of faith and is only known by faith in and through his saving action. This concept of the faith basis of all knowledge of Christ was observed in the New Testament exegetical passages of 1 Pet 2:4-12 and 1 John 1:1-7 as the foundation for relationship with God in Christ.

- Why it matters (in Gal 2:20)
  - The transition of *pistis Christou* ("faith of Christ") matters because in many cases it changes the application.
    1. Live by Faith in Christ is active trusting belief
    2. Live by the faithfulness of Christ is passive and descriptive of Christ not our belief in him.
    3. Live by Christ-like faith the kind of faith/faithfulness Christ showed towards God.

All three could work in Gal 2:20 but apply the third to *Pistis Christou* Gal 2:16 and we have a problem unless you don't mind salvation depending on Christ-like faithfulness.

## **"Works of the Law" Gal 2:16**

Old Perspective "Works of the Law"

- The deeds and actions demanded by the law which cannot provide justification for anyone (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10) • Why? No one is capable of obeying the law perfectly in order to gain God's favor (Rom 3:9-20).
- The motivation for doing these "works of the law" was not sociological or racial but was rather soteriological. Jews were seeking to do "the works of the law" because they wanted to gain merit or favor with God.

New Perspective "Works of the Law"

The following issues tend to divide NPP proponents not all of them agree.

Works of the Law Paul's letters contain a substantial amount of criticism of "works of the Law".

Defining what Paul meant by "works of the Law" is the most consistent distinguishing feature between the two perspectives.

The key questions involve Paul's view(s) of the law and the meaning of the controversy in which Paul was engaged. Paul strongly argued that we are "justified by faith in Christ (or "the faith of Christ") and not by doing the works of the law" (Gal. 2:16b).

- Historic Protestant perspectives, Gal 2:16b has been understood as an indictment of legalistic efforts to merit favor before God."
- "works of the Law" then as referring to human effort to do good works in order to meet God's standards. What is called works righteousness.
- In this view, Paul is arguing against the idea that humans can merit salvation from God by their good works alone.

Key point: the "new" perspective agrees that we cannot merit salvation; the issue is what exactly Paul is addressing

By contrast, new-perspective scholars see Paul as talking about "badges of covenant membership" or criticizing Gentile believers who had begun to rely on the Torah to reckon Jewish kinship.

It is argued that in Paul's time, Israelites were being faced with a choice of whether to continue to follow their ancestral customs, the Torah, or to follow the Roman Empire's trend to adopt Greek customs. The new-perspective view is that Paul's writings discuss the comparative merits of following ancient Israelite or ancient Greek customs. Paul is interpreted as being critical of a common Jewish view that following traditional Israelite customs makes a person better off before God, pointing out that Abraham was righteous before the Torah was given. Paul identifies customs he is concerned about as circumcision, dietary laws, and observance of special days.

NPP argue, when Paul criticized the Jews for adhering to "works of the law," he was referring to these "boundary markers" rather than a system of works-righteousness, as is presumed in the traditional understanding of Paul's arguments.

James Dunn shows this, "Works of law', 'works of the law' are nowhere understood here, either by his Jewish interlocutors or by Paul himself, as works which earn God's favor, as merit-amassing observances. They are rather seen as badges: they are simply what membership of the covenant people involves, what mark out the Jews as God's people;...in other words, Paul has in view precisely what Sanders calls 'covenantal nomism.' And what he denies is that God's justification depends on 'covenantal nomism,' that God's grace extends only to those who wear the badge of the covenant."

Dunn notes elsewhere that these "badges" can also be called boundary markers

At the 10th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference (2003), N.T. Wright explained his agreements and disagreements with James Dunn.

"... when Jimmy Dunn added his stones to the growing pile I found myself in both agreement and disagreement with him. His proposal about the meaning of 'works of the law' in Paul – that they are not the moral works through which one gains merit but the works through which the Jew is defined over against the pagan – I regard as exactly right. It has proved itself again and again in the detailed exegesis; attempts to deny it have in my view failed. But Dunn, like Sanders (and like some other New Perspective writers such as John Ziesler) has not, I think, got to the heart of Paul. Again, much of my writing on Paul over the last twenty years at least has been in at least implicit dialogue with him, and I find his exposition of justification itself less than satisfying. For one thing, he never understands what I take to be Paul's fundamental covenant theology; for another, his typically protestant anti-sacramentalism leads him to miss the point of Romans 6."

## The righteousness of God

Proponents of New Perspectivism argue that the righteousness of God, spoken of by Paul in Romans, is referring to God's faithfulness rather than the positive imputation of Christ's righteousness.

"If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatsoever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom. For the judge to be righteous does not mean that the court has found in his favor. For the plaintiff or defendant to be righteous does not mean that he or she has tried the case properly or impartially. To imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge's righteousness is simply a category mistake. That is not how the language works." - N.T. Wright

## Faith vs. Works

NPP advocates argue that the traditional dichotomy of faith in Christ vs. works righteousness isn't present in Paul.

The dichotomy is between "covenant badges" (also called boundary markers) vs. the all-inclusive instrument of faith (which allow Gentiles into this covenant).

## Paul's rhetoric: Human effort and good works

Historic protestant perspective see Paul's rhetoric as being against human effort to earn righteousness, based on their interpretation of the phrase "works of the law," as Works righteousness.

"New-perspective" interpretations of Paul tend to result in Paul having nothing negative to say about the idea of human effort and saying many positive things about good works.

New-perspective scholars point to the many statements in Paul's writings that specify the criteria of Final judgment as being the works of the individual.

Final Judgment According to Works... was quite clear for Paul (as indeed for Jesus). Paul, in company with mainstream second-Temple Judaism, affirms that God's final judgment will be in accordance with the entirety of a life led – in accordance, in other words, with works.

(N.T. Wright, New Perspectives on Paul, 10th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference. Online)

Wright however does not hold the view that good works contribute to one's salvation but rather that the final judgment is something we can look forward to as a future vindication of God's present declaration of our righteousness. In other words, our works are a result of our salvation and the future judgment will show that.

## **Justification and imputation**

As stated above, NPP proponents agree on some things, however not all see things the same way.

N.T. Wright has been the most outspoken regarding the redefinition of the doctrine of justification' imputed righteousness.

## **The Old Perspective on Justification and imputation**

Justification defined:

The legal declaration of righteousness applied to the sinner wherein the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner so that he stands in a right relationship with God. Thus, justification has to do with one's initial salvation which will be confirmed in accordance with the works generated by the Spirit at the final judgment.

Justification involves:

1. Righteousness of God – God's unswerving commitment to do what is right. "What is right is what upholds in proper proportion the value of what is infinitely valuable, namely, God" (Piper, Future Justification, 64). Thus, "the essence of the righteousness of God is his unwavering faithfulness to uphold the glory of his name" (Piper, 64).

2. Functional Meaning of Justification – the declaration that the sinner is morally righteous before God. This action is not merely the declaration of forgiveness nor is it merely the status/ verdict of acquittal that also legally makes one a member of the covenant family.

Question: How is it that a morally righteous judge can declare a sinner to be innocent?

Answer: The imputation of Christ's righteousness.

3. Imputed righteousness – it would indeed be "nonsense" and "a legal fiction" for a holy God to pronounce a guilty sinner righteous. And this is the reason why the imputation of Christ's moral righteousness to the sinner is necessary (2 Cor 5:21).

4. Future justification – we are saved by Faith alone but such Faith is never alone. Faith issues in loving works of righteousness. Thus good works are the necessary evidence of justification rather than the basis of final justification. At the final judgment good works will be the Spirit-motivated evidence of our initial justification.

## **One new perspective Guy on Justification**

Justification in the Wright

Justification isn't merely an initial means by which someone is right with God, but rather a mark of who already is right with God. Two quotes by N.T. Wright.

"[T]he doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by 'the gospel'. It is implied by the gospel; when the gospel is proclaimed, people come to faith and so are regarded by God as members of his people. But 'the gospel' is not an account of how people get saved. It is, as we saw in an earlier chapter, the

proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ....Let us be quite clear. 'The gospel' is the announcement of Jesus' lordship, which works with power to bring people into the family of Abraham, now redefined around Jesus Christ and characterized solely by faith in him. 'Justification' is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family, on this basis and no other."

"In theology, therefore, justification is not the means whereby it becomes possible to declare someone in the right. It is simply that declaration itself. It is not how someone becomes a Christian, but simply the declaration that someone is a Christian. It is not the exercise of mercy, but the just declaration concerning one who has already received mercy. This is a crucial distinction, without which it is impossible to understand the biblical material."

In Wright's view, justification has more to do with Jewish-Gentile issues rather than one's status before God.

Wright's Denial of imputed righteousness

N.T. Wright reinterprets texts classically used as proof-texts for imputed righteousness.

He understands 2 Corinthians 5:21, to refer to God's covenant faithfulness.

(see [N.T. Wright's Becoming the Righteousness of God PDF](#)).

"Is there then no 'reckoning of righteousness' in, for instance, Romans 5:14-21? Yes, there is; but my case is that this is not God's own righteousness, or Christ's own righteousness, that is reckoned to God's redeemed people, but rather the fresh status of 'covenant member', and/or 'justified sinner', which is accredited to those who are in Christ, who have heard the gospel and responded with 'the obedience of faith'." -

(Wright at Rutherford House Conference 2003, pdf, p. 8)

Wright agrees with the substance of the doctrine of "imputed righteousness" he does not like the language.

Wright does not believe God's righteousness is anything that he can give or that can be transferred to a believer. The believer is simply declared righteous because he is now a covenant member.

## **What is the Gospel?**

Old Perspective on the Gospel

The crucified Jesus is the Lord of the world and those who believe in his death receive forgiveness from their sins and are justified. Failure to announce that Jesus died for sins (1 Cor 15:3) is only bad news. The message of rescue from sins is the good news of the Gospel.

"The good news for Paul was, first, that a persecutor of Jesus could be given a right standing before God through faith. The good news was not that Jesus died and was raised—that was emphatically bad news at this moment! What turned

that bad news of death and resurrection into good news was the teaching . . . that by faith alone this life and death of Jesus could be the ground of the justification of the ungodly, not condemnation”

(John Piper, Future Justification, 87-88)

### The Gospel

When Paul refers to ‘the gospel’, he is not referring to a system of salvation, though of course the gospel implies and contains this, nor even to the good news that there now is a way of salvation open to all, but rather to the proclamation that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth has been raised from the dead and thereby demonstrated to be both Israel’s Messiah and the world’s true Lord. ‘The gospel’ is not ‘you can be saved, and here’s how’; the gospel, for Paul, is ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’. ...The gospel is the heraldic proclamation of Jesus as Lord, it is not first and foremost a suggestion that one might like to enjoy a new religious experience. Nor is it even the take-it-or-leave-it offer of a way to salvation. It is a royal summons to submission, to obedience, to allegiance; and the form that this submission and obedient allegiance takes is of course faith. That is what Paul means by ‘the obedience of faith’.

(NT Wright New perspective on Paul, 10th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference)

What is the Bible’s Big Idea/Storyline in relation to Soteriology?

Old perspective answer

Was God’s “single divine purpose,” i.e., his covenantal scheme (to deal with evil and put the whole world right), the metanarrative of the Bible?

No, it would appear that God had a different way of dealing with evil as the overarching plan of Scripture – the seed of the woman in Gen 3:15. Coming out of the garden, God immediately began to show how he intended to set the world right again after the fall (Abel, Seth, Noah). Well before Abraham, God demonstrated his commitment to establish a line of God worshipers that would eventually lead to the One who would fulfill Gen 3:15.

While Abraham and Israel were part of this succession, God’s covenant with Abraham was not the primary means by which the evil of the fall would be dealt with. Rather, it was God’s commitment to bring glory to himself through the seed of the woman that would bring an end to sin and crush the serpent’s head.

Abraham was part of the plan, but the covenant was not the primary means by which God fulfilled his purpose for the solution to the Fall. • Perhaps the best way to explain this metanarrative is to call it “redemptive” rather than “covenantal.”

The big point seems to be that God wanted to redeem people from their sin as the primary storyline. Permitting them entrance into his family was certainly a secondary effect, but we should not confuse the primary with the secondary.

## New Perspective

### The idea of Jews Still in Exile

Wright thinks that the many of the Jews of Jesus' day regarded Israel as 'still in exile' and that Messiah's coming would deliver the captives, release God's people from exile, and restore God's kingdom from foreign domination; it would in fact be the right ordering of God over the foreign nations through Israel.

In line with this understanding, Wright regards much of Jesus' action as an enactment of this part of the "salvation story."

In this story the political nature comes out strongly.

By consequence, Wright tends to deemphasize, but not deny, the personal nature of salvation in Christ.

This understanding and emphasis often clashes with the evangelical historic reformed faith which has consistently held the focus of Jesus' message to be 'personal forgiveness of sin by vicarious sacrificial atonement of Jesus as Passover Lamb'.

## The Atonement

Historic protestant perspective:

- Generally hold to some form of penal substitution.
- They see it as central theory put forth in the New Testament.
- The belief in the "finished work" of Christ have been central in protestant theology.

### New Perspective Views

- NPP question whether penal substitution is really of central importance in Paul's writings.
- Some agree with penal substitution just see the New Testament as promoting a different thematic focus.
- They see other theories of the atonement as more central to Paul's thinking
- There has been little agreement.
- The following is a broad sample of different views advocated by various NPP scholars:

E. P. Sanders argued that Paul's central idea was that we mystically spiritually participate in the risen Christ and that all Paul's judicial language was subordinate to the participatory language.

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

N. T. Wright has argued that Paul sees Israel as representative of humanity and taking onto itself the sinfulness of humanity through history. Jesus, in turn, as Messiah is representative of Israel and so focuses the sins of Israel on himself on the cross.

Wright's view is thus a "historicized" form of Penal Substitution.

(N.T. Wright. "[Romans and the Theology of Paul](#)" (PDF). 2005 As well as N. T. Wright, "Jesus and the Victory of God" Fortress Press 1996)

David Brondos has argued that Paul sees Jesus as just a part in a wider narrative in which the Church is working to transform lives of individuals and the world, and that Paul's participatory language should be understood in an ethical sense (humans living Christ-like lives) rather than mystically as Sanders thought.

(David Brondos, "Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle's Story of Redemption", Fortress Press, 2006)

Pilch and Malina see Paul as holding to the Satisfaction theory of atonement but they also only consider the undisputed letters of Paul for the study.

(Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, "Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul" Augsburg Fortress 2006)

### **Justification and Judgement**

Rom 2:13 "but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."

In Romans chapter 2, Paul's Apparent speaks of justification by works and says that those who do good works will receive eternal life (Rom 2:13, 2:6; cf. 2:7–10, 26–29). How could Paul say that eternal life in according to works when he also maintains in 3:20 that no one is righteous by doing works of law? Since this passage is the key text in a debate about works and the final judgement i have given the three main views and the frame of thought surrounding them.

#### **A. Hypothetical view**

Calvin, Murray, Moo - Paul means just what he says. Those who do good works will receive eternal life. But, says Moo, the problem is that no one does the necessary good works. All fall short of perfection, and no one is justified by works of law (3:20). All of chapter two demands perfection for eternal life—a perfection no sinner ever attain. This view is called the The Hypothetical View claims Paul was speaking hypothetically in regards to being justified by works. Paul is speaking hypothetically, that if someone would live a a perfect life, fulfilling all that God required in the Law then they get a ticket into heaven. Paul argues this hypothetical (i would add theoretical) possibility to make the point, No one (i.e. Jew or Gentile) has done the Law. This is the very reason why another source of righteousness must be provided (Rom. 3:20-30). Many that hold this position also affirm a doctrine of rewards where works will determine rewards but not salvation. At the Judgment Seat of Christ each believer will be judged by Christ to determine his eternal rewards, but he remains eternally secure for they persevered to the end in faith even if the judgment reveals much failure.

#### **B. The Eschatological Justification (in accord with works) View**

Thomas R. Schreiner, Richard Gaffin - This second view is founded on the already/not-yet framework of the two comings of Christ. The soteriological blessings of Christ are positioned in the already/not-yet framework of the two comings of Christ. This view holds that just as there is an already and a not-yet to the saving blessings of regeneration, adoption and sanctification, so too is there an already and a not-yet to the saving blessing of justification. They place Rom. 2:13 within the context of 2:3-11 and because Romans 2:6-7 seem to clearly teach that the good works of believers,

and the evil works of unbelievers, will stand as evidence on judgment day, some have sought to import the same meaning into the words of Rom 2:13. For them, Paul has in mind the good works that are done by the power of the Spirit. The new-covenant work of the Spirit produces good works in believers' lives, and those who do such good works will receive eternal life. They see the final end times justification in view, where faith and its fruit; a life of good works will be the evidence of their justification. In short; Works will provide evidence that one actually has been saved: At the final judgment works provide the necessary condition, though not the ground for final salvation, in that they provide evidence as to whether one has actually trusted in Jesus Christ.

### C. The Eschatological Justification (on the basis of works) View

This view is often considered the Catholic view. it uses the same frame as above but the final eschatological justification but see works not as the fruit of faith but see justification on the basis of works. Paul's statement in verse 13, "the doers of the Law will be justified," to refer to the final judgment when those who have faith in Christ and possess good works, though not perfect, will be "justified" or "vindicated" on the basis of those works. So it is faith and works are part of the final justification. Some in the New Perspective camp have been accused of holding to this view. James Dunn holds that works will provide the criterion by which Christ will determine eternal destiny of his people. Since Paul, Jesus, and the New Testament writers hold together 'justification by faith and not by works' with 'judgment according to works', we should not fall into the trap of playing one off against the other or blend them in a way that diminishes the force of each. To be fair, Dunn has pushed back claiming it is not Catholic but that He holds to a (hand quotes in air) "tension" that is evident in scripture (like Rom 2:13) and that it is a mystery how it is resolved on the last day. We should not construct resolutions to such tensions and so clam to know the mind of the judge and how he rules. What is given is given as a tension. Are we saved by Faith Yes! Are we finally justified on the basis of a whole life of faithful work. Yes! Dunn would say, It is such tensions that promotes faithfulness to Christian living and doctrine. (end of views, now back to interp. points)

## Further reading

- Responses of the Old Perspective to the New Perspective for further research

In regard to Judaism:

D.A. Carson, Peter O'Brien, and Mark Seifrid, eds. *Justification and Variegated Nomism 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Baker, 2001). Note especially Carson's helpful summary article at the end of this volume.

Simon Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Eerdmans, 2002).

Robert Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Biblica* 66 (1985): 1-38.

In regard to "works of the Law":

Thomas Schreiner, *The Law and its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Baker, 1993).

Douglas Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," *WTJ* 45 (1983): 90-100.

On Justification:

John Piper, *The Future of Justification* (Crossway, 2007). One should also be aware of his *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should we Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Crossway, 2002)

John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2d ed (Baker, 1993).

Mark Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (InterVarsity, 2000)

D. A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21-26," in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles Hill and Frank James, 119-39 (InterVarsity, 2004).

General Works from an Old Perspective Perspective:

Carson, O'Brien, Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism 2: The Paradoxes of Paul* (Baker, 2004). Note especially the articles by Carson, Moo, Silva, Westerholm, and O'Brien. Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Eerdmans, 2004).

Moisés Silva, "The Law and Christianity: Dunn's New Synthesis," *WTJ* 53 (1991): 339-53

Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (InterVarsity, 1994). Richard Gaffin, "Paul the Theologian," *WTJ* 62 (2000): 121-41.

Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origins of Paul's Gospel* (Eerdmans, 2002).

Colin Kruse, *Paul, the Law, and Justification* (Hendrickson, 1997).

Robert Smith, "Justification in 'the New Perspective on Paul.'" *Reformed Theological Review* 58 (April 1999): 16-30 and "A Critique of the 'New Perspective' on Justification." *Reformed Theological Review* 58 (August 1999): 98-113.

Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (P & R Publishing, 2004).