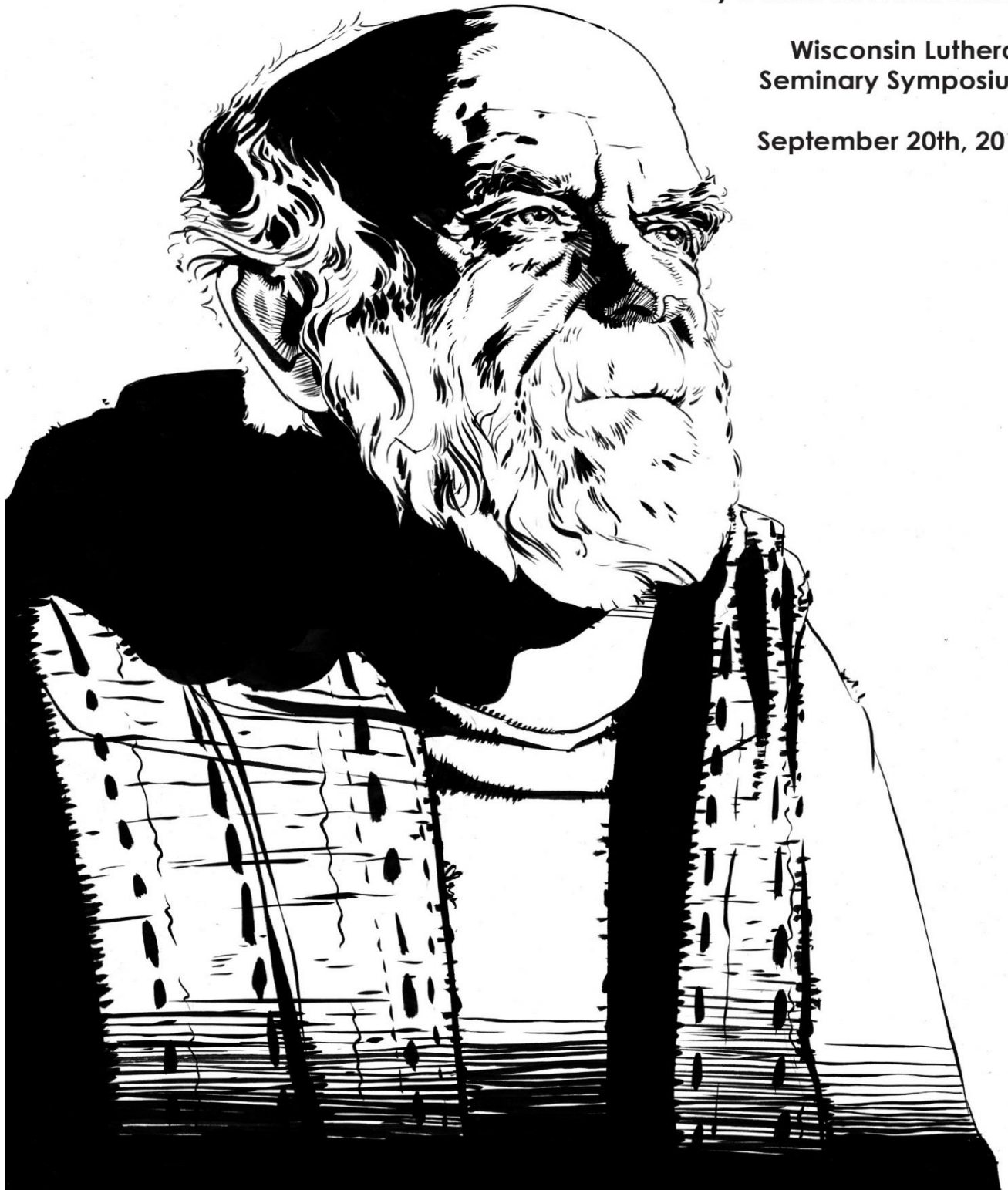


# The Hermeneutics of the New Perspective on Paul

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Martin Luther's rediscovery of justification by faith alone launched the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Almost five hundred years later, justification by faith in Jesus Christ is still the center of Reformation teaching. More recently, however, a scholarly movement called the New Perspective on Paul has challenged the Reformation's interpretation of justification by faith. The New Perspective is led by E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright. What shift in perspective are they proposing? E. P. Sanders says that Jews in the first century, including the Pharisees, were not works-righteous. They believed in grace just as much as we Lutherans do. If Paul did not critique Judaism for works-righteousness, then what was Paul's critique of Judaism? James Dunn's answer is that Paul critiqued Judaism for trying to narrow the grace of God so that it applied to Jews and Jews only. They narrowed the grace of God by insisting that to be part of the people of God, the Gentiles had to adopt "the works of the law" (Gal 2:16 [3x]; 3:2, 5; Rom 3:20, 28).<sup>2</sup> "Works of the law," according to the New Perspective, are not good works done to earn God's favor, but rather are the markers of Jewish identity: especially circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. Perhaps most importantly, N. T. Wright says that justification is not about how a sinner is saved, but about membership in the covenant family.

Many New Perspective authors insist that the New Perspective takes nothing essential away from the Reformation reading of Paul. James Dunn, for example, says: "I affirm as a central point of Christian faith that God's acceptance of any and every person is by his grace alone through faith alone."<sup>3</sup> More traditional interpreters, however, believe that the New Perspective obscures the Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>4</sup>

My assignment is the hermeneutics of the New Perspective on Paul. I will examine these four hermeneutical presuppositions which New Perspective scholars bring to the text:

- 1) Since first-century Judaism was a religion of grace, Paul was not critiquing works-righteousness.
- 2) Justification was not meant to answer the question "How can a sinner find a gracious God?" but rather "How can Gentiles become part of the people of God?"
- 3) The justification vocabulary in Paul is covenant language.

*Presupposition One: First-century Judaism was a religion of grace.*

- 4) Individual passages should be interpreted against a specific overarching narrative which N. T. Wright calls “God’s single plan through Israel for the world.”<sup>5</sup>

**Presupposition One: Since first-century Judaism was a religion of grace, Paul was not critiquing works-righteousness.<sup>6</sup>**

### **E. P. Sanders**

In 1977, E. P. Sanders published a book entitled *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.<sup>7</sup> Before Sanders, the main reference works on first-century Judaism portrayed Judaism as a legalistic, works-righteous religion in which salvation was earned by amassing more good deeds than bad.<sup>8</sup> Sanders set out to “destroy” the view that Judaism in the time of Paul was a “religion of legalistic works-righteousness.”<sup>9</sup> He examined a wide variety of Jewish sources dating from 200 BC – AD 200, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and especially Tannaitic literature (the literature of the early Rabbis dating from the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 until the compilation of the Mishnah in AD 200). Many assume that at least some of the beliefs expressed in this early Rabbinic literature go back to the time of Paul because the Rabbis sought to preserve tradition by repeating what previous teachers had said.

Sanders concluded that the heart of Second-Temple Judaism was not works-righteousness but the belief that God had made a covenant with Israel by grace. One of the Rabbis said, “Thou hast shown us mercy, for we had no deeds.”<sup>10</sup> Each individual Israelite was a member of the covenant by grace and was guaranteed final salvation.<sup>11</sup> Mishnah Sanhedrin 10.1 says “All Israelites have a share in the world to come.”<sup>12</sup> If an individual Jew transgressed one of God’s laws, the covenant itself provided means of atonement (especially repentance, sacrifices, and the Day of Atonement).<sup>13</sup> According to Sanders, Jews did not have to earn their way into the covenant, nor did they think that salvation was earned by having more good deeds than bad.

Sanders argues that first-century Jews were careful to keep the commandments, not because they thought they could earn God’s favor, but because keeping the commandments was the necessary response to God’s electing grace.<sup>14</sup> Sanders does say that obedience was necessary *as a condition for remaining in the covenant*.<sup>15</sup> Obedience to the commandments *maintained* one’s status as a covenant member in good standing.<sup>16</sup> Sanders insists that this does not mean

that final salvation was earned.<sup>17</sup> Obedience simply demonstrated one's intention to remain in the covenant.<sup>18</sup> "Ultimately, what is required is that one intends to remain in the covenant, intends to be obedient."<sup>19</sup>

The name that Sanders gave to this pattern of religion was "covenantal nomism."

Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, "covenantal nomism" means that Jews saw their law-keeping ("nomism") within the context of God's gracious covenant and not as a way to earn salvation. Sanders even says that Judaism and Paul agree completely on the relationship between grace and works. "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."<sup>21</sup> "In short, *this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.*"<sup>22</sup> In other words, Paul had no quarrel with Judaism except for the fact that Judaism rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

Sanders was interested in what he called "patterns of religion." The "pattern" of a religion is how someone first "gets in" to the religion and then how the person "stays in" until final salvation.<sup>23</sup> Sanders said that in ancient Judaism a person "gets in" by grace. He "stays in" by obedience to the commandments. Sanders says: "In Judaism ... commitment to the covenant puts one 'in,' while obedience (righteousness) subsequently keeps one in."<sup>24</sup>

### **Impact on Exegesis**

The New Perspective on Paul has accepted Sanders' argument that Judaism was a religion of grace. James D. G. Dunn, one of the most prominent leaders of the New Perspective, says:

The Judaism of what Sanders christened as "covenantal nomism" can now be seen to preach good Protestant doctrine: that grace is always prior; that human effort is ever the response to divine initiative; that good works are the fruit and not the root of salvation.<sup>25</sup>

This first presupposition influences the New Perspective's reading of Paul. For example, in Romans 9 and 10, Paul says that "the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of

righteousness (νόμον δικαιοσύνης), have not attained their goal (εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν). Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works (ὡς ἐξ ἔργων). . . . Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own (τὴν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην), they did not submit to God’s righteousness” (Romans 9:31-32, 10:3). According to the New Perspective, these words do *not* mean that Jews tried to earn righteousness before God on the basis of their works. Instead, Jews were trying to establish a righteousness that would be “their own” to the exclusion of the Gentiles. “Israel is now shown to be guilty of a kind of meta-sin, the attempt to confine grace to one race.”<sup>26</sup> “The ‘meta-level’ of Israel’s problem with the Torah is ‘national righteousness.’”<sup>27</sup> Paul is critiquing the Jews for a restrictive “nationalism,”<sup>28</sup> not for any attempt to earn righteousness before God. The New Perspective will not see in this passage any accusation of any form of works-righteousness because their presupposition is that Jews were not works-righteous.

### **Assessment of Presupposition One**

How should we assess Sanders’ thesis that Judaism was a religion of grace? The New Perspective is right to point out that many Jewish documents of the Second-Temple period display a strong dependence on God’s grace. These words from the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, sound like they were written by a Lutheran: “As for me, if I stumble, the mercies of God shall be my eternal salvation. If I stagger because of the sin of my flesh, my justification shall be by the righteousness of God which endures forever” (1QS 11.11).<sup>29</sup> “I lean on thy grace and on the multitude of thy mercies, for thou wilt pardon iniquity” (1QH).<sup>30</sup> Or consider this synagogue prayer which has been dated between AD 10 – 40: “Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who multiplies forgiveness.”<sup>31</sup> We should not be surprised to find statements of grace in first-century Judaism because they had the Old Testament, which contains plenty of statements of divine grace (Ex 34:6-7; Hosea 3:1, et al.).

True Confessional Lutherans have never believed that *all* first-century Jews were works-righteous. There were certainly many among the Jews who did not look to their own works for salvation, but rather looked to the coming Messiah for salvation.<sup>32</sup> First-century Judaism, however, was *not* monolithic.<sup>33</sup> The New Perspective does not take sufficient account of the fact

that there are also statements of synergism in Second-Temple Jewish literature. For example, Sirach 3:3, 29 says, “He who honors his father atones for sins. . . . Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.” Moisés Silva notes that Sanders quotes these passages in his discussion of Sirach, but “astonishingly, Sanders overlooks altogether the theological implications of those statements . . . Sanders offers no explanation for—indeed, shows no awareness of—what looks like a fairly blatant view of self-salvation.”<sup>34</sup>

### **The Evidence of the Gospels**

It is important to note that Sanders excludes the Gospels from consideration. It is fair to say that the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable is self-righteous:

To some who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’” (Luke 18:9-14)

Sanders regards the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector as “a Lukan (or pre-Lukan) creation.”<sup>35</sup> As Confessional Lutherans, our hermeneutical presupposition is that Jesus really said these things. Christ’s assessments are true. If he says that some first-century Pharisees were self-righteous, then some were indeed self-righteous. Lest we look down on the Pharisees, however, we must also let this parable assess the self-righteousness in our own hearts.

### **The Definition of Grace**

Sanders set out to show that Judaism was a religion of grace, but he did not account for the fact that Paul and the Rabbis differed on the *definition* of grace.<sup>36</sup> For Paul, grace is undeserved. For the Rabbis, grace is still a gift, but it is not completely undeserved. This becomes apparent from Sanders’ discussion of the election of Israel. Sanders says that the Rabbis believed that God elected Israel *by grace*, but Sanders also gives statements from the Rabbis in which they say that God elected Israel because of their obedience to the commandments.

Consider these quotations from Rabbinic literature:

Mekilta Pisha 5 – But as yet they had no religious duties to perform by which to merit redemption . . . [They were] bare of any religious deeds. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, assigned them two duties, the duty of the paschal sacrifice and the duty of

circumcision, which they should perform so as to be worthy of redemption. ... For one cannot obtain rewards except for deeds.

Mekilta Pisha 16 – R. Simeon b. Yohai says: Because of their observing the rite of circumcision did God bring the Israelites out of Egypt.<sup>37</sup>

Sometimes the election was attributed to future obedience:

Sifre Deut. 311 – When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave [the] Torah to Israel, he stopped, looked (into the future, *tsafah*) and perceived ..., and, there being no nation among the nations which was worthy to receive the Torah except Israel, “he fixed the bounds of the peoples.”<sup>38</sup>

Sanders explains these statements by saying that the Rabbis wanted to show that God was not arbitrary in his choice of Israel.<sup>39</sup> Sanders says:

The Rabbis did not have the Pauline/Lutheran problem of “works-righteousness,” and so felt no embarrassment at saying that the exodus was earned; yet that it was earned is certainly not a Rabbinic doctrine. It is only an explanatory device. One might have expected the Rabbis to develop a clear doctrine of prevenient grace, but grace and merit did not seem to them to be in contradiction to each other; and doubtless they had good biblical support here.<sup>40</sup>

Guy Prentiss Waters, a former student of E. P. Sanders, is right to reply:

Any system of theology that conceives God as electing a person on the grounds of his or her foreseen or actual deeds is not gracious in the biblical sense. ... the biblical position is that God has chosen his people simply because it pleased him to do so.<sup>41</sup>

John M. G. Barclay, in his book, *Paul and the Gift*,<sup>42</sup> shows that there were different definitions of grace in the ancient world. He identifies six concepts which can be “perfected”<sup>43</sup> or pushed to the extreme in one’s definition of grace: superabundance, singularity, priority, incongruity, efficacy, and non-circularity.<sup>44</sup> If I am understanding Barclay correctly,<sup>45</sup> these six concepts are kind of like levers. Any combination of these levers can be pulled in one’s definition of grace. Your definition of grace will depend on which levers you pull (and which levers you don’t!). The two that are relevant for our discussion are *priority* (the gift “takes place prior to the initiative of the recipient”<sup>46</sup>), and *incongruity* (the gift takes place “without regard to the worth of the recipient”<sup>47</sup>).

In their definition of grace, the Rabbis perfected *priority* in that God *took the initiative* in electing Israel. But they did not perfect *incongruity*. The gift was given to Israel rather than to the other nations because Israel was more worthy. This contradicts Paul's definition of grace, but not that of the Rabbis. The Rabbis believed that the election was a gift.<sup>48</sup> God was under no obligation to give it. He took the initiative in giving it. But Israel was a worthy recipient of that gift. They at least deserved it more than the other nations.

By contrast, Paul's definition of grace perfected not only *priority* but also *incongruity*.<sup>49</sup> Grace, for Paul, is given to those who are *unworthy*. "God justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5). "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6) "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). For Paul, grace is given, not to those who deserve it, but to those who deserve the opposite: God's wrath (Eph 2:2).

### **The Antithesis Between Grace and Works**

Another point at which we see a difference between Paul and Judaism regarding the definition of grace is in Paul's antithesis between grace and works. Sanders himself says that in Palestinian Judaism,

Grace and works were not considered as opposed to each other in any way. I believe it is safe to say that the notion that God's grace is in any way contradictory to human endeavor is totally foreign to Palestinian Judaism. The reason for this is that grace and works were not considered alternative roads to salvation.<sup>50</sup>

But *Paul* certainly considered grace and works to be alternative roads to salvation!<sup>51</sup> "So at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:5-6). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). To say, as Sanders does, that Paul and Judaism agree on the matter of grace and works,<sup>52</sup> is to cloud the differences between Paul and Judaism on the *definition* of grace. For Paul, grace by definition is undeserved (Rom 4:5; 5:6) and excludes works (Eph 2:8-9). "And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6).

### **"Staying in" by Works**



Sanders says that in covenantal nomism, a person “gets in” by grace but “stays in” by works.<sup>53</sup> This shows that Judaism believed in salvation by grace *and works*. D. A. Carson writes:

... Sanders has managed to have a structure that preserves grace in the “getting in” while preserving works (and frequently some form of merit theology) in the “staying in.”<sup>54</sup>

Guy Prentiss Waters agrees:

In summary, Sanders has corrected the portrait of Judaism as a religion of pure Pelagianism, and has demonstrated that this religion is semi-Pelagian in nature.<sup>55</sup>

In Pelagianism, a person merits salvation by their good deeds without the aid of God’s grace. In semi-Pelagianism, God’s grace is necessary to make a beginning, but then it is necessary for human works to make a contribution to salvation.<sup>56</sup> New Perspective writers point out that the controversies over Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism happened centuries after Paul. True, but the fundamental issues of grace and works stay the same over the centuries.

Sanders also says that “the Rabbis did not have a doctrine of original sin or of the essential sinfulness of each man in the Christian sense.”<sup>57</sup> A lessening of the doctrine of original sin always goes hand-in-hand with the view that works make a contribution to salvation.

### **Paul and Works**

Sanders points out that for Paul, one cannot live in intentional and unrepentant sin and expect to have final salvation (Gal 5:21).<sup>58</sup> The New Perspective points out that Paul expects believers to do good works (Gal 6:7-8).<sup>59</sup>

It is certainly true that good works are the evidence of faith and that living in intentional and unrepentant sin will drive the Holy Spirit out of the heart. Ephesians 2:8-9, however, says that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works. The first two Reformation *solae* (salvation by grace alone, through faith alone) are firmly grounded in Ephesians 2:8-9.<sup>60</sup> Our salvation is by grace alone from first to last. We get in by grace and we stay in by grace.<sup>61</sup> We do not get in by grace and stay in by works. Paul asks the Galatians, “After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” (Gal 3:3) When Paul tells the Philippians, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” he immediately adds, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:12-13).<sup>62</sup>

### **Synergism as Part of the Fallen Human Condition**

Finally, the first presupposition of the New Perspective does not take into account the fact that our fallen human nature is inclined toward synergism. It is sometimes said that to see strands of synergism in Judaism demonstrates a Christian prejudice against Judaism. Fighting against anti-Semitism is Sanders' motivation for arguing that Judaism is a religion of grace.<sup>63</sup> We certainly need to be careful of anti-Semitism.<sup>64</sup> Synergism, however, is a universal *human* condition.<sup>65</sup> Every single fallen human heart thinks that it is good enough to contribute to its salvation. Thomas Schreiner recalls the remark of his colleague Robert Stein: "if Judaism were not legalistic at all, it would be the only religion in history that escaped the human propensity for works-righteousness."<sup>66</sup> The words of both Jesus (Luke 18:9-14) and Paul (Rom 3:28; 9:30-10:3; Gal 2:16) are a reminder that we cannot contribute anything to our own salvation. God has provided free salvation in Jesus Christ.

### **Presupposition Two: Justification was not meant to answer the question "How can a sinner find a gracious God?" but rather "How can Gentiles become part of the people of God?"**

The New Perspective describes itself as an attempt to read Paul in his first-century context.<sup>67</sup> They say that if we come to the text with the question, "How can I quiet my guilty conscience?" or "How can I find a gracious God?" then we are reading the text in a sixteenth century context. Those were the questions Martin Luther wanted answers to, but they were not the questions Paul was addressing. So says the New Perspective.<sup>68</sup> The question Paul was addressing in his first-century context was, "How can Gentiles be part of the people of God?"

This New Perspective view can be traced back to a 1963 article by Krister Stendahl entitled, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West."<sup>69</sup> Stendahl argued that Augustine and Luther's reading of Paul was far too concerned with matters of guilt and forgiveness. Stendahl says that Paul was not concerned with such matters,<sup>70</sup> but with defending the rights of Gentiles to be part of the people of God.<sup>71</sup> According to Stendahl, the question of how to find a gracious God was "later and western."<sup>72</sup>

New Perspective interpreters have been persuaded by Stendahl.<sup>73</sup> James Dunn says that "The leading edge of Paul's theological thinking was the conviction that God's purpose

embraced Gentile as well as Jew, not the question of how a guilty man might find a gracious God.”<sup>74</sup> It is a central New Perspective belief that Paul is not dealing with general questions about sin and salvation, but about the very specific historical issue of Gentiles being admitted into the people of God.

## **Response to Stendahl and the New Perspective**

### **A Modern Question?**

Stendahl says that the question, “How can I find a gracious God?” is “later and western.”<sup>75</sup> It is a sixteenth-century question read back into the first century. We certainly should take into account the gap in time and culture between Luther and Paul, and between Paul and ourselves, but such considerations can be taken too far. Henri Blocher makes an important point:

... seemingly self-evident statements about Abraham’s world, or Paul’s, being another world than ours ... should be understood as hyperbolic expressions of *some* differences, without obscuring, in Oliver O’Donovan’s words, “the fundamental truth that past generations occupied the same world as ourselves and can speak with us about it.”<sup>76</sup>

As much as people change over the centuries, their basic concerns stay the same. One of those basic concerns is: “What is going to happen to me when I die?” Luther had an introspective conscience, not because he lived in the sixteenth century, but because he took Paul’s statements about the wrath of God seriously.<sup>77</sup>

### **What Problem Does Justification Solve?**

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. We deserve condemnation and death because we have sinned against God’s law (Rom 1:18, 32; 3:10), but God gives us justification and life through faith in Christ Jesus (Rom 5:18). We deserve to be condemned, but the good news of justification is that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). “He who is righteous by faith will *live*” (Rom 1:17; Hab 2:4). Thus the view that justification is Paul’s answer to the problem of how Gentiles can become part of the people of God is not adequate. Justification answers the problem of the sinner’s standing before God.

### **Works of the Law (Τὰ Ἔργα Τοῦ Νόμου)**

One of the most characteristic features of the New Perspective is the view that the phrase “works of the law” (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:15-16 [3x]; 3:2, 5) refers especially to the works which

formed the boundary between Jews and Gentiles: circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. According to the New Perspective, Paul argued against justification by works of the law because works of the law kept Gentiles out of the people of God.

Paul says in Galatians 2:15-16,

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles, know that a person is not justified by *the works of the law* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου), but by faith in Jesus Christ. So, we too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by *the works of the law* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου), because by *the works of the law* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) no one will be justified.

These verses contain a three-fold repetition of the phrase “the works of the law” (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ νόμου). The New Perspective believes that “works of the law” focuses on the laws which distinguished Jews from Gentiles: circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. Instead of contrasting faith and good works, the New Perspective says that Paul is contrasting two different ways of identifying the people of God: either by faith or by the marks of Jewish identity. Dunn has zealously defended this interpretation. He first expounded it in an article, published in 1983, entitled “The New Perspective on Paul.”<sup>78</sup> The article focused on Galatians 2:15-16.

To prove his theory (that “works of the law” focuses on circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath), Dunn points to the immediate context of Galatians 2:16. In 2:6, Paul refused to have Titus *circumcised*. In 2:11-14, Paul rebuked Peter for not eating with the Gentiles.<sup>79</sup> Dunn says: “We may justifiably deduce therefore that by ‘works of the law’ Paul intended his readers to think of *particular observances of the law like circumcision and the food laws*.”<sup>80</sup>

In the wider Greco-Roman world, “*just these observances were widely regarded as characteristically and distinctively Jewish*.”<sup>81</sup> Circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath identified Jews as Jews. They were identity badges which identified the person as a Jew. Works of the law “functioned as identity markers,” “badges of covenant membership.”<sup>82</sup> Paul’s Jewish-Christian opponents in Galatia insisted that if the Gentiles wanted to become part of the people of God, they needed to have the badges of covenant membership: the ethnic identity markers of circumcision, food laws and the Sabbath. In other words, Paul’s opponents insisted that the Gentiles had to become Jews in order to become part of the people of God. Paul’s argument with

the Judaizers is that they have too narrowly circumscribed the people of God. Dunn says that for Paul, “these works of the law in effect imprison God’s righteousness within a racial and national ... framework.”<sup>83</sup> “What Jesus has done by his death and resurrection, in Paul’s understanding, is to free the grace of God in justifying from its nationalistically restrictive clamps.”<sup>84</sup> According to the New Perspective, Paul’s argument has nothing to do with faith and good works. The issue is all about nationalistic identity markers. Paul did not want the Gentiles to have to become Jews, so he argued that the only identity badge of the people of God is faith, a badge that could be worn by both Jews and Gentiles.

### **Response to Dunn’s Interpretation of “Works of the Law”**

#### **“Works of the Law” Includes the Whole Law**

The phrase “works of the law” certainly includes circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. It is also true that Paul saw the Mosaic Law as a barrier which divided Jews and Gentiles. Ephesians 2:11-16 says that Christ removed this barrier by his death. “Works of the law,” however, are not limited to the boundary-marking features of the law.

In Galatians 3:10, Paul says that “all who rely on the works of the law (ὄσοι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything (πᾶς) written in the book of the Law.’” Paul says “*everything* written in the book of the Law.” Therefore “works of the law” are not limited to boundary markers.<sup>85</sup> Paul warns the Galatians that if they accept circumcision, they will be “obligated to obey the whole law” (ὄλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι, Gal 5:3).<sup>86</sup>

#### **“Works of the Law” Includes the Moral Law**

N. T. Wright says that “works of the law” “are not the moral ‘good works’ which the Reformation tradition loves to hate.”<sup>87</sup> But “works of the law” includes the moral law. In Romans 3:20, Paul says that a person “cannot be justified by works of the law” because all have sinned against the moral commands of God’s law (1:18-3:20). Paul mentions sins of “gossip,” “slander,” and “disobedience to parents” (Rom 1:30). If we follow the flow of thought in Romans, we see that “the works of the law” “are the good works which God requires of all human beings (2:7,10), that God has spelled out for the benefit of Jews in the Mosaic law (2:13,

18), but that human beings ... have not done.”<sup>88</sup> The reason works of the law do not justify is that everyone has broken the law. “Paul’s point is that sinners cannot be declared righteous on the basis of a law whose requirement to do what is right they have not met.”<sup>89</sup>

### **Faith Versus Works in General**

Dunn says that “we should not let our grasp of Paul’s reasoning slip back into the old distinction between faith and works in general, between faith and ‘good works.’”<sup>90</sup> In response I say that after speaking of “works of the law” in Romans 3:28, Paul goes on to make just that distinction between faith and works in general. In Romans 4:4-5, Paul says

Now to the one who works (τῷ δὲ ἐργαζομένῳ), wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work (τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ) but trusts (πιστεύοντι) God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness (Rom 4:4-5).

Romans 4:4-5 has always been difficult for New Perspective interpreters because here Paul himself contrasts working for a wage with receiving a gift by faith. This is the exact contrast which the Reformation reading of Paul emphasizes. N. T. Wright tries to downplay these verses by seeing 4:4-5 as a side illustration which carries little weight in the argument. He says: “Paul has picked up *misthos* [“wage”] from Genesis, which is firmly in the front of his mind, and allows an illustration to develop sideways out of it, which by coincidence happens to overlap with one way of expounding an ‘old perspective’ view of justification.”<sup>91</sup> In response I say that Romans is a very carefully argued and tightly structured book. It is not likely that Paul would let his argument slip a little bit and that this slip in the argument would just happen to correspond with an old perspective reading.

Ephesians 2:8-9 makes the same contrast as Romans 4:4-5. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Dunn notes that Ephesians 2:9 says “works.” It does not say “works of *the law*.” He says: “[W]orks of the law’ is a very specific and clearly demarcated phrase. It refers to ‘works of *the law*.’ And that means not any law or all law, but specifically the Jewish law.”<sup>92</sup>

*Presupposition Two: Justification answers the question: “How can Gentiles become part of the people of God?”*

What Dunn overlooks, however, is the common term in both “works” (Eph 2:9) and “the works of the law” (Rom 3:28), namely, “works.”<sup>93</sup> The same fundamental contrast between working and believing is found in both passages.<sup>94</sup> In both Romans 3:28 and Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul’s point is that we are saved not by doing but by believing in Christ.

### **Not a New Interpretation**

Interestingly, the interpretation which limits “works of the law” to the ceremonial aspects of the law was around at the time of the Reformation. The Apology says:

The opponents interpret this [Rom 3:28] as referring to the Levitical ceremonies. But Paul is talking not only about the ceremonies, but about the entire Law. For later [Rom 7:7] he quotes from the Decalogue: “Do not covet.”<sup>95</sup>

In sum, the phrase “works of the law” is not limited to the boundary-marking features of the law. “Works of the law” (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ νόμου) are simply “works prescribed by God’s law.” They do not justify because people have not done them perfectly (Gal 3:10).

### **Conclusion for Presupposition Two**

Stephen Westerholm is one of the best defenders of the Reformation reading of Paul. He summarizes the debate between Old and New Perspectives like this:

Cut to the quickest of the quick, then, the issue that divides the “Lutheran” Paul from his contemporary critics is whether “justification by faith, not by works of the law” means “sinners find God’s approval by grace, through faith, not by anything they do,” or whether its thrust is that “Gentiles are included in the people of God by faith without the bother of becoming Jews.”<sup>96</sup>

The title of the closing chapter of Westerholm’s book also sums up the issue: “Grace Abounding to Sinners or Erasing Ethnic Boundaries?”<sup>97</sup> Both sides in the debate would say that Paul is concerned with both of those things. For the Reformation reading the emphasis falls on “Grace Abounding to Sinners.” For the New Perspective, the emphasis falls on “Erasing Ethnic Boundaries.”

### **Presupposition Three: The justification vocabulary in Paul is covenant language.**

Nicholas Thomas Wright argues for this presupposition most strongly. Wright is an interesting blend of academics and church work. He recently served as a bishop in the Church of

England. He is a strong defender of the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.<sup>98</sup> Of all the New Perspective authors, Wright has the most influence at a popular level. He has written many books geared toward laity, including an entire set of commentaries called “The New Testament for Everyone.”<sup>99</sup> He is frequently invited to give lectures at seminaries in America.<sup>100</sup> Wright has written many books on Paul.<sup>101</sup> His 1,500-page *magnum opus* on Paul, entitled *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, was released in 2013.<sup>102</sup>

It is important first to understand what, for Wright, justification is not. According to Wright, justification is not “the gospel” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον).

I must stress again that the doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by “the gospel.” ... [The gospel] is ... the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>103</sup>

For Wright, the gospel is the good news that Jesus is Lord of the world. This understanding of the content of the “gospel” allows Wright to say that the preaching of the gospel is not limited to the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins but includes engagement in the political sphere and ecological work.<sup>104</sup>

How does Wright come to this understanding of the gospel as the good news that Jesus is Lord of the world? “Glad tidings” (εὐαγγέλια) was sometimes used in inscriptions which honored Caesar. The Priene calendar inscription says of Caesar Augustus: “the birthday of this god [Augustus] began *the good news* [εὐαγγελίων] on his account for the world.”<sup>105</sup> In LXX Isaiah 52:7, messengers “bring the good news” (εὐαγγελιζομένου) that “your God reigns.” Wright concludes that “gospel” for Paul means “the proclamation that Jesus [not Caesar] is the true Lord of the world.” Wright says:

Paul’s message could not escape being confrontative: Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord, and at his name, not that of the emperor, every knee shall bow. This aspect lies at the heart of what I have called “the fresh perspective on Paul,” the discovery of a subversive political dimension not as an add-on to Paul’s theology but as part of the inner meaning of the “gospel,” “righteousness,” and so on.<sup>106</sup>

### **Response to Wright’s Understanding of “Gospel”**

In 1 Cor 15:1-5 Paul himself gives the content of the gospel: “I want to remind you of the gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) I preached to you ... that Christ *died for our sins* according to the



Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:1, 3-4). The content of the gospel is that Jesus died for our sins.

At the beginning of Galatians (a letter in which the words “gospel” and “justify” are prominent<sup>107</sup>), Paul summarizes the message of the letter in the opening verses: “the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). Therefore it is wrong to say, as Wright does, that “‘the gospel,’ is not, for Paul, a message about ‘how one gets saved.’”<sup>108</sup>

Wright illegitimately separates “justification” and “gospel.” Paul explains his gospel in terms of justification when he says that “in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed” (Romans 1:17). Nor should justification be separated from the forgiveness of sins. David “speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits (λογίζεται) righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count (μὴ λογίσῃται) against them’” (Romans 4:6-8). Thus the imputation of righteousness is also the non-imputation of sin.<sup>109</sup>

For Wright, forgiveness of sins is included in justification in the sense that forgiveness of sins is a benefit of being in the covenant and justification is God’s declaration that you are in the covenant, but, for Wright, justification itself is not the forgiveness of sins.<sup>110</sup> Wright says that salvation from sin is important, but “justification” is not the key term Paul uses to talk about salvation. He says:

[S]alvation remains enormously important; conversion remains enormously important; “the gospel” remains central, powerful, vital; *but the language of “justification” is not the key term used by Paul to convey all this.*<sup>111</sup>

Justification, says Wright, was more about the doctrine of the church than about the doctrine of salvation: “In standard Christian theological language, [justification] wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.”<sup>112</sup>

Justification, for Wright, is about how one can tell who is a member of the covenant people, the church.

### **Response: Justification Belongs in Soteriology**

Paul explicitly says that justification is about the standing of the sinner *before God*. “Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified *before God* (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ)” (Gal 3:11). “No one will be declared righteous *in God’s sight* (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ) by the works of the law” (Rom 3:20). Justification is thus about the vertical relationship between the sinner and God (soteriology). It has implications for the horizontal relationship (ecclesiology), but justification itself belongs firmly in soteriology.

To substantiate his claim that justification is more about membership in the church than about salvation, Wright must change the meaning of the word “justification” to mean God’s declaration that a person is a member of the covenant family, the church. But can justification legitimately be defined as God’s declaration that one is “in” the covenant? Kevin Vanhoozer puts the question this way: Does justification mean “in” or “innocent”?<sup>113</sup>

#### **Δικαιόω – “to declare a member of the covenant”?**

Wright contends that “‘justification’ ... denotes the verdict of God himself as to who really is a member of his people. ... God makes the declaration ‘Here are my people.’”<sup>114</sup> The lexical evidence, however, does not support this meaning for δικαιόω.

A word study of δικαιόω reveals that in Scripture the words for justification denote a judicial (forensic) act.<sup>115</sup> The word is used in the ordinary sense of being acquitted. “When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent (קִרְיָצְהוּ-תֵּן יִקְרְיָצְהוּ LXX: δικαιώσωσιν τὸν δίκαιον) and condemning the guilty” (Deuteronomy 25:1).<sup>116</sup> BDAG gives this definition for δικαιόω: “to render a favorable verdict, *vindicate*.”<sup>117</sup> “Declare a covenant member” is not an established meaning for δικαιόω. Δικαιόω is a law-court word. When Paul says δικαιόω, he means “to declare not guilty, to acquit, to clear of all charges.”<sup>118</sup>

Wright admits that the δικ- word group “carried overtones of the law court.”<sup>119</sup> But he contends that it was also covenant language. In fact, he says that the covenantal meaning is primary. He says that the law-court meaning is secondary and serves the covenantal meaning.<sup>120</sup>

The lawcourt metaphor behind the language of justification, and the status “righteous” which someone has when the court has found in their favor, has given way to the clear sense of “membership in God’s people.”<sup>121</sup>

What evidence does Wright have for taking δικαιώω as covenantal language? Wright points to the context of Galatians 2. Peter “used to eat with the Gentiles. But when [the men from James] arrived, he began to ...separate himself from the Gentiles” (Gal 2:12). Peter’s action sent a signal to the Gentiles that they were not full members of the covenant people, not full members of the family. Since Paul’s response focuses on justification by faith, Wright concludes that “to justify” means “to declare a member of the covenant people.” Wright says: “Words mean what they mean within their sentences and contexts, and *dikaiothomen* here must refer to God’s declaration that all believers are part of his family.”<sup>122</sup> Wright says:

... Paul is not in a lawcourt, he is at a dinner table. ... “to be justified” here does not mean “to be granted free forgiveness of your sins,” “to come into a right relation with God” or some other near synonym of “to be reckoned ‘in the right’ before God,” but rather, and very specifically, “to be reckoned by God to be a true member of his family, and hence with the right to share table fellowship.”<sup>123</sup>

This is the primary thing Paul wants to say in Galatians: that *all those who have this “faith” belong in the same, single community, eating at the same, single table. ... And this is, more or less, what Paul means by “justification by faith.”*<sup>124</sup>

We see that while Wright does not deny that Jesus died for sins and to save sinners, he believes that this is not what Paul is primarily talking about.

Because they see the emphasis in justification as being on inclusion and table fellowship across traditional lines, New Perspective scholars see justification as foundational to the ecumenical movement. Wright says: “Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith impels the churches, in their current fragmented state, into the ecumenical task. ... The doctrine of justification is in fact the great ecumenical doctrine.”<sup>125</sup> Paul said that Jewish and Gentile Christians should eat at the same table. The New Perspective draws the conclusion that Protestants and Roman Catholics should have the Lord’s Supper together.<sup>126</sup> Wright says: “Because what matters is believing in Jesus, detailed agreement on justification itself, properly conceived, isn’t the thing which should determine Eucharistic fellowship.”<sup>127</sup> James Dunn looks

at the situation of Jews not eating with Gentiles in Galatians 2:11-14 and concludes that the same situation exists in the church today when “we have the same refusal of some Christians to eat at the same table (the *Lord’s* table!) with other Christians.”<sup>128</sup> What the New Perspective does not consider is that the Gentile believers in Galatians 2 were not holding to false doctrine. We need to look at everything Scripture says about church fellowship, including Romans 16:17. Simon Gathercole, a critic of the New Perspective, rightly notes: “Since the emphasis in some discussions of justification is on inclusion, tolerance, and ecumenism, there can be a tendency to downplay the importance of doctrinal clarity.”<sup>129</sup>

### **Response to Wright’s Interpretation of δικαίω**

It is true that in Galatians 2:11-21, the specific occasion is Jews withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentiles. But Paul addresses this specific issue by referring to the more fundamental question of how any person, Jew or Gentile, is able to stand righteous before God.<sup>130</sup> The table fellowship setting does not, then, change the meaning of δικαίω. Furthermore, even though table fellowship is the setting in Galatians 2:11-14, it is not the setting of Romans 3:23-24. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified (δικαιοῦμενοι) freely by his grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

I do not want to overstate my case. Certainly one thing Paul wants say in Galatians is that Gentiles believers are full members of the family of God. “So in Christ Jesus you are all *sons* of God through faith ... There is neither Jew nor Gentile” (Gal 3:26, 28). But we still miss out on something if we say that δικαίω *means* God’s declaration of family membership. Justification is God’s declaration that we are innocent before him.

### **δικαιοσύνη – “status of covenant membership”?**

When δικαιοσύνη refers to something God credits to humans, Wright says that the word means “status of covenant membership.”<sup>131</sup> Several times Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6). “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην).” In support of the meaning, “status of covenant membership,” Wright notes that Genesis 15 is the chapter in which God made a covenant with Abraham.

The context alone strongly suggests that “reckoned it to him as righteousness” means, more or less, “God reckoned this in terms of covenant membership,” “God made a covenant with him on this basis.”<sup>132</sup>

In response I say that even though “covenant” is an important Biblical concept, the word “righteousness” does not mean “status of covenant membership.”

### **God Credits Righteousness through Faith**

What, then, does “righteousness” mean? I find Stephen Westerholm’s definition of righteousness to be helpful. He says that “righteousness” is *what one ought to do* and the status one has if one does it.<sup>133</sup> Remember that Abraham came out of a background of idolatry (Gen 11:27-32; Jos 24:2). As an idolater, Abraham himself lacked righteousness, but God gave him the status of one who is righteous, and Abraham received that status through faith. After his conversion, Abraham’s faith was certainly active in good works, but the narrative of Genesis also shows that Abraham’s behavior was sometimes *unrighteous*. He lied when he told Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister (Gen 13:10-13). He broke the sixth commandment with Hagar (Gen 16:1-6). He still needed to have righteousness credited to him through faith.<sup>134</sup> This is the way Paul reads the narrative. He cites Abraham as an example of God “justifying the ungodly” (τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἄσεβῆ; Rom 4:5). Wright disagrees with this way of reading the passage. He believes that “the ungodly” refers not to Abraham himself, but to the Gentiles who would come into Abraham’s family.<sup>135</sup>

Against Wright’s interpretation is the fact that Paul immediately cites another *individual*, David. This citation of David fits the Reformation reading perfectly. David lacked righteousness and needed forgiveness because his behavior with Bathsheba was *unrighteous*. But God credited him with righteousness through faith (Rom 4:6-8). When God credits someone with righteousness, then, it means that he treats and regards someone as righteous even though their behavior has not been righteous.<sup>136</sup>

### **Denial of Imputed Righteousness**

Wright believes that the idea of God giving us his own righteousness is absurd:

If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever 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 favour. 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 language works.<sup>137</sup>

In response I say that no one who believes in imputed righteousness would explain it in the way Wright caricatures it here.<sup>138</sup> When Confessional Lutherans speak of imputed righteousness, we mean that God credits us with the perfect obedience of Jesus. But Wright also rejects this language. He says:

... Paul never puts it like this ... Yes: the faithful are accounted righteous "in the Messiah"; but this is not because the Messiah possesses something called "righteousness," earned by his own personal covenantal lawkeeping, which he can share with or "impute" to his people ...<sup>139</sup>

Wright says that the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ "is not Pauline."<sup>140</sup> One might wonder how Wright interprets 2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ)." Wright says: "The 'righteousness of God' in this verse is not a human status in virtue of which ... one ... stands 'righteous' before God, as in Lutheran soteriology."<sup>141</sup> What then does "become the righteousness of God" mean? According to Wright, it means that Paul in his apostolic ministry embodies the righteousness of God. How does Wright come to this conclusion? He explains his reasoning by saying that ever since 2:14, Paul has been talking "about his apostleship, his apostleship as the embodiment of the gospel he preaches .... Paul is not just someone who tells people about the gospel; he is someone who embodies it."<sup>142</sup> "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Cor 4:10). Wright concludes that "becoming the righteousness of God" is also talking about something that Paul embodies in his apostolic ministry. Thus in Wright's translation of the New Testament, *The Kingdom New Testament*, 2 Corinthians 5:21 reads: "...so that in him we might embody God's faithfulness to the covenant."<sup>143</sup> We will speak below about "God's covenant faithfulness" as Wright's translation for δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ.

### **Response to Wright's Interpretation of 2 Cor 5:21**

It is true that in 2 Corinthians 2:14-5:21 Paul talks a lot about the nature of his apostolic ministry. It is a cross-shaped ministry that embraces suffering as Jesus embraced suffering. But Paul also speaks in this section about the apostolic *message* that he proclaims. "Christ died for all" (5:15). "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them" (5:19). 5:21 is a summary, not of Paul's apostolic *person*, but of his apostolic *message*: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Furthermore, Wright overlooks the fact that there is a clear exchange between us and Christ expressed in 2 Cor 5:21. Christ had no sin, but he took our sin so that, in exchange, "we might become the righteousness of God in him."

We Confessional Lutherans cannot allow Christ's righteousness to be taken away from us. If Wright's interpretation is allowed to stand, we will no longer be able to say with Luther: "Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours."<sup>144</sup> If Wright were correct, we would no longer be able to rely on Christ's perfect obedience in our place.<sup>145</sup>

### **Present and Future Justification**

Both Wright and Dunn say that present justification is by faith alone, but final justification on the last day will be on the basis of faith and works. Wright says, "Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publically ... on the basis of the entire life."<sup>146</sup> Wright and Dunn point to passages such as Romans 2:13 ("It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous") and 2 Cor 5:10 ("We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad").

### **Response to Wright and Dunn's Teaching on Future Justification**

In passages like the ones just quoted, it is important to distinguish between law and gospel. Romans 2:13 is pure law. Paul is saying that if a person wants to be justified by the law the standard is that he must *actually do* the things required in the law. Paul goes on to say that nobody meets this standard (Rom 3:10; Rom 3:12). "Therefore no one will be declared righteous

in God's sight by the works of the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin" (Rom 3:20).

We will indeed appear before the judgment of seat of Christ, but Paul says that we will have an Advocate.<sup>147</sup> "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom 8:33-34). "Jesus Christ is the *living guarantor* of the believers' justification from Easter until the end of this world."<sup>148</sup>

James Dunn says that "to affirm that Jesus is also eschatological Judge is to recognize that justification is a process, is not complete in the moment faith is placed in Christ..."<sup>149</sup> In response I say that while it is certainly true that good works are the evidence that we are believers in Jesus, the work of Jesus for our salvation does not need to be supplemented. "It is finished" (John 19:30). The verdict we receive in justification by faith is the same verdict which God pronounced over Jesus and the whole world when God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 4:25, 5:18-19; 2 Cor 5:14, 19; 1 Ti 3:16). That verdict is already full and complete.

### **Conclusion for Presupposition Three**

In conclusion, the contention that Paul's justification vocabulary is covenant language lacks sufficient lexical support. Paul's doctrine of justification is about the guilty sinner standing before God the righteous Judge.<sup>150</sup> On the basis of what Jesus has done, God declares the sinner not guilty. He "justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5).

### **Presupposition Four: Individual passages should be interpreted against a specific overarching narrative, which N. T. Wright calls "God's single plan through Israel for the world."**

This fourth presupposition is unique to N. T. Wright. It is not shared by E. P. Sanders or James Dunn. Wright interprets individual passages against an overarching narrative which he believes was an essential part of Paul's worldview. Wright uses this overarching narrative as a hermeneutical lens<sup>151</sup> for his exegesis of individual passages. Wright says:

It is an indication of how the implicit hermeneutical spiral of my own method is supposed to work: having begun (a long time ago) with exegesis, I have been driven to worldview



*Presupposition Four: Passages should be interpreted against the narrative of “God’s single plan through Israel for the world.”*

models ... At every point, the aim is to be able to return to exegesis, ... [saying] “Now at last we can make sense of what before was incomprehensible.”<sup>152</sup>

This is an important point. For Wright, there are at least parts of the text that are “incomprehensible” without his overarching narrative. I will focus on three aspects of Wright’s overarching narrative: 1) God and creation 2) the vocation of Israel and 3) continuing exile.<sup>153</sup>

### **God and Creation**

For Wright, the main plot of Scripture is the story of God and all of creation. God made a good creation. He put his highest creation, human beings, in charge of this good creation. Human beings rebelled and “creation was subjected to frustration” (Rom 8:20). God is determined to put his creation back right again. For Wright, the reconciliation of humans is a sub-plot within this main plot of God and all of creation.<sup>154</sup> With the resurrection of Jesus, God launched his new creation. When Christ returns God will liberate his creation from its bondage to decay and bring it into the freedom and glory of the children of God (Rom 8:21). The vocation of Christians is to be an advanced sign of this new creation by exercising wise stewardship over the earth through the arts, social justice, ecological activism and political engagement.<sup>155</sup> This is not wasted effort because God is going to renew *this creation* (cf. 1 Cor 15:58). God will somehow incorporate our efforts into his new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 65:17; Rev 21:1).

### **Critique of Wright’s Narrative**

Wright talks more about the restored creation than he does about the restored relationship with God. Yes, creation is ruined in Genesis 3. “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 3:17). But Genesis 3 itself puts the emphasis on the ruined relationship with God. Satan successfully turns Adam and Eve against God (Gen 3:1, 4-5). The good news is that God has in Christ reconciled human beings to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19). “While we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). Wright makes the story of God and all of creation the main plot of Scripture, and the reconciliation of humans “the main sub-plot” within that “larger plot, the story of creation.”<sup>156</sup> In response I say that the true main message of Scripture is that God has reconciled humans to himself in Christ.

### **The Vocation of Israel**

A second part of Wright’s overarching narrative is the vocation of Israel. This is how Wright’s narrative goes: In Genesis 12:3, God said to Abraham, “all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” With these words, according to Wright, God gave to Abraham’s family the vocation of rescuing the world.<sup>157</sup> “Israel was the means chosen by the creator God through which to rescue the world from the plight described in Genesis 3 – 11.”<sup>158</sup> “Israel’s obedience/faithfulness should have been the means of undoing the problem of Adam, of humanity as a whole (2:17-24; 3:2f).”<sup>159</sup> The “boast” of the Jew which Paul refers to in Romans 2:17, 23, is “I can be the one through whom God rescues the world.”<sup>160</sup> Because Israel is sinful, however, Israel failed in her vocation to rescue the world from its plight.<sup>161</sup> This creates a problem for God. God has promised to rescue the world through Israel, but Israel failed to rescue the world. God could rescue the world in some other way, but then he would be unfaithful to his promise to rescue the world *through Israel*.<sup>162</sup> What God needs is a faithful Israelite who will be faithful to Israel’s vocation to rescue the world. Paul, of course, believed that Jesus was that faithful Israelite.<sup>163</sup> Since Jesus represents Israel, God has been faithful to his promise to rescue the world *through Israel*.

Paul uses the phrase “the righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) or “his righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ) six times in Romans.<sup>164</sup> Wright says that “the righteousness of God” in Romans refers to God’s faithfulness to his covenant promise to save the world through Israel.<sup>165</sup> “‘God’s righteousness’ here [in Romans] is his faithfulness to the covenant, *specifically to the covenant with Abraham made in Genesis 15* ...”<sup>166</sup> “The phrase ‘the righteousness of God’ (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) summed up sharply and conveniently, for a first-century Jew such as Paul, the expectation that the God of Israel ... would be faithful to the promises made to the patriarchs.”<sup>167</sup>

### **Critique of Wright’s Narrative**

#### **Only Jesus Had the Vocation to Save the World**

Wright says that “Israel’s obedience/faithfulness should have been the means of undoing the problem of Adam, of humanity as a whole (2:17-24; 3:2f).”<sup>168</sup> Mark Seifrid rightly asks: “Did God then intend Israel to die for the sins of the world? If Israel had been faithful to God, would it have fulfilled this role? ... At the very least, [Wright’s] work requires considerable

*Presupposition Four: Passages should be interpreted against the narrative of “God’s single plan through Israel for the world.”*

clarification at this crucial point.”<sup>169</sup> Wright’s statements about Israel’s vocation seem to blend together the vocation of God’s people to be the light of the world and the unique vocation of Christ to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Furthermore, it is reading into the text to say that the boast of the Jew was “I can be the one through whom God rescues the world.”<sup>170</sup> What Paul says is that the Jew is convinced that he is “a guide for the blind, a light for those in the dark, an instructor of the foolish” (Rom 2:19). That’s a long way from saying “I have been given the vocation to rescue the world.”

### **The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ**

Wright says that for God to carry out his plan, he needed a faithful Israelite. This causes Wright to understand the phrase πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16 [3x]; Gal 3:22) as “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” rather than “faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>171</sup> Jesus certainly was faithful to his vocation to rescue the world, but I do not think that this is what Paul means when he says πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. When Paul rephrases πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, he never says Χριστὸς ἦν πιστός (“Christ was faithful”), but rather εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν (“we believed in Jesus Christ”).<sup>172</sup> “Paul in effect exegetes the construction [πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] by saying εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν” (“we believed in Jesus Christ,” Gal 2:16).<sup>173</sup>

### **Δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ - “God’s Covenant Faithfulness”?**

What should we say to Wright’s interpretation of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as “God’s covenant faithfulness”? Some of Wright’s critics completely dissociate “righteousness” in Romans from “covenant faithfulness.” Mark Seifrid, for example, points out that “righteousness” does not *have to* refer to “covenant faithfulness.” If “righteousness” necessarily refers to “covenant faithfulness,” one would think that the words “righteousness” and “covenant” would frequently appear together in the Old Testament, but Seifrid demonstrates that they almost never appear together:

Only rarely do ברית and צדק—terms appear in any proximity to one another, despite their considerable frequency in the Hebrew Scriptures. “Covenant” (ברית) occurs 283 times, צדק—terminology some 524 times, and yet in only seven passages do the terms come into any significant semantic contact.<sup>174</sup>

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Similarly, Stephen Westerholm notes that the contrast between the “righteous” and the “wicked” “is perhaps the central motif of the book of Proverbs, no book in the Bible uses the language of righteousness with anything approaching comparable frequency.”<sup>175</sup> Yet the word “covenant” occurs only once in Proverbs (in regard to marriage in 2:17).

Thus Seifrid and Westerholm contend that “righteousness” does not have to refer to “covenant faithfulness.” Seifrid writes: “All ‘covenant-keeping’ is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is ‘covenant keeping.’ It is misleading, therefore, to speak of ‘God’s righteousness’ as his ‘covenant faithfulness.’”<sup>176</sup>

I think Seifrid and Westerholm make important points, but I would also say that the fact that “righteousness” does not always refer to covenant faithfulness does not definitively prove that it does not refer to God’s covenant faithfulness in Romans, especially when one considers that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ evokes references to “God’s righteousness” in the Psalms and Isaiah.

Several times in the Psalms, when the Psalmist needs to be saved, he appeals to God’s characteristic of righteousness. “In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me” (Psalm 71:2). In Isaiah’s poetry, he often uses “righteousness” in parallelism with “salvation” (45:8; 46:13; 51:5, 6, 8, 59:16, 17; 61:10). “My **righteousness** draws near speedily, my **salvation** is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations” (Isaiah 51:5). “Righteousness” is often explained as “conformity to a norm.” If the norm is the covenant, then “righteousness” is conformity to the norms of the covenant. Thus righteousness would be one’s conformity to the commitments he made in the covenant. It could be that the reason “righteousness” and “salvation” are paralleled in Isaiah is that in the covenant God has committed himself to his people and so when his people are in trouble the righteous thing for God to do is to keep his covenant commitments by saving his people. This seems to be August Pieper’s understanding. In his Isaiah commentary, he says that קִנְיָ “designates God’s faithfulness to his covenant of grace with Israel.”<sup>177</sup> If Paul means to evoke the Psalms and Isaiah, then a covenantal association cannot be completely ruled out. On the other hand, I am still not convinced that the Christians in Rome would have heard δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in 1:17 and thought “This means that God has been

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faithful to the covenant promise he made to Abraham that he would save the world through Israel.”

Others reject Wright’s interpretation of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ because it loads the phrase with so much narrative freight. In addition to evoking God’s faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham, Wright also sees the phrase as evoking God’s faithfulness to creation, his commitment to fix his broken world.<sup>178</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer wonders whether Wright “may not sometimes commit, on the hermeneutical level what James Barr terms, on the lexical level ‘illegitimate totality transfer.’”<sup>179</sup> “Illegitimate totality transfer” means that when a word occurs in a given context it is taken to mean everything it could possibly mean, all at once. For Wright, almost everything Paul says is packed with a narrative substructure.<sup>180</sup>

My biggest objection to Wright’s interpretation of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as God’s covenant faithfulness is that he uses it *as a replacement for* the way of reading the letter which goes: 1) We lack righteousness. 2) Yet God has supplied us with a righteous status through faith. Wright rejects this reading as too influenced by 16th century categories.<sup>181</sup> But this way of reading the letter fits the flow of the letter very well.

Romans 1:17 says that “in the gospel the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ) is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ could refer to God’s justifying activity (θεοῦ would then be a subjective genitive), or it could refer to a righteous status which comes from God (θεοῦ would then be a genitive of source).<sup>182</sup> If it is a genitive of source, then δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ would be equivalent to “the righteousness that comes from God” (τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην; Phil 3:9) and “the gift of righteousness” (τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης; Rom 5:17).<sup>183</sup> Paul goes on to say that all people are unrighteous (1:18-3:20). So a natural reading of the flow of the letter is that in the gospel God supplies us with a righteous status that we would not otherwise have.

How can the God of perfect justice acquit the guilty? Romans 3:25-26 gives the answer. The atoning sacrifice of Christ satisfies the demands of God’s justice.

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ), because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand

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unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) at the present time, so as to be just (δίκαιον) and the one who justifies (δικαιοῦντα) those who have faith in Jesus.

At the cross, the demands of God’s justice have been met and God is able to both be just and the one who justifies the ungodly.<sup>184</sup> Thus the way of reading Romans which Wright rejects (Humans lack righteousness, but God supplies us with the status of righteousness on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ) fits the data of the letter very well.

### **The Narrative of Continuing Exile**

Another important part of Wright’s overarching narrative is his thesis that even though the historical Babylonian exile had ended, first-century Jews, including Saul of Tarsus, believed that Israel was still in a continuing state of exile even in the first century.<sup>185</sup> A remnant of exiles had geographically and historically returned (Ezra 1-3), but many aspects of the great prophecies of restoration in Isaiah and Ezekiel had not happened yet. Even after the historical return from exile, Ezra says: “But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors.” (Nehemiah 9:36). Wright connects the idea of continuing exile to the fact that pagans were ruling over the Jews in Judea. How could the exile be over if Israel was still being ruled by the pagan Romans?<sup>186</sup> In Daniel 9:2, Daniel says, “I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” God then sends the angel Gabriel to Daniel with a message: “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city” (Daniel 9:24). Wright interprets this as meaning that the exile would last not 70 years, but 490 years. Thus, according to Wright, first-century Jews who were reading Daniel believed that the exile was still ongoing.

According to Wright, Paul saw Jesus’ death under the Roman overlords as the height of exile, bringing the exile to a climactic end. In his death, Jesus exhausts the curse of exile.

For Paul, the death of Jesus, precisely on a Roman cross which symbolized so clearly the continuing subjugation of the people of God, brought the exile to a climax. The King of the Jews took the brunt of the exile on himself.<sup>187</sup>

Because the Messiah represents Israel, he is able to take on himself Israel’s curse and exhaust it. ... The crucifixion of the Messiah is, one might say, the *quintessence* of the curse of exile, and its climactic act.<sup>188</sup>

## **The Influence of the Continuing Exile Narrative on Wright’s Reading of Paul**

In Galatians 3:10 Paul says “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’” The passage Paul quotes is Deuteronomy 27:26. In Deuteronomy 28:64, God says that Israel will be sent into exile if they disobey. Thus one of the covenant curses is exile. Therefore, Wright reasons, the “curse” in Galatians 3:10 is the curse of exile, rather than the curse which the law pronounces over all who break it. Wright says of the “curse” in verse 10:

This is not an abstract piece of theology, a convenient abstract mechanism whereby a “curse” which theoretically hung over the head of “sinners” in general should be transferred to someone else ...<sup>189</sup>

To this I must respond that the law does not “theoretically” pronounce a curse over sinners in general. The law *really does* pronounce a curse over sinners in general. The day of wrath is coming! On that day it will be obvious that the curse is not theoretical.

In verse 13, Paul says that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” For Wright, the “us” in verse 13 is not all people, but only “Jews,” since only Jews were under the curse of continuing exile. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law,” for Wright, means that Christ redeemed Jews from the Jewish exile. Paul, Wright says, “is not here producing a general statement of atonement theology applicable equally, and in the same way, to Jew and Gentile alike.”<sup>190</sup> Wright’s interpretation of Galatians 3:10-13 has the potential unintended consequence of taking comfort away from the troubled conscience. The logical conclusion of Wright’s interpretation is that if you are a Gentile, then verse 13 (“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law”) does not apply to you. If the curse of the law is simply the curse of exile, then Galatians 3:13 offers no comfort to the person whose conscience is troubled by his sins.<sup>191</sup>

Wright is aware of the pastoral concern to give comfort to troubled consciences but says: Take it back to the lawcourt if you want. If you need to know that God has accepted you freely, sinner as you are, because of the achievement of Jesus, so that you are no longer to be classified as “a sinner” but as a rescued, liberated, adopted child, all that is there for

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the asking. But do not imagine that by repeating that wonderful, refreshing, liberating message you have even begun to understand the urgent message of Galatians 3.<sup>192</sup>

For Wright, Paul’s statements “about the curse of the law, and how it is exhausted in the death of Jesus ... are not primarily abstract statements about the atonement ... No doubt they contribute to discussions at these more abstract levels, but such matters were not what Paul was basically talking about.”<sup>193</sup>

The bearing of the ‘curse’ was not, as in the reductionist accounts of much traditional Protestantism, a matter of (a) humans in general being ‘cursed’ because of sin and the law, (b) the Messiah taking the curse on himself, and so (c) humans being released from it ... The problem addressed in Galatians 3:10-14 is not, then, “How can sinners find a gracious God?”<sup>194</sup>

Notice that points (a), (b), and (c) is a summary of the gospel and Wright is saying that this is not what Galatians 3:10-14 is about.

The narrative of continuing exile also affects Wright’s interpretation of the Gospels. When Jesus tells people, like the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” (Mark 2:5), Wright comments, “*Forgiveness of sins is another way of saying ‘return from exile.’*”<sup>195</sup> Even the Parable of the Prodigal Son is, for Wright, not about personal forgiveness but about the return from exile.

Consider: here is a son who goes off in disgrace into a far country and then comes back ... This is the story of Israel, in particular of exile and restoration. ... This is what the parable is about.<sup>196</sup>

Here we see again that even though Wright believes in the salvation of sinners and the forgiveness of sins, he says that most of the *sedes* passages on which that teaching is based are actually talking about something else.

### **Is the Narrative Actually There?**

In a recent book on overarching narratives in Galatians, Andrew Das surveys some of the many overarching narratives which different scholars propose to shed light on the text. Das points out that these narratives *lie completely under the text*. He then asks the important question: if a narrative lies completely below the surface, how do we know it is actually there?<sup>197</sup> Mark Seifrid makes the same point: “Those who adopt this sort of reading generally appeal to an



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*implicit narrative* that informs the statements which appear in the text. The text stands in constant danger of being overrun by the imagination of the interpreter.”<sup>198</sup>

In Galatians 3:10-14, Paul does not actually say that Jesus ended the exile. Paul never says that by the “curse” he really means exile. It needs to be read into the text. In Romans, Paul never explicitly lays out Wright’s narrative about God being faithful to his plan to save the world through Israel *even though Israel as a whole failed to save the world*. This narrative needs to be read into the text.

### **Does the Reformation Reading of Paul Have a Story?**

Wright criticizes the old perspective reading of Paul as being “de-historicized,” “de-Judaized,” and “de-storied.”<sup>199</sup> He says that “For the ‘old perspective,’ Paul had to ditch everything about his previous worldview, theology, and culture – the old symbols, the ancient stories, the praxis, the view of God himself.”<sup>200</sup>

He admits that the old perspective has some overarching story, but he says that this story is badly shrunken and truncated to “Humans sin. God sent Jesus. So it’s ok.” He says that to reduce the gospel to bare propositions (“Humans are sinners, but believe in Jesus and you will go to heaven.”) is to do the same thing which Rudolph Bultmann did when he demythologized the gospel by dismissing all of the historical events as irrelevant and conceptualizing the gospel “*in a non-narrative form*, reducing it to the pure existential challenge of every moment.”<sup>201</sup>

In response, Confessional Lutherans definitely do not de-historicize the gospel. The historical events of Jesus’ death and resurrection are the bedrock of our faith. Nor do Confessional Lutherans “de-story” the gospel. We trace the promise of a Savior from the first promise in the Garden (Gen 3:15) to the promises given to Abraham and then to King David that one of his descendants would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:14-16) and finally to the Savior who came and brought God’s story to its always intended climax.<sup>202</sup> Confessional Lutherans do not de-story the gospel.

### **Wright and the Authority of Scripture**

Wright also states that Scripture cannot be seen as a set of abstract truths or rules. God “has not wanted to give us an abstract set of truths unrelated to space and time.”<sup>203</sup> President

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Wendland responds: “Of course the Bible is story, but it is not *just* story nor is it *all* story. It also articulates many doctrinal truths.”<sup>204</sup>

Wright does not view Scripture as the verbally inspired and inerrant word of God. He uses the analogy of a play script to describe the sense in which he believes the Bible is authoritative. Scripture, he says, contains the previous acts of a play. We are in the final act of the play. According to Wright, Scripture is authoritative in the sense that the carrying forward of the story needs to be in conformity with the previous acts of the play as found in the script.<sup>205</sup>

Wright also separates the authority of Scripture from the authority of God:

The risen Jesus doesn’t say, “All authority in heaven and earth is given to...the books you chaps are going to go and write.” He says, “All authority has been given to *me*.”<sup>206</sup>

In response I say that one cannot separate God’s authority from what God says. The Scriptures are the very words of God (2 Tim 3:16).

### **The Hermeneutical Key to All of Scripture**

John the Baptist gives us the hermeneutical key to the Scriptures when he points at Jesus and says, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Jesus himself gives the same hermeneutical key in Luke 24. “He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and *repentance for the forgiveness of sins* will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:47). This is the main message of Scripture. It was also Paul’s main message. “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom 4:25). “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:7). “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy ... so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5).

Martin Franzmann, in his essay “Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics,” quotes a saying of Luther: “Unless one understands the things under discussion (*res*), one cannot make sense of the words (*verba*).”<sup>207</sup> The *res* is the subject matter. The *verba* are the words. Franzmann says that “interpretation is a ‘circular’ process (from *verba* to *res* to *verba*), and in this process the *res* is of crucial importance.”<sup>208</sup> Franzmann says that the *res*, the subject matter

of Scripture is “the radical gospel.” The radical gospel is that “God, to whom man can find no way, has in Christ creatively opened up the way which man may and must go.”<sup>209</sup> Franzmann says that the radical gospel does not flatten out the Scripture, but rather the radical gospel is the *cantus firmus*, the consistent song of Scripture within which all the detailed variety of the *verba* can be heard.<sup>210</sup>

N. T. Wright would agree that the radical gospel is true, but I’m not sure he would agree that it is the *res*, the subject matter of Scripture. He consistently says that sin and salvation is not what Paul is talking about. Recall what he said about Galatians 3:10-13: “The argument in chapter 3 about the curse of the law, and how it is exhausted in the death of Jesus ... are not primarily abstract statements about the atonement ... *such matters were not what Paul was basically talking about*”<sup>211</sup> (Emphasis added). Wright says that “while faith and grace and promise are vital” to Romans 4, “*they are not its main subjects*”<sup>212</sup> (Emphasis added). Wright says that in Galatians 2, “The question at issue was not, how can individual sinners find salvation?”<sup>213</sup> When responding to his critics, Wright says that “salvation remains enormously important,” but in his actual exegesis of the passages, he consistently says that salvation is not what Paul is talking about.<sup>214</sup> He says that in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 Paul is talking *about* God giving to Abraham a Jew-plus-Gentile family. Franzmann’s hermeneutical method of seeing the words (the *verba*) in relation to the *res* (the main subject matter which is the radical gospel) allows us to do justice to the details of God giving to Abraham a Jew-plus-Gentile family without downplaying the *cantus firmus* which is always a song about how God has opened up a way for sinners in Christ.<sup>215</sup> Wright loses track of the main theme of Scripture when he consistently says that the text is not talking about how sinners can find salvation. The radical gospel is the overwhelming theme of the entire Scriptures. By repeating it in various ways, the Scriptures present the radical gospel to us and say “This is our main theme. Read us this way!”<sup>216</sup>

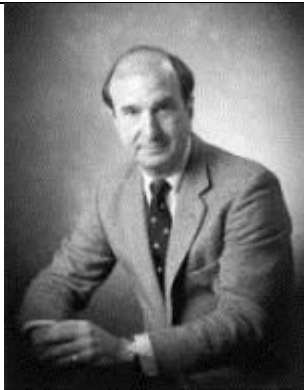
## **Conclusion**

We have surveyed four presuppositions of the New Perspective. The first presupposition of the New Perspective was that since first-century Judaism was a religion of grace, Paul was not critiquing works-righteousness. This presupposition does not recognize that Paul and the Rabbis

had different definitions of grace. For Paul, grace by definition is given to the undeserving and excludes works. Presupposition two is that justification did not address the question “How can a sinner find a gracious God?” but rather “How can Gentiles become part of the people of God?” This presupposition takes the emphasis off of the individual sinner standing before his or her God. The third presupposition is that justification is covenant language. Wright makes this lexical move to support his teaching that justification is more about ecclesiology than about soteriology. We saw that justification is *before God* (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:11) and thus belongs in soteriology. The fourth presupposition says that individual passages are to be read against a specific overarching narrative. This takes an overarching narrative from outside of the text and imposes it onto the text, changing the plain meaning of the text.

In some ways the Reformation began with a deep study of the inspired letters of Paul. As heirs of the Reformation, let us commit ourselves to a deep study of the text. When we read Paul’s letters, we will see what Luther saw there: “Jesus Christ clearly portrayed as crucified” (Gal 3:1). The radical gospel, the chief article, is that “Christ was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Nearly five hundred years after the Reformation, this is still the way the Scriptures present themselves to us to be read.

## New Perspective Scholars



E. P. Sanders:

Main Works:

*Paul and Palestinian Judaism.* (1977)

*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People.* (1983)

Main Teaching: Judaism is a religion of grace.



James D. G. Dunn

Main Works:

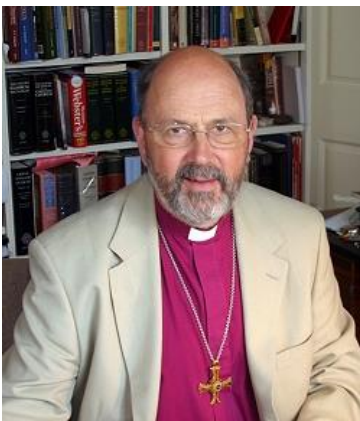
“The New Perspective on Paul.” (1983)

“Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Gal. 3.10-14).” (1985)

*Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary. (1988)

*The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (1998)

Main Teaching: “Works of the Law” focus on boundary markers.



N. T. Wright

Main Works:

*The Climax of the Covenant.* (1991)

*What Saint Paul Really Said.* (1997)

*Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision.* (2009)

*Paul: In Fresh Perspective.* (2009)

*Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013.* (2013)

*Paul and the Faithfulness of God.* (2013)

Main Teaching: Justification is God’s declaration that a person is in the covenant. God’s righteousness is God’s covenant faithfulness. Continuing exile is a controlling narrative.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the interview with James Dunn in a helpful introductory video, posted on YouTube by St. John’s Nottingham: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqZYbcvANhM>.

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<sup>3</sup> James Dunn, “A Man More Sinned Against Than Sinning? A Response to Carl Trueman,” Online: [www.thepaulpage.com](http://www.thepaulpage.com).

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2004); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); *ibid.*, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). WELS treatments of the New Perspective include: G. Philip Arnold, “Pauline Perspectives: A Summary and Critique of the New Perspective on Paul,” *WLQ* 112 (2015): 184-194; David Gosdeck, “Nicholas Thomas Wright – New Perspective on St. Paul,” essay presented to the Minnesota Valley Pastoral Conference on November 12, 2013, WLS Online Essay File; Daniel Leyrer “Does Paul Need to Be ‘Un-Lutheranized?’” *WLQ* 107 (2010): 298-301; Daniel Waldschmidt, “The Target of Paul’s Polemic: A Dialogue with the New Perspective,” WLS Online Essay File; *ibid.*, “The New Perspective on Paul,” submitted to D. A. Carson for the class “New Testament Research” at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Ill., April, 2015. Online at [https://www.academia.edu/12427172/New\\_Perspective\\_on\\_Paul](https://www.academia.edu/12427172/New_Perspective_on_Paul); Paul Wendland, “A Lutheran Look at the New Perspective on Paul,” forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 126. This book is a response to John Piper’s *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*, listed above footnote 2.

<sup>6</sup> For a more expansive treatment of this presupposition, see my senior thesis at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, “The Target of Paul’s Polemic: A Dialogue with the New Perspective.”

<sup>7</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> Sanders lists, among others: Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, 6 volumes (München: Beck, 1922-61); Ferdinand Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrash und Talmud* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1880); Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther und Reichard, 1906).

<sup>9</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Mekilta Shirata 9. Quoted in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 86.

<sup>11</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 205-6.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933; repr., 1987), 397. Cf. also George Foot Moore, *Judaism II*, 95. Quoted in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 147.

<sup>13</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 180, 182, 236.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 82, 97.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 141, 146-7.

<sup>18</sup> Sifre Qedoshim perek 8.10 – “... everyone who confesses to (i.e. agrees to) the commandment concerning just measures confesses to (confirms) the exodus from Egypt; but anyone who denies the commandment concerning just measures denies the exodus from Egypt.” Quoted in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 543.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 552.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>25</sup> James Dunn, “The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith,” in *The New Perspective on Paul*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 193-212, here 194.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 240.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.



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<sup>28</sup> D. A. Carson describes the New Perspective's position this way in his online lecture: "The New Perspective on Paul."

<sup>29</sup> G. Vermes, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Penguin, 1987). Cited by James Dunn, "What's Right about the Old Perspective on Paul," in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo*, eds. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> G. Vermes, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Penguin, 1987), 177.

<sup>31</sup> This prayer is the sixth of the Eighteen Benedictions. Quoted by Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 232.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Armin Panning, *Galatians, Ephesians*, People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997), 45: "But the Jews who truly understood the nature of this covenant with God never trusted or relied on their performance of these special regulations as the reason why God should be gracious to them. For example, when they brought their sacrifices, they did not view that as something they did for God; their sacrifices served, rather as reminders of God's great promise. ... Hence Paul expects Peter to agree with him when he says [in Gal 2:15-6], 'We [who are Jews by birth] ... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.'"

<sup>33</sup> On the variety of views on salvation in Second-Temple Judaism, cf. the first volume of essays in a pair of volumes edited by D. A. Carson, Mark Seifrid, and Peter T. O'Brien, *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume I: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 140 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2001; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Moisés Silva, "The Law and Christianity: Dunn's New Synthesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 339-353, here 348-9.

<sup>35</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 175. Quoted by Moisés Silva, "The Law and Christianity: Dunn's New Synthesis," 350 n19.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 32.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 90.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 92. To those who know the history of the life of C. F. W. Walther, one cannot help but be remind of the election controversy in which Walther's opponents said that God's eternal election was *intuitu fidei*, "in view of faith." Walther wrote concerning the election controversy: "Our adversaries state plainly that God has decreed to elect certain men in view of their *conduct*, or they use similar terms. Turn and twist as much as they will, they declare that something which man does is the cause of his salvation." C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans., W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 271.

<sup>39</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>41</sup> Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*, 55-6.

<sup>42</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). It should be noted that even though I am using Barclay's work here, Barclay would not agree with me on every point. For example, Barclay sees the definition of grace in the Rabbis as a completely legitimate definition of grace and should not be taken to be less than grace simply because it does not match Paul's definition (cf. *ibid.*, 166-169). Since Paul is writing inspired Scripture, I take Paul's definition of grace to be the true definition of grace. Every other definition of grace falls short of true grace.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-70.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-75.

<sup>45</sup> I have only read a few sections of Barclay's book. His book would be a useful area of further study.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 73. Italics original.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 32. Westerholm makes use of Barclay's earlier work on the subject of "gift" in the ancient world.

<sup>49</sup> Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 157-8, 165, 566.

<sup>50</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 297. Quoted in Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 26-31.

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<sup>52</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 543.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>54</sup> D. A. Carson, "Summaries and Conclusions," *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 1:544-5. Cf. also Robert H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Biblica* 66 (1985): 1-38; Simon Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*, 57.

<sup>56</sup> For a discussion of Semi-Pelagianism cf. John P. Meyer, *Studies in the Augsburg Confession* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1995), 42-43.

<sup>57</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 114. Quoted in Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 513.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Dunn, "The New Perspective: whence, what and whither?" in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 79: "Was Paul's 'work of faith and labor of love' (1 Thess. 1:3) ... as synergistic in its own way as Judaism's covenantal nomism?" Cf. also *ibid.*, 87: "If the finding that Judaism's soteriology was synergistic means that salvation was in at least some measure dependent on obeying the law, then we note that Paul expected believers to obey the law ... Does any emphasis on human responsibility before God run the risk of being rebuked as synergistic?" Emphasis original. Cf. also Bruce Longenecker, "On Critiquing the New Perspective," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 96 (2005): 263-271. Longenecker says that critics of the New Perspective apply a double standard to the respective soteriologies of Paul and Judaism.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. also FC SD III:36, 39. Here the Formulators emphasize the *particulae exclusivae* [exclusive clauses] ("not by works," "apart from the works of the law"). All quotations from the Confessions are taken from the Kolb-Wengert translation.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul." Cf. also Peter T. O'Brien, "Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. 2:249-296.

<sup>62</sup> FC SD IV:35.

<sup>63</sup> Dunn, "The New Perspective: whence, what and whither?" in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Thomas Schreiner, "'Works of the Law' in Paul," *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991): 217-244, here 224: "...since anti-Semitism has sometimes crept into N. T. exegesis, Sanders' work rightly warns us against reading Judaism with jaundiced and unsympathetic eyes."

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Schreiner, "An Old Perspective on the New Perspective," *Concordia Journal* 35 (2009): 144-155, here 147.

<sup>66</sup> Schreiner, *The Law & Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 115. Cf. also Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 216-17: "If Christianity has been far from immune from legalism, is it likely to think that Judaism, at any stage of its development, was?"

<sup>67</sup> Don Garlington, "The New Perspective on Paul: An Appraisal Two Decades Later," *Criswell Theological Review* 2 (2005): 17-38, here 18.

<sup>68</sup> This phrase is taken from the summary of the New Perspective given by D. A. Carson in his lecture, "The New Perspective on Paul." Online.

<sup>69</sup> Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199-215.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 200, 202.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 206: "The problem we are trying to isolate could be expressed in hermeneutical terms somewhat like this: ... Where Paul was concerned about the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man's salvation out of a common human predicament." Cf. also Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 2: The "doctrine of justification by faith was hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs to the promises of God to Israel."

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 131. Quoted in Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 2. Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," 203, 205.

<sup>73</sup> Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 120; *ibid.*, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 200; *ibid.*, "Works of the Law

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and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14),” in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 140. Cf. also N. T. Wright, “Justification: Yesterday, Today and For Ever,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 428.

<sup>74</sup> Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14),” in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 140.

<sup>75</sup> Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 131. Quoted in Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 2. Cf. also Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” 203, 205.

<sup>76</sup> Henri Blocher, “Justification of the Ungodly (*Sola Fide*),” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2:467. The quotation is from Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester/Grand Rapids: InterVarsity/Eerdmans, 1986), 162.

<sup>77</sup> Professor Deutschlander sometimes says “Luther took God seriously.”

<sup>78</sup> James Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *BJRL* 65 (1983): 95–122. Originally delivered as The Manson Memorial Lecture at the University of Manchester on November 4, 1982. Reprinted in Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 99-120. Subsequent page references will be to this edition. Dunn defended his interpretation of “works of the law” in a number of subsequent articles: Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Gal. 3.10–14)”; “Yet Once More – ‘The Works of the Law,’ A Response”; “Whatever Happened to ‘Works of the Law?’”; “Noch einmal ‘Works of the Law’: The Dialogue Continues.” For bibliographic information, see the bibliography. These articles were also reprinted in *The New Perspective on Paul*. In this paper, page references are to this edition.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. also N. T. Wright, *Justification*, 119: The exegesis “must be solidly anchored to the actual situation Paul is describing in 2:11-14.”

<sup>80</sup> Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” 108. Italics original.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. also Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14),” in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 125. Dunn quotes 1 Maccabees 1:60-63; Aristaeus 139, 142.

<sup>82</sup> Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” 108-9.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-5.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 148-160.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Douglas Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 73–100, here 84.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Wright, *Justification*, 117.

<sup>88</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 388 n. 107. Cf. also Douglas Moo, “‘Law’ ‘Works of Law’ and Legalism in Paul,” 96-99.

<sup>89</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 444. Cf. also *ibid.*, 388 n107; Douglas Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” 96-99.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 115. Italics original.

<sup>91</sup> Wright, “Paul and the Patriarch: The Role(s) of Abraham in Galatians and Romans,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 586. Cf. also *ibid.*, 562-3; Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 102.

<sup>92</sup> Dunn, “Whatever Happened to ‘Works of the Law?’” 384.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” 97: “... Paul appears to criticize ‘works of the law’ not because they are *nomou* (‘of the law’) but because they are *erga* (‘works’).”

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Schreiner, “An Old Perspective on the New Perspective,” 144.

<sup>95</sup> Apology IV:87. Similarly, Luther sounds like he is responding directly to James Dunn when he says: “Thus for Paul ‘works of the Law’ means works of the entire Law. Therefore one should not make a distinction between the Decalogue and ceremonial laws. Now if the work of the Decalogue does not justify, much less will circumcision, which is a work of the Ceremonial Law. When Paul says, as he often does, that a man is not justified by the Law or by works of the Law, which mean the same thing in Paul, he is speaking in general about the entire Law.” (*Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1–4*, LW 26:122).

<sup>96</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 257.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

<sup>98</sup> He wrote a long book on the subject: *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

<sup>99</sup> The New Testament for Everyone (Westminster: John Know Press, 2011).

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<sup>100</sup> Many of his talks are posted on YouTube.

<sup>101</sup> Some of the most important are: *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009). This book is a response to a book written against him by John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*. Wright, *Paul: in Fresh Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009). Wright has also written an exegetical commentary on Romans: *Romans in The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 395-770.

<sup>102</sup> *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Book I, Parts I and II, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Book II, Parts III and IV, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013). There are two important companion volumes to this book. One is a collection of Wright's previous essays on Paul: *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013). This collection of essays is very helpful for understanding Wright's interpretation of Paul. The other companion is a survey of recent Pauline interpreters: *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

<sup>103</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 133.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 154.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. the Priene calendar inscription in honor of Caesar Augustus: "And Caesar, by his appearance [exceeded] the hopes of [all] those who had anticipated [*the good news* εὐαγγέλια], not only by [sur]passing all benefactors who had come before him, but also by leaving behind to those who would come (after) not even hope of surpassing (him), and the birthday of the/*this god* began *the good news* [εὐαγγελίων] on his account for the world." *OGIS*, no. 458, ca. 9 BC, cited in Evans, "Mark's Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription," 68-9 and in James Voelz, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, CC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 94 n12.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Wright, "The New Perspective on Paul," in *Perspectives on Paul*, 273-291, here 278. On Paul's confrontation of Emperor worship, see Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in *Perspectives on Paul*, 169-188; *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, 59-79; *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 279-347, 1271-1319.

<sup>107</sup> εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγελίζομαι: 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14; 3:7; 4:13. δικαίω/δίκαιος/δικαιοσύνη: 2:16 [3x], 17, 21; 3:6, 7, 11, 21, 24; 5:4, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Wright, "Gospel and Theology in Galatians," in *Pauline Perspectives*, 86-7.

<sup>109</sup> On the basis of this passage, the WLS Dogmatics notes say that "Forgiveness of sins is used as a perfect synonym of justification." Cf. FC SD III:23: "...the righteousness of faith before God consists of the gracious reckoning of Christ's righteousness, apart from any addition of our works; it consists in the fact that our sins are forgiven and covered and are not reckoned to us (Rom 4 [:6-8])."

<sup>110</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 95; Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 957.

<sup>111</sup> Wright, *Paul and his Recent Interpreters*, 118.

<sup>112</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 119. Elsewhere, Wright insists that he has not replaced soteriology with ecclesiology. Cf. *ibid.*, *Justification*, 133: "Nor is this – as critics of the new perspective have said ad nauseam, and I understand why – to replace soteriology with ecclesiology." *Ibid.*, 147: "Is this 'ecclesiology' as opposed to 'soteriology'? Of course not. It is ecclesiology (membership in God's people) as the advance sign of soteriology (being saved on the last day)." Emphasis original.

<sup>113</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, "Wrighting the Wrongs of the Reformation?" in *Jesus, Paul, and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, eds. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 250.

<sup>114</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 121.

<sup>115</sup> Much of the word study which follows is taken from the WLS Dogmatics notes, 347-52.

<sup>116</sup> "Declare the innocent not guilty, and so establish his innocence" (LXX: δικαιοῦσαι δίκαιον δοῦναι αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ; 1 Kings 8:32). The Lord faults the judges in Israel because they "acquit the guilty (LXX: οἱ δικαιοῦντες τὸν ἄσεβῆ) for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent" (Isaiah 5:23; cf. also Prov 17:15). It is also used in the sense of helping a person to enjoy the benefits of a favorable verdict. Isaiah 50:8 says, "He who vindicates me (יְהוָה לִי לְעֵזֶר לXX: ὁ δικαιοῦσας) is near. Who then will bring charges against me?" In the New Testament δικαιοῦν is used in the ordinary sense of acquitting or of being acquitted. 1 Corinthians 4:4 says, "My conscience is

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clear, but that does not make me innocent (δεδικαίωμαι). It is the Lord who judges me.” Hebrew taken from an online Hebrew Bible: <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm>.

<sup>117</sup> BDAG 2.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. FC SD III:17: “Accordingly, the word ‘justify’ here means to pronounce righteous and free from sins and to count as freed from the eternal punishment of sin because of Christ’s righteousness, which is ‘reckoned to faith by God’ (Phil 3[:9]). This is consistent with the use and meaning of this word in Holy Scripture, in the Old and New Testaments. Proverbs 17[:15]: ‘One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.’ Isaiah 5[:23]: ‘Woe to those who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights!’ Romans 8[:33]: ‘Who will bring any charges against God’s elect? It is God who justifies,’ that is, who absolves from sin and pronounces free.”

<sup>119</sup> Wright, “The Shape of Justification,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 216-222. The paper was originally published on *The Paul Page* ([www.thepaulpage.com](http://www.thepaulpage.com)) on October 9, 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 117.

<sup>121</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 121.

<sup>122</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 968.

<sup>123</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 116.

<sup>124</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 968.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 158.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, 159.

<sup>127</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 159

<sup>128</sup> James Dunn, “The New Perspective: whence, what and whither?” in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 35. Cf. also *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>129</sup> Gathercole, “What Did Paul Really Mean?” *Christianity Today*, August 2007, 22-28; here 26.

<sup>130</sup> The language is taken from Douglas Moo in a debate with Douglas Campbell. “Is the Lutheran Approach to Pauline Justification Justified?” Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlujS-fH8R4>.

<sup>131</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 121.

<sup>132</sup> Wright, “Paul and the Patriarch,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 565. Wright says that Seifrid’s “attempt to split up ‘righteousness’ and ‘covenant membership’ ... fails not least because of Paul’s central use of Gen. 15 where the two are inextricably intertwined.” Wright further notes the parallel between Genesis 17:11 and Romans 4:11. “And [Abraham] received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised” (Romans 4:11). “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.” (Genesis 17:11) Wright, “Paul and the Patriarch,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 566: “Thus where Genesis has ‘sign of the covenant’, ... Paul has ‘sign of *dikaioσύνη*’, ... One might bring this out by rendering *dikaioσύνη* here as ‘covenant membership’, or even ‘the status of covenant membership’. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant membership Abraham already had on the basis of believing God’s promise about his family. Paul seems to have made this equation, and so should we.” Mark Seifrid responds: “In fact, Rom 4:11 could easily be used against Wright’s reading: Paul, after all, doesn’t speak of a covenant, but of righteousness. And Paul insists that righteousness is given to the uncircumcised ‘non-convental’ Abraham -- so that Jews, who are within the covenant, must follow the steps of obedience -- i.e. the faith -- of the uncircumcised” (email correspondence, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Cf. also Das, *Paul and the Stories of Israel*, 78-79.

<sup>133</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 272.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. FC SD III:32.

<sup>135</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1004. Cf. also Wright, “Paul and the Patriarch,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 569.

<sup>136</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 276. Cf. FC SD III:22.

<sup>137</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Simon Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by his Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. 2:147–184

<sup>139</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 950 n487.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 951.

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. Wright, “On Becoming the Righteousness of God: 2 Corinthians 5.21,” in *Pauline Theology*, II (ed. D. M. Hay; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 200-8, repr., *Pauline Perspectives*, 68-76, here 73. Subsequent page references are to this edition. Also available online: [http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Becoming\\_Righteousness.pdf](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Becoming_Righteousness.pdf). Cf. also *Justification*, 159.

<sup>142</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 160-1.

<sup>143</sup> *The Kingdom New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

<sup>144</sup> LW 48:12. Cf. FC SD III:9, 14-15.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. also FC SD III:30: “Therefore, in the justification of the sinner before God, faith relies ... only on Christ and (in him) on his perfect obedience, with which he fulfilled the law for us and which is reckoned to believers as righteousness.”

<sup>146</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 129. Cf. also Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 940; Wright, *Justification*, 101-2. Cf. also Don Garlington, “The New Perspective on Paul: An Appraisal Two Decades Later,” 22, 24: “On the part of many, there has been a failure to recognize that salvation is not finally complete until, in Paul’s words, we are eschatologically ‘saved by his life’ (Rom 5:10). ... One may legitimately talk of obedience as the precondition of eschatological justification, or perhaps better, vindication. Yet obedience, in the Jewish context, is but perseverance and the avoidance of idolatry (the central thesis of my *Obedience of Faith*).” Garlington sets out his case for this most fully in *‘The Obedience of Faith’: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context*, WUNT 38 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991).

<sup>147</sup> Cf. James White in a debate with N. T. Wright. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp8rMsOCsvY>.

<sup>148</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity), 59. Emphasis added.

<sup>149</sup> Dunn, “Jesus the Judge: Further Thoughts on Paul’s Christology and Soteriology,” in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 403.

<sup>150</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 11.

<sup>151</sup> Wendland, “A Lutheran Look at the New Perspective on Paul,” forthcoming.

<sup>152</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 474.

<sup>153</sup> Wright lays out this overarching narrative in detail in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 139-163; 456-537.

<sup>154</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 490.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

<sup>156</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 490.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 504; Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 95. Wright quotes the saying of a later Rabbi: “But the Holy One, blessed be he, thought, ‘Perhaps something may go wrong, and there will be no one to repair matters. Lo, to begin with I shall create the first Adam, so that if something should go wrong with him, Abraham will be able to come and remedy matters in his stead’” (Genesis Rabbah 14.6). Jacob Neusner, trans., *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, Brown Judaic Studies 104 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

<sup>158</sup> N. T. Wright, “Romans 2.17-3.9: A Hidden Clue to the Meaning of Romans?” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 1 (2012): 1-25. Reprinted in *Pauline Perspectives*, 489-509, here 498. Page references will be to this edition.

<sup>159</sup> Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 107.

<sup>160</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1003 n658.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 507; *Ibid.*, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 98.

<sup>162</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 841.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>164</sup> Romans 1:17 – “For in the gospel the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ) is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” Romans 3:5 – “But if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness (θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην) more clearly, what shall we say?

That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us?” Romans 3:21 – “But now apart from the law the righteousness of

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God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” Romans 3:25-26 – “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ), because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) at the present time, so as to be just (δίκαιον) and the one who justifies (δικαιοῦντα) those who have faith in Jesus.” Romans 10:3 – “Since they did not know the righteousness of God (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην) and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”

<sup>165</sup> Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 99; *Ibid.*, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1469.

<sup>166</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 67.

<sup>167</sup> Wright, *Romans*, 398.

<sup>168</sup> Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 107.

<sup>169</sup> Seifrid, “The Narrative of Scripture and Justification by Faith: A Fresh Response to N. T. Wright,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72 (2008): 19-44, here 34.

<sup>170</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1003 n658.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Wright, “The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology,” in *Pauline Perspectives*, 201-2; Wright, *Romans*, 470.

<sup>172</sup> Moisés Silva, “Faith Versus Works of Law in Galatians,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2:217-248, here 231.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>174</sup> Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 1:423. Those passages are: Isa 42:6; 61:8-11; Hos 2:16-20; Psalm 50:1-6; 111:1-10; Daniel 9:4-7; Neh 9:32-33.

<sup>175</sup> Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 287.

<sup>176</sup> Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 1:423.”

<sup>177</sup> August Pieper, *Isaiah II*, trans., E. E. Kowalke (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979), 277. Cf. *ibid.*, 203.

<sup>178</sup> Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, 26.

<sup>179</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, “Wrighting the Wrongs of the Reformation?,” 240.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Wright, “New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8,” in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. S. K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 26-35.

<sup>181</sup> Wright, *Romans*, 403.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 95-96. Cf. also Kuske, *Romans 1 – 8*, 50: “[θεοῦ] could be taken as a subjective genitive, indicating that God is the one who makes the declaration of acquittal (cf. Ro 3:30 ὃς δικαιώσει). Or it could be taken as a genitive of source, indicating that the acquittal comes from God (cf. Php 3:9 τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην). In either case the point is made that God is the judge who makes the declaration of acquittal.”

<sup>183</sup> That this righteousness is “by faith from first to last” (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν) might tip the scales in favor of a righteous status which is received by faith. Cf. Cranfield, *Romans* 1:97-8. Thanks to my associate, Rev. Kirk Lahmann for pointing me to this consideration.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. WLS Dogmatics notes, 353: “From this it is evident that justification is a verdict. . . . It is not an executive order of God with no legal satisfaction (just cause) as its basis, comparable to a governor’s pardoning of a criminal. It is rather the verdict of a judge who after due investigation acquits a defendant because of a prior satisfaction of justice.” Cf. also Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*, 274.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Wright, *Justification*, 60. Wright’s full argument for “continuing exile” is found in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 139-163.

<sup>186</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 141.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

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<sup>191</sup> One of the things that is frequently repeated in the Lutheran Confessions is that maximum comfort needs to be given to troubled consciences. Apology IV: 110, 164A, 172 A, 180 C, 224 A, 319 C; FC SD III:32. Professor Deutschlander says that there is a three-fold hermeneutical rule found throughout the Lutheran Confessions. The interpretation must: 1) be according to the Scripture, 2) give maximum glory to Christ, 3) give maximum comfort to the troubled conscience.

<sup>192</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 134. For Wright, the urgent message of Galatians 3 is that God is now giving to Abraham the world-wide family composed of Jews and Gentiles.

<sup>193</sup> Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology," in *Pauline Perspectives*, 214.

<sup>194</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 526.

<sup>195</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 268. Cf. *ibid.*: "Centuries of Christian usage have accustomed readers of the New Testament to think of 'forgiveness' as primarily a gift to the individual person, which can be made at any time. It is, in that sense, abstract and ahistorical, however much it may burst upon one's consciousness with fresh delight in particular historical situations. On this basis, analyses of Jesus' offer of forgiveness have tended to focus on the piety (the *sense* of forgiveness) or the abstract theology (the *fact* of forgiveness, or the belief in it) of Jesus' hearers and/or the early church. The entire argument of this book so far indicates that this puts the cart before the horse. What is regularly missing from analyses of forgiveness is that which, arguably, stands front and centre in precisely those biblical and post-biblical Jewish texts upon which Jesus and the early church drew most heavily. *Forgiveness of sins is another way of saying 'return from exile.'*"

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>197</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Stories of Israel: Grand Thematic Narratives in Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 236-8. Das refers to a volume of essays edited by Bruce Longenecker, *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002). Cf. especially the essay by Francis Watson, "Is There a Story in These Texts?"

<sup>198</sup> Seifrid, "The Narrative of Scripture and Justification by Faith," 26-7.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Wright, *Justification*, 191.

<sup>200</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 460. Douglas Moo comments on this quotation: "One can only respond 'Really?' and trust that Wright would, on reflection, wish to retract this statement." Douglas Moo, Review of N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, n.p. [cited 28 July 2016]. Online: [http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/paul\\_and\\_the\\_faithfulness\\_of\\_god](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/paul_and_the_faithfulness_of_god).

<sup>201</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 457.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Carl Lawrenz and John Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2004); John Jeske, *Genesis*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1991); John Lawrenz, "Insights Drawn from the Structure of Genesis," in *Heritage and Hope: Essays in Honor of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary* (Mequon: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Press, 2013), 1-44.

<sup>203</sup> "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" in *Vox Evangelica* (1991), 7-32.

<sup>204</sup> Paul Wendland, "A Lutheran Look at the New Perspective on Paul," forthcoming. Emphasis original.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" Cf. also Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, 171-2.

<sup>206</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 28-29.

<sup>207</sup> Martin Franzmann, "Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40 (1969): 235-46, here 235.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>211</sup> Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology," in *Pauline Perspectives*, 214.

<sup>212</sup> Wright, *Romans*, 497.

<sup>213</sup> Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology," in *Pauline Perspectives*, 195.

<sup>214</sup> Wright, *Paul and his Recent Interpreters*, 118.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Franzmann, "Seven Theses," 246: "And the radical-Gospel orientation will give him freedom, freedom to hear the individual text in its individuality, to hear just this voice in its closer or more remote contrapuntal relationship to the *cantus firmus* which ever rings in his ears..."

<sup>216</sup> I owe this language and some of the language in the closing paragraphs to President Wendland.