

The New Perspective(s) on Paul:  
An Introduction  
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Introduction. The expression itself was introduced by James D. G. Dunn in 1982: “The New Perspective on Paul,” *BJRL* 65 (August, 1982): 94-122, reprinted in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1990). More recently, a number of individuals add the parenthetical “(s)”, since there have been many developments.

I. Components of NPP. Not all proponents of the NPP agree, which is why we now often refer to the “New Perspectives on Paul” in the plural. But the following are a cluster of emphases one tends to find. In each case, one could easily list several sub-points, and it is beyond my concern to mention each of those separately for the purposes of a general introduction.

A. Re-appraisal of first century Palestinian Judaism, in such a manner that its alleged “legalism” is denied.

B. Re-appraisal of “God’s righteousness,” and, ordinarily, of justification

i. “God’s righteousness” is not judicial righteousness; it is faithfulness to a promise, or to a covenant, or it is soteric power

ii. Justification is not so much about how an individual stands before the bar of God’s judgment; it is about who is and who is not considered to be part of the covenant community

iii. Paul argues “from” justification, not “for” justification, which he regards as a matter settled in Abraham’s covenant

iv. For some in the NPP, future justification (insofar as it exists) is based on works done in grateful obedience

v. For Wright and Dunn, “to be justified” means to be a member of the covenant people of God.

Dunn: “God’s justification is rather God’s acknowledgement that someone is in the covenant” (NPP, 190)

Wright: “Justification in this setting, then, is not a matter of how someone enters the community of the true people of God, but of how you tell who belongs to that community (WSPRS, 119)... “Within this context, ‘justification,’ as seen in

3:24-26, means that those who believe in Jesus Christ are declared to be members of the true covenant family” (129).

C. Paul’s “problem” with the Law is that it distinguished Jew and Gentile.

D. Restriction of “works of the law” to mean the boundary markers of circumcision, diet, and calendar.

## II. The Two Major Sources of the NPP

A. Source One, consciously referred to by Dunn: E. P. Sanders’s re-evaluation of Palestinian Judaism in his 1978 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

N.B.: Even before Sanders, scholars such as David Daube and W. D. Davies had begun a revision of understanding Palestinian Judaism in two ways: they questioned the validity of the distinction between Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism; they questioned whether there was any “normative” Judaism.

1. His over-all approach: comparison of “pattern of religions”; “getting in” and “staying in.”
2. Negative: Removes the Rabbinic/Talmudic material from the discussion
3. Positive: Assesses the remaining literature, and finds no evidence of legalism, but rather emphasis on three things: election, appeals to God’s mercy, and atonement

B. Source Two, not expressly referred to by Dunn: Ernst Käsemann’s influential “Gottesgerechtigkeit bei Paulus,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 58 (1961): 367-78, translated and re-published as “The Righteousness of God in Paul,” in *New Testament Questions for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969, 168-82). [n.b. Dunn does refer once to Käsemann in this essay, but it is fairly insignificant, is negative (“Rudolph Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann, both read Paul through Lutheran spectacles and both made this understanding of justification by faith their central theological principle” p. 185), and does not refer to this seminal work]. Yet Käsemann’s thesis is fully embraced by Dunn, by Wright, by Stuhlmacher, and most other proponents of the NPP.

1. Removes the δικ-language in Paul (esp. Rom. 1:17, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) from the forensic judicial arena to the soteric arena, “God’s saving activity” or “saving power.” (Later, in the language of N. T. Wright, “God’s covenant faithfulness”).

“From the outset it will be noticed that in the field of the Old Testament and of Judaism in general, righteousness does *not convey primarily the sense of a personal, ethical quality*, but of a *relationship*; originally signifying trustworthiness in regard to the community, it came to mean the rehabilitated standing of a member of the community who had been acquitted of an offence against it. Any interpretation which begins from the general concept and its specifically *juridical* application is bound to centre on the character of righteousness as gift and, in practice, on anthropology. But the formulation which Paul has taken over speaks primarily of *God’s saving activity*, which is present in his gift as a precipitate without being completely dissolved into it.”  
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“We see here that Paul has kept to the aspect of righteousness as *power*, implicit in the formulation itself and supported by various parallel expressions. God’s power becomes God’s gift when it takes possession of us and, so to speak, enters into us...” 173

“The widely-held view that God’s righteousness is simply a property of the divine nature can now be rejected as misleading. It *derives from Greek theology*, which speculates about such properties; it contradicts the basic sense of ‘righteousness’ within the tradition of the Old Testament and later Judaism--namely, faithfulness in the context of the community; and it proves ultimately inadequate because it postulates what cannot be convincingly intellectualized--namely, the making-over to a human being of a property of the divine nature. *Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is for Paul, as it is for the Old Testament and Judaism in general, a phrase expressing divine activity, treating not of the self-subsistent, but of the self-revealing God.

We take the decisive step along the road to the proper understanding of Paul when, and only when, we grasp the indissoluble connection of *power and gift* within the conception of the divine righteousness; having done so, we wonder why this finding has not long ago come to be taken for granted.” 174

“Paul was not primarily concerned with the Christian in some purely notional individual capacity, much less with the Christian personality. To say that a man only believes as an individual is simply to say that here, as in the case of ministry in the world, he cannot shrug off responsibility. But I find myself totally unable to assent to the view that Paul’s theology and his philosophy of history are oriented towards the individual.” 175-76

“But equally God continues in that faithfulness which is called *sedaka* in the Old Testament and is there, as in Judaism in general, bound up with the Covenant; the same faithfulness is very powerfully recalled in Rom. 9.” 180 [K. is on to something here, because the Sinai covenant is based upon righteousness, conditioned upon Israel’s obedience, though K. almost surely doesn’t get this.]

“All that we have been saying amounts to this: *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is for Paul God’s sovereignty over the world revealing itself eschatologically in Jesus. And, remembering the Greek root, we may also say that it is rightful *power* with which God makes his cause to triumph in the world which has fallen away from him and which yet, as creation, is his inviolable possession.” 180

2. Creates an enormous arena of interpretation of *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* in Gal. 2:16 and elsewhere. Not “faith in Jesus Christ,” but “faithfulness *of* Jesus Christ.” (cf. my chapter in the forthcoming Festschrift for David F. Wells). If it is Christ’s faithfulness that justifies (as opposed to our faith in Christ), then perhaps Jews, who do not believe in Christ, can be redeemed by his faithfulness.

### III. Evaluation

#### General Evaluative Introduction.

To understand the NPP, one must grasp its historical setting: The Ecumenical discussions of the late twentieth century, specifically the post-holocaust setting in continental Europe, and post-Vatican II setting in the British isles. There is a not-so-thinly-veiled effort to remove perceived barriers between Jews and Christians (Käsemann/Stuhlmacher) or between Catholics and Protestants (Dunn, N. T. Wright). That is, faith *in* Christ distinguishes Christians from Jews, and faith *alone* in Christ distinguishes Protestants from Catholics. So, if we can remove this card from the deck, the ecumenical card game may proceed more expeditiously. E. P. Sanders (in?)famously stated, for instance, that the only problem Paul had with Judaism was “that it wasn’t Christianity.” Dunn and Wright suggest that “getting in” the covenant (and, regrettably, they will almost never explain which of the six or seven OT covenants they are referring to) is by election and “staying in” is by grateful and faithful obedience, a view entirely undistinguishable from that of medieval Roman Catholicism.

This setting, unfortunately, creates two problems for the NPP. First, it leads to a distortion of many important Pauline points, especially those related to God’s righteousness, judgment, and justification. Second, it actually injures the ecumenical discussion, by essentially requiring Christians to concede that Christianity is hardly

different from Judaism, and by requiring Protestants to reject any recognizably Protestant doctrine of justification. The ecumenical dialogue becomes, effectively, a monologue.

Finally, as a general introductory comment, the NPP manifests a shameful ignorance of the Church's historic creeds and confessions. I tell my students I'll give them a dollar for every quote of an historic confession they can find in Wright or Dunn, and I'm not nervous about losing a cent. The NPP apparently regards the Church and her creeds with such contempt that they are not even to be given the courtesy of an occasional citation. Routinely, the NPP makes comments about "traditional" understandings (which they regard as traditional *mis*understandings) of matters without any citation. Worse, what they ordinarily regard as a "traditional" understanding is not found in any creeds anywhere; it is a pure straw man.

Wright, for instance, repudiates the traditional understanding of the imputation of righteousness by arguing that a judge, in a court, does not impute his own righteousness to the accused. True enough, but no Protestant confession ever *said* that God imputes his own righteousness to anyone; to the contrary, God imputes the righteousness of the Mediator, the God-*Man*, to sinners. Westminster's Shorter Catechism, for instance, says: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for *the righteousness of Christ imputed to us*, and received by faith alone" (#33). In the Larger Catechism's 70th Q&A, this is even further clarified: "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for *the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them*, and received by faith alone." And the 30th Article of the Lutheran Formula of Concord says: "that God forgives us our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit, or worthiness of ours preceding, present, or following, that He presents and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience, on account of which righteousness we are received into grace by God, and regarded as righteous." So, no Protestant confession ever affirmed what Bishop Wright takes such pains to deny; yet in his denial he implies, at least, that someone else does affirm the

matter (otherwise, Bishop Wright would also deny the existence of unicorns; presumably, he does not deny them because he knows perfectly well that no one affirms their existence).

Similarly, Käsemann (and later Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification*, p. 62) implies that he has discovered some earth-shattering solution when he declares that justification and sanctification, faith and works, cannot be separated from one another (“Neither are justification and sanctification to be separated”, p. 171, cf. also 181-82). But this has always been affirmed by the Protestant confessions. The Westminster Confession says: “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet *is it not alone* in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with *all other saving graces*, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.” (11:2) Articles IV and VI of the Augsburg Confession say: “This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight.... Also they teach that *this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits*, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God.” The Heidelberg Catechism’s 64th Answer says: “But does not this doctrine make men careless and profane? Answer: By no means: for it is *impossible* that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, *should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness*.” The twelfth of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church says: “Albeit that good workes, which are the fruites of fayth, and folowe after iustification, can not put away our sinnes, and endure the seueritie of Gods iudgement: yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christe, *and do spring out necessarily of a true and huely fayth*, in so muche that by them, a lyuely fayth may be as evidently knowen, as a tree discerned by the fruit.” And Westminster’s 77 Q&A says: “Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification...” It is a much-to-be regretted reality that the NPP often suggests that it is solving a traditional problem, when in fact what it “solves” was never affirmed by any tradition anywhere.

#### A. Re-assessing Palestinian Judaism (I largely concur)

##### 1. Not a theological issue

2. Not a confessional issue
3. Not, therefore, a test of orthodoxy, but a matter of historical judgment
4. Sanders's "positive" evidence is compelling. Neither election, appeals to mercy, or recourse to atonement are necessary (or even intelligible) within a legalistic framework.
5. Sanders's "negative" evidence is a little less compelling. Some argue that, even as he describes "getting in" and "staying in," some of the texts related to the second appear to show some evidence that could be construed legalistically (D. A. Carson, Mark A. Seifrid, and Peter O'Brien, *Justification and Variegated Nomism*).
6. Much confusion exists here and on the next point, by both proponents and opponents, due to the what Charles Hodge (et al.) called the legal dimension of the Sinai covenant itself, as regarded temporal prosperity in the land of Canaan.
7. I think the Sanders hypothesis, overall, is compelling. The caricature of Judaism that characterized the "dominant approach" for several centuries was just that, a caricature, and one largely dependent on later Rabbinic sources. Judaism of the period was indeed "variegated," and the fewer assumptions we make about it in order to understand the New Testament, the better off we probably are.

#### B. The Käsemann Hypothesis (I disagree entirely)

1. All parties agree that in the ordinary Greek usage, and in many OT texts also, ἡ δικαιοσύνη refers to God judging uprightly, as a reflection of his moral uprightness (following the observation that δικαιοσύνη in the LXX often refers to the moral uprightness of humans, cf. Stephen Westerholm, "The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith in Romans," *Interpretation* 58, July, 2004, pp. 253-264, esp. 254-57).

Psa. 9:4 For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment (κρίνων δικαιοσύνην).

Psa. 9:8 and he judges (κρινεῖ) the world with righteousness (δικαιοσύνη); he judges (κρινεῖ) the peoples with uprightness.

Psa. 50:6 The heavens declare his righteousness (τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ), for God himself is judge (κριτής)!

Psa. 58:1 Do you indeed decree what is right (δικαιοσύνην), you gods? Do you judge (κρίνετε) the children of man uprightly?

Psa. 69:27 Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal (δικαιοσύνη) from you.

Psa. 71:12 O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! 13 May my accusers be put to shame and consumed; with scorn and disgrace may they be covered who seek my hurt. 14 But I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more. 15 My mouth will tell of your righteous acts (τὴν δικαιοσύνην), of your deeds of salvation all the day, for their number is past my knowledge.

Psa. 71:24 And my tongue will talk of your righteous help (τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου) all the day long, for they have been put to shame and disappointed who sought to do me hurt.

Psa. 72: 1 Give the king your justice (ὁ κρίμα σου), O God, and your righteousness (τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου) to the royal son! 2 May he *judge* your people with righteousness (ἐν δικαιοσύνη), and your poor with justice (κρίσει)! [N.b. chiasm here, from “justice to “righteousness” to “righteousness” to “justice”]

Psa. 96:11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; 12 let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy 13 before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge (κρίναι) the earth. He will judge (κρινεῖ) the world in righteousness (ἐν δικαιοσύνη), and the peoples in his faithfulness (τῇ ἀληθείᾳ).

Psa. 98:9 before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity (ἤκει κρίναι τὴν γῆν κρινεῖ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνη καὶ λαοὺς ἐν εὐθύτητι).

Psa. 119:40 Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life! (ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνη σου ζῆσόν με)

Psa. 119:62 At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules. (τὰ κρίματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης σου)

Psa. 119:75 I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous (δικαιοσύνη τὰ κρίματά σου), and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Psa. 119:106 I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules (τὰ κρίματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης σου).

Psa. 119:121 I have done what is just and right (ἐποίησα κρίμα καὶ δικαιοσύνην); do not leave me to my oppressors. [n.b. in all these the rules are righteous, and the psalmist, when he conforms to them, is righteous, appealing to an upright/righteous God to exonerate and defend him--not because such a God is “faithful,” or “powerful,” but because he is upright]

Mic. 7:9 I will bear the indignation (ὀργήν) of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause (ἕως τοῦ δικαιῶσαι αὐτόν τὴν δίκην μου) and executes judgment for me (ποιήσῃ τὸ κρίμα μου). He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication (τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ).

Is. 1:26 And I will restore your judges (τοὺς κριτάς σου) as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness (πόλις δικαιοσύνης), the faithful city.

Is. 5:7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice (κρίσιν), but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness (δικαιοσύνην), but behold, an outcry!

Is. 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness (ἐν δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἐν κρίματι) from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Is. 16:5 then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice (κρίνων καὶ ἐκζητῶν κρίμα) and is swift to do righteousness (σπεύδων δικαιοσύνην).

Jer. 22:3 Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness (ποιεῖτε κρίσιν καὶ δικαιοσύνην), and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. [n.b. this text could be a reference to what might be called social justice rather than retributive justice]

2. The original OT evidence from Cremer and Käsemann underestimated the judicial context of the so-called “soteric language.” That is, when God was said to demonstrate his “righteousness” in Israel’s deliverance, the deliverance was from the nations around her, whom Yahweh *judged*. That is, such “deliverance” anticipates the final judgment, which is soteric for the elect but *not* for the non-elect. “Righteousness” is still, therefore, juridical/forensic, and still refers to the fact that God will judge rightly; but when He judges His (and his people’s) enemies, this accrues to His people’s benefit/deliverance/salvation. Douglas J. Moo noted this problem with the Käsemann hypothesis, by saying: “Thus far, it would appear that God’s δικαιοσύνη is exclusively beneficial in its operation; and, indeed, scholars such as von Rad conclude just that. But a number of texts show how short-sighted such a conclusion would be. First, several of the passages that highlight the salvific benefits of God’s righteousness also refer to the judgment that it brings on the wicked....When Israel’s enemies are in view, or when Israel breaks the terms of the covenant, God’s righteousness naturally takes on a negative, judgmental aspect (cf. Isa. 5:16; 10:22)” (*Romans 1-8*, p. 79).

Is. 51:5 My righteousness (ἡ δικαιοσύνη μου) draws near, my salvation (τὸ σωτήριόν μου) has gone out, and *my arms will judge the peoples*; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; *for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment*, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation (τὸ δὲ σωτήριόν μου) will be forever, and my righteousness (ἡ δὲ δικαιοσύνη μου) will never be dismayed.... 8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my righteousness (ἡ δὲ δικαιοσύνη μου) will be forever, and my salvation (τὸ δὲ σωτήριόν μου) to all generations.

Psa. 71: 4 Rescue me, O my God, *from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man*. 5 For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth....10 For *my enemies* speak concerning me; those who watch for

my life consult together 11 and say, “God has forsaken him; *pursue and seize him*, for there is none to *deliver* him.” 12 O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! 13 May my *accusers be put to shame and consumed*; with scorn and disgrace may they be covered who seek my hurt. 14 But I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more. 15 My mouth will tell of your righteous acts (τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου), of your deeds of salvation (τὴν σωτηρίαν σου) all the day, for their number is past my knowledge.... 24 And my tongue will talk of your righteous help (τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου) all the day long, for they have been put to shame and disappointed who sought to do me hurt.

3. Käsemann et al. acknowledge that the δικ- language in Greek is ordinarily either moral (“uprightness”) or forensic/judicial (“an upright judge”), but suggest that in the OT the authors meant something different. But, why, then, did the translators of the LXX select this language, from what was available to them in Greek? If they meant “power,” why didn’t they employ δύναμις (which Paul employed in Romans 1:16)? If they meant “faithfulness,” why didn’t they say πιστός (as Paul did at 1 Cor. 1:9)? Note, for instance: Rom. 3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? 2 Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 What if some were unfaithful (εἰ ἠπίστησάν τινες) Does their faithlessness (ἡ ἀπιστία αὐτῶν) nullify the faithfulness of God (τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ)?

4. Even if δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ could mean something like “God’s power” or “God’s faithfulness” in some contexts, the context in Romans 1 is overwhelmingly juridical.

-1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

- 1:24 Therefore God gave them up (παρέδωκεν) in the lusts of their hearts to impurity,

-1:26 For this reason God gave them up (παρέδωκεν) to dishonorable passions.

-1:28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up (παρέδωκεν) to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

-1:29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness (ἀδικία)

-1: 32 Though they know God’s decree (τὸ δικάσιμα τοῦ θεοῦ; AV “judgment of God”) that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

- 2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.

-2: 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?

-2: 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment (δικαιοκρισίας) will be revealed.

- 2:6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

-2:8 and who are persuaded of unrighteousness (πειθομένους δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ)

- 2:12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

-2:13 for the doers of the law will be justified (δικαιωθήσονται)

-2: 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

-3:5 But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God (θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην), what shall we say? That God is unrighteous (ἀδικος) to inflict wrath (ὀργήν) on us?

-3:8 Their condemnation is just (ἐνδίκον).

- 3:9 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,

-3:10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no not one (Οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς).

-3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable (ὑπόδικος) to God.

-3:20 For no human being will be justified (οὐ δικαιωθήσεται) in his sight by works of the law...

-3:21 ff. But now the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of

God (δικαιοσύνη δὲ Θεοῦ) through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified (δικαιούμενοι) by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ), because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ) at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier (δίκαιον καὶ δικαιούντα) of the one who has faith in Jesus.

5. Käsemann, Dunn, Wright, et al., evade/avoid, as did Protestant Liberalism before them, the fundamentally juridical tenor of the Bible *per se*, and of its soteriology. It was *judgment* that removed the human race from the blessedness of God's Presence in the garden; the entire race, except for a small family, was destroyed in a *judicial flood* in the days of Noah; Israel, when disobedient, was subject to God's repeated *judgment*; Christ died as a Substitute to bear God's *judicial wrath* on behalf of his people, and his apostle described the new Christian faith of the Thessalonians this way: "...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who *delivers us from the wrath to come*." (1 Thes. 1:9-10). Peter declared, "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be *judge* of the living and the dead." (Acts 10:42). And Paul also said: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17: 30-31). Note that Peter and Paul follow the language of the OT (Paul's is identical to, e.g., Psalm 96:13) in describing the redemptive activity of Christ as *culminating in* his return for judgment, to "judge the world in righteousness," as the Apostles' Creed does also. Biblically, we could even speak of "salvation-judgment," because the salvation of God's creation requires the elimination of the wicked therefrom, as Peter said: "who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a

few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water (n.b. that floodwater may have “saved” eight souls, but it judged the entire remainder of the race!). Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.” (1 Pet. 3:20-21)

In addition to the Käsemann hypothesis, we noted earlier several other NPP distinctives regarding “righteousness” and “justification”. For Wright and Dunn, “to be justified” means to be a member of the covenant people of God.

Dunn: “God’s justification is rather God’s acknowledgement that someone is in the covenant” (NPP, 190)

Wright: “Justification in this setting, then, is not a matter of how someone enters the community of the true people of God, but of how you tell who belongs to that community (WSPRS, 119)... “Within this context, ‘justification,’ as seen in 3:24-26, means that those who believe in Jesus Christ are declared to be members of the true covenant family” (129).

This is extremely confusing, and wrong-headed. It is confusing because we can never know which covenant Dunn or Wright are speaking of. Even if we omit the Adamic administration, we have two covenants with Noah, one with Abraham, one with the Israelites at Sinai, one with Phinehas and his sons to be priests, one with David’s lineage to build Yahweh a permanent house, and a pledged “new covenant” that will come in the future (Jer. 31:31). So, to confuse or conflate these seven distinct covenants is itself a substantial problem. The Gentiles, for instance, are comprehended in the Abrahamic covenant by the third pledge (and indeed, Abraham himself is an uncircumcised Gentile when he is justified!), but they are not comprehended in the Sinai covenant. On precisely a matter that interests the NPP (who are the people of God?), two of the covenants in the canonical OT give two entirely different answers.

It is also quite wrong-headed to think that to be “in the covenant” (whichever one is being referred to) is equivalent to being justified (or anything else soteric). Were not the Israelites all included in the Sinai covenant? But were

the ones who murmured and died in the wilderness (Numbers 21) justified? And if justification includes not only judgment, but sometimes terminal judgment, who needs to *be* justified? Throughout her history, Israel was repeatedly on the wrong end of the prophetic law-suit; she was repeatedly judged as being *unrighteous*, though she was manifestly *in* the Sinai covenant. The Israelites plainly did not understand “being in the covenant” as the NPP understands it. They resisted being in it at Sinai, wanting nothing to do with Moses’s thunderous deity and frightened that he would “break out against them” (Ex. 19:22, 24), frightened that if God spoke to them they would die (Ex. 20:19). Half of their psalms were laments, and most of those were laments about God’s judgment. They complained about the Sinai covenant in the wilderness (Ex. 15:24, 16:2, 17:3, Num. 14:2,29, 16:41, Deut. 1:27), and even desired to go back to slavery to the Egyptians (Num. 11:18, 14:3). They not only did not view “being in the covenant” as being justified or soteric; they obviously considered it to be a nuisance, a burden the apostles later said “neither we nor our fathers could bear” (Acts 15:10). So the NPP is way off base here, not only for its consistent confusing of the Abrahamic covenant with the Sinai covenant, but even moreso for suggesting that being “in the covenant” at Sinai implied justification or anything else soteric.

It need hardly be noted that such a viewpoint (that being “in the covenant community” is equated with justification) is functionally identical to the medieval Roman Catholic viewpoint: Those who are members of the visible Roman Church are justified; and those who are not members of that visible communion are not. If the NPP is largely motivated by an ecumenical concern, partly to reconcile Rome to Protestants and vice versa, how will it achieve such by declaring one of those parties the uncontested winner?

### C. Jew and Gentile in Paul’s Thought (I have considerable concurrence)

The NPP in general has called attention, rightly, to the apostle Paul’s ministerial anguish (Rom. 9). Paul, a Jew, was called to preach Christ to the Gentiles, many of

whom believed; while many of his kinsman according to the flesh did not. The NPP has rightly called attention to the importance of this issue for understanding Paul. For Paul, “the law” is a covenant made at Sinai, 430 years after “the promise” (Gal. 3:17). His problem with this covenant is that it excluded Gentiles. To continue to observe it in Paul’s day requires a continued “wall of hostility” between Jew and Gentile which Jesus defeated. Indeed, the NPP expends a good deal of energy wrestling with the idea of the “people of God,” often very fruitfully. The NPP has also rightly called attention to the theological reality that the Christ-event constitutes the fulfilment of the third pledge-promise made to Abraham and Sarah (to bless all the “nations/Gentiles” through their singular descendant, Christ). A substantial amount, probably even the largest amount, of Paul’s “negative” statements about the Law, are due to this.

D. Restriction of “works of the law” to mean the boundary markers of circumcision, diet, and calendar (I don’t concur at all)

Dunn especially, but also N. T. Wright, takes the expression ἔργων νόμου at Gal. 2:16 (and elsewhere) to refer to the so-called “boundary marker” laws, but not to the entirety of the works required by the Mosaic law. Thus: “yet we know that a person is not justified *by works of the law* but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not *by works of the law*, because *by works of the law* no one will be justified” (Gal. 2:16). For Dunn this means that one is not justified by observing those boundary markers within the Sinai covenant that distinguish Jew from Gentile. Unfortunately, this leaves entirely open the possibility that one is justified by *other* works of the Mosaic law.

This hypothesis is not only contrary to any ordinary understanding of the vocabulary, it is contrary to Paul’s usage of the expression elsewhere, such as:

“For by works of the law (ἔργων νόμου) no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:20)

Note here that through the law comes knowledge of sin, and such knowledge is comprehensive. The so-called “boundary markers” are not the *only* laws that convey knowledge of sin (Paul expressly refers to covetousness, for instance, in

Romans 7); indeed, one could argue that the boundary markers are positive law and not moral law at all.

“For all who rely on works of the law (ἔργων νόμου) are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’” (Gal. 3:10)

The citation of Leviticus 18:5 by Paul here could hardly be plainer: “*all* things written in the Book of the Law,” not *some* of the things there written.

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