

Further reading

Favourable

[*Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*](#), by E. P. Sanders

[*What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*](#), by N. T. Wright

[*Paul: Fresh Perspectives*](#), by N. T. Wright

[*In Defense of the New Perspective on Paul: Essays and Reviews*](#), by Don Garlington

[*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*](#), by James D.G. Dunn

[*Romans 1-8, Word Biblical Commentary*](#), by James D.G. Dunn

[*Romans 9-16, Word Biblical Commentary*](#), by James D.G. Dunn

[*Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*](#), by James D.G. Dunn

Critical

[*Getting the Gospel Right: Assessing the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul*](#), Cornelis P. Venema (2006).

[*Where Is Boasting: Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5*](#), by Simon J. Gathercole

[*Justification And The New Perspectives On Paul: A Review And Response*](#), by Guy Prentiss Waters

[*Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*](#), by Peter Stuhlmacher, Donald A. Hagner

[*Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*](#), by Stephen Westerholm

[*Misunderstanding Paul?: Responding to the New Perspective*](#), by J. Ligon Duncan

[*Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel*](#), by Seyoon Kim

[*The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*](#), by John Piper (2007)

Trinity Church Liphook

Studies in Galatian – Background Reading

The New Perspective on Paul

Legalism or Nationalism (Racism)

Introduction: As we begin our studies in Paul's letter to the Galatians it is important to understand the approach that we will be taking in the light of the on-going debate with regard to what has been called: ***The New Perspective on Paul*** [NPP].

The debate has wider implications than Galatians but it does have a particular bearing on how we might understand the difficulties that Paul was seeking to address in his letter to the churches of Galatia. These notes are compiled from various sources.

The New Perspective on Paul: So what is this all about? Since the early 1900's some authors have suggested that Paul has been misread since the period of the Reformation. In short, we have been viewing the New Testament church through Reformation period 'cultural lenses'. By this it was thought we had taken a cultural problem from the Reformation period: 'Works – Salvation' and superimposed it on the New Testament church, when no such problem existed.

The issue gathered momentum when EP Sanders wrote a book in 1977 entitled: *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. He coined the phrase: "covenantal nomism" which is essential to the NPP thesis, in this he holds that the First Century Jews were not guilty of 'legalism' but rather their obedience to laws etc. involved them

trying to 'keep the covenant'. James Dunn was the first to coin the term "*The New Perspective*" in a 1983 Manson Memorial Lecture, *The New Perspective on Paul and the Law*. Later the former Anglican Bishop NT Wright became the flag-bearer of NPP and most widely read on the subject. Care must be taken in trying to grasp the NPP because whilst there are common threads in how different people express it there is also little overall unity.

Response to: The NPP. This has been wide and varied with some seeing value in it whilst not agreeing with its findings; others are hostile to it on the grounds that at a wider level it questions not only the *Doctrine of Justification* but also the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer.

This really is a big debate and it is being conducted by much more capable men than me. That said my response is to ask a simple question: How did Christ view the Jewish leaders of His day? As people possibly confused but sincerely trying to keep covenant? Or as people who had completely lost their way and become legalistic and self-righteous? I have provided below some links and references to both sides of the debate for those who wish to explore it further.

In our studies we will be taking the 'traditional' route regarding Paul and the Galatians - Here I will let Scripture speak for itself:

Regarding the New Testament period Jewish leader, it may be true that the follower of this self-exalting religion may genuinely be thankful to God for some of his outward moral purity ("*God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortionists, unjust, adulterers,*" [Luke 18:11](#)). But his confidence before God is what *he* is (regardless of who made him that way). Whether one should call this religion a "self-help moralism" is an open question. But that it is a religion that **trusts in its own morality and exalts self is clear**. What Jesus thought of it is also clear:

- They accused Jesus of being demonic ([Matthew 12:24](#))
- They do not know how to understand the law ([Matthew 12:2-7](#))
- They sought to destroy Jesus ([Matthew 12:14](#)).
- They are "an evil and adulterous generation" ([Matthew 16:4](#)).
- They break the commandments with their traditions ([Matthew 15:6](#)).
- They worship vainly and their heart is far from God ([Matthew 15:8-9](#)).
- They are not planted by the Father ([Matthew 15:12](#)).
- Their teaching is leaven to be avoided ([Matthew 16:12](#)).
- They do not bear the fruit of the kingdom and will lose it ([Matthew 21:43-45](#)).
- They are children of hell ([Matthew 23:15](#), [33](#)).
- They neglect the weightier matters of the law ([Matthew 23:23](#)).

Tim Keller draws two positives from the NPP view:

1. It does show how the gospel can be undermined from within the Christian church and community and why great care must be taken to protect gospel truth.
2. It shows that the book of Galatians has often been read too much as a rather academic debate about doctrine and not enough consideration given to Paul's concern for Christian living and the unity of the Church.