

Reform for the Sake of the Reformation

My Agenda in Pauline Studies, Such as It Is: An Apologia

by Tim Gallant

At the outset, I must say that this little piece is frequently marked by the first-person pronoun. That is because this is something of a personal *apologia*, rather than a scholarly article. It is an *apologia* I have felt compelled to make, not only because I frequently encounter all sorts of absurd attributions of motive to anyone remotely thought to be connected to the so-called “New Perspective on Paul” (“it’s all an agenda to undermine *sola fide*,” for example), but because people sometimes question me personally, or at least intimate such questions. This little exercise is, then, something of an attempt to clear the air, explain why I see the need to do further work in the interpretation of Paul, as well as provide some hints of where I do and do not stand, no matter what the reader may have heard second- or third-hand.

Motivation

I became Reformed between the years 1989-1992, after a great deal of study, reflection, interaction with others, and in the end, profound soul-searching regarding my handling of Scripture. The adoption of the Reformed faith was like a burden lifted off my shoulders, because I felt like I had stopped fighting the biblical text, trying to shape it into the pattern I preferred.

A decade and a half or so later, I am still Reformed by conviction, and happy to be so. It is important for me to make this clear, because over the past several years, I have started to chart a journey in my interpretation of (in particular) Paul’s letters which has forced me to listen again, to ask the question whether I have heard him rightly on many points.

We live in times that can, without any exaggeration, be described as times of suspicion and paranoia. And when anyone in conservative Presbyterian and Reformed circles engages in any significant reordering of exegesis, especially with regard to the epistles of Paul, he almost immediately is regarded as trying to import some form of works-righteousness into the camp. It is assumed that any touching of Paul’s teaching on the law, and the connected matters of justification, will necessarily imperil the Protestant consensus.

This explains the reaction to the so-called New Perspective on Paul, the scholarly wave which arose largely out of the groundwork of E. P. Sanders’s 1977 opus, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Many scholars in his wake laid out programs to understand Paul, and in the process most of these suggested that *righteousness* (which is closely related to *justification* in both Hebrew and Greek) meant something quite other than most Protestants assumed. And even more basically, most of these NPP scholars averred that Paul’s problem with his kinsmen was not one of Pelagianism or works-righteousness, but of a failure to recognize the salvation-historical moment: Christ had come and brought redemption, and in so doing had initiated a program to incorporate Gentiles alongside Jews as equal members of the people of God.¹

Because the NPP scholars had revisited Paul, and even had gone so far as to propose new meanings for the term *justification* itself,² the almost automatic assumption among conservative Presbyterian and

¹ This is, of course, a drastically oversimplified picture, and I make no claim that every NPP proponent would affirm all of it.

² See especially N. T. Wright’s affirmation that *justification* refers to covenant membership. Note, however, that despite the frequent claims of his critics, Wright does not at all dismiss or even minimize the forensic nature of justification.

Reformed folk was that the NPP program(s) must, by the nature of the case, be an attack upon *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and the whole Reformation vision.

It is not my intention here to get into precisely how much of that reaction has been justifiable, and how much of it has been quixotic. I bring up the NPP, not to defend it as such, but to illustrate the point that any reinterpretation of Paul is met with more than wariness, and is a dangerous exercise in the circles within which I run. There are many men with sharp eyes who have an amazing ability to identify an anti-*sola fide* agenda.

As I have confessed above, I am one who has been rereading Paul and attempting to put the puzzle pieces together in a fashion rather different from how I once did. Along the way, I have studied a great deal of contemporary Pauline scholarship, and it is inevitable that I have read through stacks of volumes by writers associated with the “Sanders revolution” to a greater or lesser degree. And the truth is that I have appreciated a great deal, and even appropriated a great deal.

So what is my stance, then, and what is my agenda? I decline to say that I am an agent of the so-called New Perspective on Paul.³ I could make a list of problems that I see all too frequently marking this scholarship, and some of that will be borne out in my analytical work. I am especially unenthusiastic about the tendency to see the Jew-Gentile issue as an “ethnological” problem; that is a seriously misleading misnomer, and obscures fundamental issues at stake (see #4 below in my *Preliminary Account of Problems in Common Pauline Readings*). Beyond that, however, is the simple fact that I find the term NPP of little value. There is no real consensus on much other than Judaism (and I cannot endorse Sanders wholesale on that point itself).

The truth is that my motivation for studying Paul, and doing so in a new light in some respects, is wholly a Reformation motivation. It is not only that I insist on *sola scriptura* - that the Bible itself must remain our ultimate authority, and therefore call into question our traditions, if need be.⁴ It is also because I heartily affirm *sola fide* that I have assayed this task.

Now, I am well aware that such a claim on my part will be met with skepticism by some. There are people who seem rather certain that disagreement with them must, on a point as crucial and as Protestant as the interpretation of Paul, of necessity mean an attack upon justification by faith alone, whether explicit or implicit.

Nonetheless, I insist that my own feeble efforts are in service to the doctrine under dispute. If I did not wholeheartedly affirm *sola fide*, I would not bother battling with such people. The Church is very big, and there are many parts of it that are not all that troubled about unclarity upon the point at issue.

How then is my project in service to *sola fide*? The answer is quite simple: I believe that the most solid basis for any doctrine is a sound interpretation of the Scriptures themselves. The truth is never endangered by faithful, careful, and believing examination of the biblical text, but the results may challenge our thinking. And although I am fully convinced that the overall contours of the Protestant

³ I have been saying “so-called” often, due to my dis-ease concerning the moniker. The Sanders revolution has not produced anything like a uniform interpretation of Paul. It has produced a new reading of *Judaism*, and could better be described, not as the “NPP” but as the “NPJ” (the “New Perspective on Judaism”). This new reading of Judaism, to be sure, provides impetus for rereading Paul, but is not logically or finally determinative of what Paul himself says.

⁴ Not to mention: the Bible is also judge of contemporary scholarship. I state unequivocally here: my position is the authority of the *whole* canonical text, not simply the supposedly “authentic letters of Paul.” All Scripture is God-breathed, mutually interpreting, and fully authoritative. And to be clear: I believe Paul wrote all the letters ascribed to him, however much he may have leaned upon an amanuensis at times.

doctrine of *sola fide* are thoroughly biblical, I am very concerned that the particular exegetical avenue by which that doctrine is frequently defended is vulnerable at numerous points. My aim is not simply to attack those vulnerabilities and destroy the doctrine (and some do apparently wish to go that route). Rather the opposite, it is to take note of those vulnerabilities, to meet them head on. I believe I can do this safely, because I believe the Bible's teaching on the subject is very clear and rests upon solid foundations. And I believe I have at least a pretty good sketch of how that teaching is shaped in the text, even if some of my exegesis of Paul takes an alternative route to that usually followed.

Now, I should make clear that I am not so ambitious as to say that all the traditional readings of the Pauline passages on justification are out to lunch, and that I am going to sweep everything off the table and rebuild it in three days by some wonderful acts of creative genius. I make no claim to be reading everything differently. God forbid that I be so arrogant as to attempt anything such as that. The truth is that as I work through the various passages, I find myself meeting up again and again with the giants upon whose shoulders I stand, and I am reminded that I am home.

Nonetheless, there are certain "slants" upon Paul that some Protestants have calcified or taken to an extreme. There are even numerous interpretations of Paul by the sixteenth Reformers that I find I am unable to affirm. And I am well aware that many people will not be happy with my results. But once again, the test of the truth is Scripture. And so when people charge me with an agenda, I plead guilty. I am guilty of defending the Reformation.

Presuppositions

Having outlined my underlying motivations connected to my work in Paul, I wish now to articulate certain very important presuppositions which will shape my efforts.

- 1. The Bible is God's inspired Word, and is the ultimate authority for faith and life.**
- 2. Although my focus is upon Paul, no reading of Paul which sets him at odds with the rest of Scripture is to be accepted.**
- 3. The so-called "deutero-Pauline" letters are not secondary in importance or authority.**
- 4. Paul, as with the other biblical writers, may well not be "systematic" in our sense of the term; yet neither is he self-contradictory.** It is not to be thought, for example, that he would espouse for himself what he rejects for his opponents.⁵
- 5. Paul does not use Scripture arbitrarily or atomistically.** As has been shown in many recent studies,⁶ when he quotes or alludes to an Old Testament passage, he almost invariably intends to call to mind themes present in the context of the portion cited.

Preliminary Account of Problems in Common Pauline Readings

The following will address problem areas which highlight, in part, some of what I see as the necessity for further work in Pauline studies. My goal here is not to resolve the theological tensions that may arise

⁵ This is a very important point, which will become clear over the course of my labours. If Paul attacks the Judaizers or critiques unbelieving Israel regarding something during his discussion of justification, he will not affirm the same thing in another context, and if that is the result of our reading, then we have misread him.

⁶ See e.g. Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*.

from these observations, but simply to draw attention to the importance of the task of rethinking some of the key issues.

1. Believing versus doing leading to life. For many Protestants, one of the fundamental axioms of Paul's view of the law is that for Paul, the promise of life is not connected to *doing*, but only to *believing*. The problem with this is that in Paul's two most prominent "justification letters," Galatians and Romans, he makes precisely that connection between doing and the promise of life. In Galatians 6.7-9, "*doing good*" leads to reaping "everlasting life." Likewise, Romans 8.13, while it puts things negatively, comes out in much the same place: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the *deeds* of the body, you will *live*." (In other words, *not* doing leads to life.) These texts *must* be taken into account when discussing Paul's view of the law and justification, for the reason I noted in heading (4) of my *Presuppositions*, above.

2. Hypothetical perfect law-keeping. The notion that God extends a hypothetical offer of eternal life to those who fulfill the law perfectly is a common one, and is primarily based upon Galatians 3.10 (cf Gal 5.3). This reading has been called into question, particularly by NPP scholars. I too am going to question it, albeit on somewhat different grounds. Principally, there are two difficulties with the usual reading of Galatians 3.10, one *contextual* and the other *intertextual*, both of which I consider virtually insurmountable.

The usual approach to Galatians 3.10 ("as many as who are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, 'Cursed is every one who does not remain in all the things written in the book of the law, to do them'") is to say that the law holds out a demand of absolutely perfect obedience, and if one falls short of that demand (as everyone does), one falls under a curse. Thus those who rely on the works of the law are cursed.

To begin with the intertextual problem with this reading, Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy 27.26, from the covenant renewal ceremony upon Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. In the context, the curse is upon all those who do not continue to *uphold* the Mosaic law in all of its respects. Deuteronomy 27 curses, not weakness, but apostasy from the Mosaic law. If Paul is implying that every sin invokes the curse of the law, his interpretation is running dramatically counter to the law itself. Nor is this my idiosyncratic reading of Deuteronomy; the "keepability" of the whole law is clearly articulated in the Old Testament. For example, 2 Chronicles 34.32 speaks of a time when "the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God" (ESV) - and interpreters are virtually unanimous that the "book of the covenant" in question is Deuteronomy, from which Paul quotes here. In fact, Josiah seems to be quoting precisely from Deuteronomy 27.26 in his prayer of confession (2 Chron 34.21). *Therefore, the Old Testament contradicts the usual interpretation of Paul's usage of Deuteronomy 27.26.*

Moreover, is not enough to claim that Paul "radicalizes the law," as so many do, as if such a statement is an explanation rather than an obfuscation of the problem. The issue is Paul's handling of Scripture.

Silva takes a bit more preferable route and hypothesizes that Paul is employing Deuteronomy 27.26 in such a way that he is somehow borrowing the viewpoint of his opponents. But surely his opponents would have disagreed with Paul precisely regarding the reading Silva espouses. More importantly, Silva's reading founders on the contextual problem, to which we now turn.

The contextual problem is at least as significant as the intertextual one, and is a problem rarely recognized. Paul speaks of the curse (of the law) in verse 10, and then returns to the point in 3.13 by saying that Christ has borne the curse of the law, having become a curse for us when He was crucified.

This clearly indicates that *the objects of Christ's redemption in verse 13 are the same as the subjects of verse 10.*

So where is the problem? The problem rests in the fact that the usual reading of verse 10 stands or falls with interpreting "as many as who are of the works of the law" along the lines of "as many as *rely* on the law" - in other words, a "self-justification" reading. But in that case, verse 13 means: *Christ redeemed those who were trying to justify themselves*, which is a wholly unnatural way of looking at Galatians 3.13, to say the least (and in fact is a view held by no one, to my knowledge).

The long and the short of it is that the subjects of verse 10 must be *all* who were "under the law," regardless of their attitude - including the most wonderful saints who casts themselves upon the mercies of God by faith. And in turn, this requires that verse 13 is referring to Christ's submission to the curse in such a way that it brings about a *new situation* even for (old covenant) believers (which is precisely what we would expect from verse 14). And all of this means that we need a new approach to this passage.

What then of Galatians 5.3, which is invariably referred to - often without argument (see e.g. several of the articles in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Vol. 2: The Paradoxes of Paul*) - as proof of the traditional reading of 3.10? This verse says: "I bear witness again to every man being circumcised, he is a debtor to do the whole law." Once again, the appeal is based upon an assumption of a missing premise, namely: "and you of course know that it is impossible to do the whole law." But that is not what Paul says. There is no reason to think that Paul sees this as intrinsically "more impossible" than what the Galatians are already contemplating - i.e., getting circumcised. But in context, Paul is not dealing with the possibility or impossibility of the law's demands; rather, he is contrasting the law as a yoke of bondage to Christ who has redeemed from the law. Because circumcision was the entry-point commitment to the law, Paul is reminding them that it is an "all or nothing" step - *the law or Christ*. Verse 3 follows immediately upon verse 2: "Look, I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." I cannot argue all of this here, but my point is that the simple appeal to Galatians 5.3 to prove the usual reading of 3.10 provides absolutely no support for the argument; it simply presupposes the answer that needs to be demonstrated. And since that is so, appeal to 5.3 cannot overcome the intertextual and contextual problems with the traditional reading which I pointed out above.

3. The universalization of the law. The problems with Galatians 3.10 are related to a more basic issue, and that is: *Who is under the law?* The typical Reformed reading generally assumes that the law is universal, and that all human beings are subject to it. The primary proof text here is Romans 3.19: "Now we know that whatever the law says, to those in the law it speaks, in order that every mouth may be closed and the whole world become accountable [or *guilty*] before God." It is considered self-evident that the two parts of this verse must mean that the law speaks to "the whole world."

This, however, is problematic, since Paul has stated just the opposite in the immediately preceding chapter. Romans 2.12 assumes that Jew and Gentile are distinguished precisely by the fact that the former is "in" the law, while the latter is not: "For as many as have sinned apart from the law, will also perish apart from the law, and as many as have sinned in the law, through the law will be judged." The Greek word translated "apart from the law" means "outside of the law's polity." It is simply not comprehensible that Paul says Gentiles are apart from the law in Romans 2.12, and then places them "in" the law in 3.19.

What then does Romans 3.19 mean? This verse cannot be understood apart from noting the overall outline of Paul's train of thought: first he says that the Gentiles are worthy of death (1.32); from 2.1-3.18, he is building an argument that will include Jews within the purview of divine judgment. Paul and his "conversation partner" both agree and assume that the Gentile world is under judgment. Thus, when Paul says that the law is speaking to those "in" it, with the result that the whole world becomes accountable or guilty, *his interest is solely the disputed point: namely, that Jews (not just Gentiles) are subject to divine judgment.* This is a very natural reading of the text, and poses a much more satisfactory handling of the way Paul is employing the term. He does not say one thing in Romans 2.12 and forget himself later: only Israel is under the law, not Gentiles.

Now, I wish to make very clear that on a *theological level*, I have absolutely no problem saying that there is an *analogous sense* in which Gentiles were under "something like" the law, insofar as they are subject to the Great Judge. In fact, that is Paul's very point in Romans 2.12 (not to mention 1.32). Paul *does* see that analogy, and therefore it is a legitimate theological analogy. So my difficulty is not at all that God holds man accountable and guilty for their sins, whether in the law or outside of it. That much is indisputable. The problem is that we have taken that *deduction* or *analogy* and applied it to Paul's *terminology* of *nomos* (law) directly. And the inevitable result is that we misread Paul's statements, because we force him to be talking about something which he is not talking about. We need rather to recognize that for Paul, *nomos* usually means the *Mosaic covenantal administration* (although he also uses the term more generally to refer to the *Old Testament Scriptures*, whether in the Pentateuch or elsewhere, including narrative passages - see e.g. Gal 4.21, where Paul has a play on words with both of these meanings in the same verse). Unless and until we get this fundamental datum of Paul's word usage straight, we will not be able to follow his arguments regarding the law - not as atomistic single-verse proof-texts, but as coherently developed arguments.

4. Ethnocentrism. Here is one of my foremost criticisms of the New Perspective: Dunn and others repeatedly use terms such as *ethnocentrism* to refer to Paul's critique of those he opposes. There are serious problems with this reading.

First, in contemporary usage of the term, *ethnocentrism* boils down to a claim that Paul's opposition to the Judaizers and unbelieving Israel has something to do with some sort of "soft" form of racism. James D. G. Dunn appeals to texts such as Romans 10.3 and claims that the problem with Israel is they wanted *their own* righteousness - in other words, righteousness for *themselves* and not for the Gentiles. However, in Romans 10.3 Paul does not pit *their own* over against *righteousness of the Gentiles*; he pits it over against *God's* righteousness.

Moreover, it is simply misleading to use the terminology of *ethnocentrism*, because in most cases the matters of conflict between Paul and his opponents had absolutely nothing to do with "race." Most Jews were more than happy for Gentiles to convert to Judaism, and in fact, that was precisely the point at issue in Galatia (if indeed the "Judaizers" were Jews by blood; they may have been proselytes). And when conversion occurred, marked by circumcision and embrace of the Mosaic law, it was normal for Jews to recognize these former Gentiles as full members of the people of God. But in that case, the matter has nothing to do with racism, whether "hard" or "soft."

Now, it is possible to use *ethnocentrism* in a sort of archaic way by appealing to the Greek root. The word *ethne* meant *nations* or *Gentiles*. And since conversion to the law *via* circumcision meant that one was no longer a Gentile, then it is possible to construe the matter between Paul and his kinsmen as "ethnocentrism" of a sort. But to frame things that way is confusing at best, and obscures what is surely

Paul's primary point: *the law*. It seems to me that in some respects, many NPP interpreters have things virtually backward - as if Paul's concern over the law was centrally and even fundamentally a matter of "ethnic" issues. Galatians indicates otherwise: Paul's concern for his readers regarding the contemplated movement from Gentile-status to Jew-status was above all else a *law-oriented concern*. For *Gentiles* to become circumcised would be an embrace of *slavery* (Gal 5.1).

Some NPP scholars, such as N. T. Wright, have managed to hold onto a law-oriented concern on Paul's part, even apart from the matter of the Gentiles, and that represents a better reading of the Pauline texts. Still, I remain convinced that in many places even Wright is placing the accent on the minor key rather than the major.

I think, for example, of Romans 3.29-30, which Wright cites as decisive evidence that Paul's big concern in the larger context is the Jew-Gentile issue. I again believe this reverses things. Paul's *or* in verse 29 represents a reach for a *new line of argument*: if everything he said previously were not true, then God would not be God of both Jews and Gentiles. But this means that verse 29 is a *premise*, not a conclusion he is driving toward. It is simply not true that all through chapter 3 he has been on some sort of mission to demonstrate that Jews ought to accept the Gentile mission. (For example, Wright thinks that Israel's unfaithfulness with the "oracles" or "words" of God, mentioned in Rom 3.2-3 refers to an attempt to keep those words for themselves rather than sharing them with the Gentiles as a "light to the nations.") Although Wright has a great many elements of Paul's argument in the correct place, some wrong turns require correction.

It may thus be seen that my hope is not to promote *the* NPP agenda (if there is such a thing), but rather to come back again to the Word of God and work through interpretations which are problematic.

Preliminary Theses

I have already set forth *some* of the issues which make both prevalent "NPP" and more traditional Protestant readings of Paul problematic in certain respects. To be complete with such a list would clearly not be fitting for a brief article such as this, but I do think that I have said enough to indicate why I feel driven to seek alternative paths for interpreting aspects of Paul's writings.

Before closing, I wish to offer a few observations impinging upon the general shape of my interpretive project. Some (or perhaps all) of these are matters of varying levels of controversy, and I cannot engage in a defense of them here. It is nonetheless necessary to state some of the major insights which have contributed to the overall perspective to which my work has led me over the course of some years.

1. By *law*, Paul almost always means one of two things: *Scripture*, or the *Mosaic covenant (Torah)*. He does not use the term to refer to a generic "natural law," nor does he use it as some sort of strange shorthand for "legalistically attempting to earn salvation" (as argued by Daniel Fuller). With regard to the Mosaic covenant, the Gentiles were never under the law (and must not be brought under it now).

2. As a covenantal administration, the Mosaic law was a temporary arrangement for Israel alone, which entered at a given point in history, and exited at a given point in history (temporal language which Paul uses quite explicitly in Galatians 3.15-19).

3. The *works of the law* refer to all the works the Mosaic law required, and specifically *as* required by that law.

4. Paul's key letters to the Romans and Galatians are complementary but do not address the same situation. The letter to the Galatians addresses a situation where teachers (probably Christ-believers) are attempting to persuade the Galatian Gentiles to become circumcised and follow the law. The letter to the Romans, in its discussion of the Jews, is not referring to reputed Christ-believers, nor is it referring to unbelieving Jews trying to compel the Gentiles to be circumcised. The letter is much more "big-picture," dealing with "unbelieving Israel" as a whole, within the context of the unbelieving world and God's redeeming work that has brought salvation history to a climax in Jesus Christ.

5. Paul's understanding of the divine courtroom is not manufactured by himself, but arises out of the structure and concepts of the matter explicated in the Old Testament. It is important to recognize that the Old Testament portrays two possible positions of Israel in relation to God. (1) *God as Judge, defending His righteous people* against their oppressors. (2) *God entering into judgment as a disputant*. These two very different manners of relation explain how the same writer can appeal to God to judge him "according to my righteousness," while on the other hand pleading that God would not "enter into judgment with your servant, for in Your sight, no man living is righteous." If these lines are blurred, tremendous confusion will result, and the Bible will be presented as teaching self-contradictions.

6. The foregoing observation underscores the fact that there is a relational aspect involved with the righteousness theme. In connection with that, let me add this: Mark Seifrid has done very valuable work regarding the phrase "the righteousness of God," and as a result, he has come to be regarded by many as the great debunker of the notion that the phrase means "covenant faithfulness." The two primary linchpins of his argument are that: (1) *righteousness* and *covenant* (Hebrew *berith*) very rarely occur in the same context; and (2) *righteousness* when applied to God frequently occurs in cosmic/creational contexts. Hence, Seifrid concludes that it has to do with God's rectitude over all things, and is not covenantal.⁷

There are, however, two flaws in Seifrid's approach, one presuppositional, the other methodological. At the level of presupposition, Seifrid brings his Baptist assumptions to the table in presupposing that the covenantal idea is necessarily narrow and strictly Israel-focused. Those who do not share his constricted view of covenant will recognize that the concept is much larger and has to do with God's promises on a wider level; and in fact, that God's own words of promise to Israel were cosmic in scope.

Second, at the methodological level, Seifrid has simply done a tour of the Old Testament language. While that has value, what would be more pertinent is to ask where the phrase is clustered in Paul, and whether he is drawing the concept from specific texts.⁸ In short, the phrase is particularly clustered in Romans 3, and in that chapter, *God's righteousness is in the immediate context of almost every passage which Paul quotes or cites*. And in those contexts, the term is pretty much univocal: it refers to God's faithfulness to Israel in providing deliverance. Call it "covenant faithfulness," or call it something else, but it is simply pedantic to make the point at issue the lack of *berith* in the context. The *righteousness of God*, in Paul, if it is affected at all by the texts he is drawing on, refers to His making good on His Word, His relationship to His people, by providing deliverance, redemption, or salvation.

⁷ It should be noted that Seifrid's findings do nothing to support the traditional Lutheran reading of this term.

⁸ The phrase, or a close variation thereof, appears in Rom 1.17; 3.5, 21, 22; 10.3 (twice); 2 Cor 5.21; and Phi 3.9, although the latter appearance is not very analogous, since it speaks of a righteousness *from* (Greek *ek*) God.

Conclusion

Even conservative evangelical biblical scholars today are recognizing some need for a revisiting of Paul. I think in particular of men as opposed to the NPP as is D. A. Carson, who nonetheless recognize that there is no going back to the exegesis of Paul (or view of Judaism) of the pre-Sanders era. It helps no one to hide behind our exegetical tradition as if it has answered all the questions. It has not. God calls us to the courage to hear His Word, just as our forefathers among the Reformers did.

No exegetical tradition is better than its exegesis. Repeating the “established readings” will not make Paul say things he does not say, and the problems are not going to go away. It is a cop-out to pretend that anybody with questions about standard interpretations must have an “anti-grace” agenda of some sort. That is a disservice to many faithful Christians who are wrestling with Scripture; and it is a disservice to Scripture itself. If we wish to defend *sola fide*, there is only one way for us to do it: by revisiting the text and attempting anew to rearticulate our faith with an even closer reading of Scripture. That was the way *sola fide* was grounded in the sixteenth century, and it is the only way we can assure an even more secure grounding for the present and the future. May God help us to be faithful to His Word, and may His Spirit prevail - in our studies, in our theologizing, and in our conversations.

- August 2005