

## ETHNOCENTRIC LEGALISM AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL: RETHINKING SOME NEW PERSPECTIVE ASSUMPTIONS

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Those familiar with Pauline studies are aware that, since the emergence of the New Perspective on Paul, with roots even earlier, a shift has occurred toward viewing justification in more corporate terms.<sup>1</sup> The New Perspective has been concerned largely with the inclusion of Gentiles into God's covenant with Israel while downplaying the idea of the sinful individual before God in need of grace and forgiveness. Already in 1963, Krister Stendahl had begun moving scholarship in this direction, but it was E. P. Sanders and the subsequent New Perspective on Paul that commended such an approach to broader scholarship.<sup>2</sup> This has led to readings of Paul that have differed greatly from traditional understandings, generating a number of new conclusions regarding Paul's view of justification. While this new direction has been

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<sup>1</sup> Gary W. Burnett, for example, observes that in "New Testament studies over the past twenty-five years there has been an increasing emphasis on the understanding of the documents against a background of people groups," with the result that "more and more emphasis has been given to the relevance of the texts to questions of collective identity and social cohesion, and less and less importance attached to how the texts might address issues more to do with the individual, the salvation of the individual and individual behaviour" (*Paul and the Salvation of the Individual* [Biblical Interpretation Series; Leiden: Brill, 2001] 1). Some helpful surveys of the New Perspective include Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 3–248; Michael F. Bird, "The New Perspective on Paul: A Bibliographical Essay," n.p. [cited December 8, 2010] online at <http://www.thepaulpage.com/the-new-perspective-on-paul-a-bibliographical-essay>; James A. Meek, "The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction for the Uninitiated," *Concordia Journal* 27 (2001) 208–33; Jay E. Smith, "The New Perspective on Paul: A Select and Annotated Bibliography," *Criswell Theological Review* 2 (2005) 91–111.

<sup>2</sup> See Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963) 199–215 (later reprinted in idem, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976] 78–96), and E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). Typical is the statement of Lloyd Ratzlaff: "Krister Stendahl (1963) has shown that Paul's view of the Law was not formed, like Luther's, as a result of personal anguish over guilt; rather it was the result of his struggling to identify the place of the Gentiles in the messianic community" ("Salvation: Individualistic or Communal?" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 4 [1976] 109). Cf. also Stanley K. Stowers: "The work of many scholars, beginning with the pioneering essay by Krister Stendahl on Paul and the West's introspective conscience, suggests the need for a persistent questioning of the traditional readings of Paul's letters on a much more elemental level" (*A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994] 6).

rightly appreciated for highlighting often-overlooked elements of Paul, it is also the source of new ambiguity as to how to conceive of Paul's doctrine of justification.

Such ambiguity has created room for more thought concerning the place of the individual in Paul's view of justification, as well as how this individual relates to the corporate people of God. My intent in the present article is to highlight a few ideas with regard to the former issue, while not ignoring the latter. Specifically, I believe there is still good evidence that the emphasis on the individual's need for grace before God originates with Paul himself and not merely from reading Paul through a "Reformational" lens. The case has been overstated that Paul was not very interested in "inner tensions of individual souls and consciences" or in "treating justification as the believer's personal experience of forgiveness and deliverance from a subjective sense of guilt."<sup>3</sup> While Western individualism certainly has influenced the issue, at times neglecting significant corporate elements present in Paul's soteriology, this should not obscure the reality that Paul's doctrine of justification contains a weighty individual, anthropological element that has been increasingly neglected due to the corporate, covenantal trajectory of the New Perspective.

This trajectory, in my view, is slightly misguided and cannot fully account for some critical justification texts. Below I will argue that if we rethink the case for Jewish legalism, these texts actually affirm a strong individual element in justification, consequently creating some difficulties for a strictly corporate approach to justification.

#### I. ON JEWISH LEGALISM

The traditional approach to justification suffered a severe blow—in effect having its ground cut from beneath it—when E. P. Sanders rescued first-century Judaism from any charge of legalism, a charge that traditional NT scholarship was notorious for leveling.<sup>4</sup> Yet, granting the valuable contribution Sanders has made toward better understanding the nature of first-century Judaism, one may question whether the contribution has been entirely fatal to the older approach to justification. Many would argue that the New Perspective has given some elements within Judaism too much credit on this point.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Legalism defined.* To be sure, "legalism" is a slippery term and should be employed carefully. Kent Yinger has noted recently that little careful work has been done to define it. He argues for restricting it to what he calls "soteriological legalism," where "salvation is obtained by human obedience,"

<sup>3</sup> Krister Stendahl, "Paul among Jews and Gentiles," in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 40; Richard B. Hays, "Justification," *ABD* 3:1132. Cf. Markus Barth, "Jews and Gentiles: The Social Character of Justification in Paul," *JES* 5 (1968) 241–67.

<sup>4</sup> See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Seyoon Kim argues that, on the contrary, "Paul is an extremely important witness to the presence of the element of works-righteousness within the overall covenantal nomism of first-century Judaism" (*Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] 294).

as opposed to other related ideas, such as “ritualism” or “casuistry.”<sup>6</sup> The usage I intend here closely follows Yinger’s “soteriological legalism” and may be defined further as follows: the explicit or implicit attempt to gain salvation or favor from God based on one’s obedience either to the Mosaic law or other general precepts.<sup>7</sup>

However, I offer two qualifying observations related to the word “implicit” in the above definition. The first is that it is entirely possible that one could attempt some kind of justification by works without fully realizing one is doing it. Thomas Schreiner observes that to “describe something as legalistic is a matter of perspective.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is logical for us to remain open to the possibility that there may be a very real difference between Paul’s view of his opponents’ behavior and attitude and their own view.<sup>9</sup>

Second, soteriological legalism is a very broad concept and can manifest itself in multiple ways, not being bound to any one particular expression. New Perspective authors often point out that Paul was not Luther; that he does not “smuggle Pelagius into Galatia as the arch-opponent”; and that Judaism was not a religion where one added up good deeds in hope that they outweighed the bad in the final judgment.<sup>10</sup> While I generally agree with such statements, they do not automatically preclude the possibility of soteriological legalism in some elements of the Jewish religion. Legalism in first-century Judaism does not have to mirror sixteenth-century Roman Catholicism for it to exist.

<sup>6</sup> Kent Yinger, “Defining Legalism,” *AUSS* 46 (2008) 101.

<sup>7</sup> Here I am not denying that God expects obedience from those who follow him. However, such obedience must be undergirded and empowered by the recognition that the basis for and ongoing maintenance of relationship with God is always grace through faith. Obedience flows out of this grace-based relationship, never vice versa. It should also be noted that, in addition to “legalism,” the word “salvation” is another slippery term. As Leon Morris writes, “For Paul ‘salvation’ refers to what Christ has done in his great saving act for sinners; all the Pauline passages bear on this act in some way” (“Salvation,” *DPL* 858). More broadly, Philip S. Alexander defines the word as “the supreme good (the *summum bonum*) to which humanity, individually or collectively, can attain, the state of blessedness in which the trials and tribulations of this life are transcended and the highest perfection realized” (“Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism* [ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001] 1:261). For Paul, no doubt, the *summum bonum* that Alexander describes was found in Christ and all that he provides to the fallen human being.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “‘Works of Law’ in Paul,” *NovT* 33 (1991) 241.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce W. Longenecker argues along similar lines when he writes that “Paul’s texts often require us to distinguish between how adherents of more traditional forms of Jewish covenantalism understood their practice on the one hand, and how Paul understood it in the light of what God has done in Christ on the other. The latter often includes features quite at home with traditional ‘legalistic’ interpretations” (*The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1998] 180). So also Heikki Räisänen, who notes that Paul “understood the logic of his opponents’ position in a different way than they themselves did” (“Legalism and Salvation by the Law: Paul’s Portrayal of the Jewish Religion as a Historical and Theological Problem,” in *Die Paulinische Literatur und Theologie* [ed. Sigfred Pedersen; Århus: Forlaget Aros, 1980] 80).

<sup>10</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 121. This is a view that E. P. Sanders vigorously refuted (*Paul & Palestinian Judaism* 33–59). Sanders attributes the beginnings of such a conception to Ferdinand Weber (*Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften* [ed. Franz Delitsch and Georg Schnedermann; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1897]).

In fact, I would argue that the legalism that manifests itself in Paul's letters is often specifically Jewish in nature and closely tied to the Jewish covenant. Therefore, it is not altogether surprising that the New Perspective has highlighted ethnocentrism in Paul's opponents. I tend to agree that many of the works in question were often—though not necessarily always—more outward, “boundary-marking” works that connected the Jew to Israel's covenant, which was previously established through God's mercy. Yet, we create a false dichotomy by arguing that the problem “is not legalism (in the sense of earning merit before God) but cultural imperialism—regarding Jewish identity and Jewish customs as the essential tokens of membership in the people of God.”<sup>11</sup> The fact is that the distance between cultural imperialism and soteriological legalism is not necessarily all that far.

If certain Jews were trusting primarily in ethnic works to connect them to the people of God, works that necessarily excluded Gentiles, while having at best an ambiguous understanding of how the mercy of God undergirded such works, then the case can be made that their ethnocentrism was part and parcel of a more explicit soteriological legalism. The ethnocentrism was a natural outworking of the legalism—as John Piper has pointed out, “Ethnocentrism and self-righteousness are morally inseparable.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, when one's hope transfers from the impartial grace of God that makes no distinction to any kind of human performance, one tends to guard this performance fiercely, because one's very life depends upon it.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the natural outworking of a legalism that was attached to Jewish works was prejudiced against those who did not do the works that made one a Jew. Thus, we could label this approach “ethnocentric legalism.”<sup>14</sup>

This differs from the concept of “nomism,” which is defined more or less as a lifestyle “compatible with Jewish traditions.”<sup>15</sup> For example, Michael Bird writes, “It may be that Paul is not confronting ‘legalism’ or ‘covenantal

<sup>11</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (ed. John Riches; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) 239–40. Later he writes, “Paul's doctrine of justification by faith has to do with his rejection of Israel's cultural pride, not any presumption that she can amass credit by good works” (p. 251). Again, however, these two concepts are bound together and are not separate issues. The pride of some in Israel was based on works that connected them to the covenant, which, in my view, is still a form of legalism.

<sup>12</sup> John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007) 156.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, there were no doubt many Jews who trusted fully in the grace of God but were so accustomed to expressing such trust through specific Jewish customs that it was difficult to believe that God would not require such actions of Gentiles. One may surmise that this was the case with some of the Jewish believers at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) or with Peter's lapse in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14). The difference, in my view, in such attitudes from those that ultimately were legalistic would be a willingness to listen and be corrected (cf. Acts 11:15–18, where Peter convinces circumcised believers of God's working among uncircumcised Gentiles).

<sup>14</sup> It could also be labeled “legalistic ethnocentrism.” Either way, the point is that ethnocentrism and a self-righteous legalism are not incompatible nor even completely separate notions.

<sup>15</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990) 86. Cf. also Ernst Lohmeyer's conception of “works of the law” as the “service of the law” or “nomistic service” (“Dienst des Gesetzes”) (*Probleme paulinischer Theologie* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, n.d.] 67); so also J. B. Tyson, who follows Lohmeyer: “It is a system of service to God's revealed will; it is life under law” (“Works of Law” in Galatians,” *JBL* 92 [1973] 425).

nomism' but an *ethnocentric nomism*. . . . This differs from legalism in that the works performed are part of a covenantal framework that contains grace and defines the identity of God's people."<sup>16</sup> Bird, though demonstrating a nuance that certainly is to be appreciated, in my view concedes too much to the New Perspective's portrait of Judaism. I fear that the concept of ethnocentric nomism does not say enough about the underlying assumptions and intentions of the "obedience" rendered. Simply recognizing grace in the covenant does not necessarily mean that there was no reliance on obedience within the heart of some in order to garner favor with God. The word "nomism," to my mind, unduly softens the reality with which Paul is taking issue. I am not, of course, arguing that every Jew was an ethnocentric legalist, but that some likely were, and this is what sparks the intensity of Paul's polemic.<sup>17</sup>

2. *Legalism and first-century Judaism.* Now certainly Sanders has made a convincing case that soteriological legalism is not what defined the Jewish religion. And, to be sure, it is reductionistic and unfair to set up the Mosaic covenant simply as a foil over against which the grace of God is shown in the Christian religion.<sup>18</sup> The OT demonstrates that the law was a gift to a chosen people who had experienced God's mercy (Exod 19:4–6); that it would be their wisdom and greatness (Deut 4:6–8); and that it was to be obeyed from love and faith (cf. Num 14:11; Deut 30:6; Ps 78:22), with provision for forgiveness of sin through the sacrificial system.<sup>19</sup> It should not surprise those of us committed to the whole of Scripture that mercy for sinners existed before Paul.

However, to concede such a point to Sanders does not mean there was no such thing as legalism or any kind of works-righteousness among the Jewish people. Since Sanders's work emerged, several studies have questioned the far-reaching implications associated with it, such as the two-volume *Justification and Variegated Nomism* set, or Simon Gathercole's monograph, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1–5*, in which he argues that the lack of emphasis in Pauline scholarship "on Jewish confidence on the basis of obedience is unjustified."<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, Michael Bird argues for "variegated nomism" instead of "covenantal nomism" as a description of the whole of Second Temple Judaism, "since it permits a far

<sup>16</sup> Michael F. Bird, "Justification as Forensic Status and Covenant Membership," in *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007) 117.

<sup>17</sup> In some ways, the discussion needs to be moved away from seeking to explain Judaism as a whole. We may be better served by speaking in terms of pockets of Judaism that at times Paul uses as representative of the whole but do not necessarily define the entire Jewish religion for him.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Thielman comments that "the way Paul argues about the law with Jews and those under their influence shows that he did not regard all Jews as legalists or Judaism generally as a legalistic religion" (*Paul & the Law: A Contextual Approach* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994] 239).

<sup>19</sup> As George Howard states, to "keep the law then was, among other things, to find cultic forgiveness for breaking the law" (*Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology* [2d ed.; SNTSMS 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990] 53).

<sup>20</sup> *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001, 2005); Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 197.

greater diversity of beliefs concerning the role of the law, covenant, grace and eschatology than ‘covenantal nomism’ does.”<sup>21</sup> And Jacob Neusner has argued that, while Sanders succeeds in writing an apologetic work against “a considerable social problem of our age,” anti-Judaism, he fails to accurately describe the Jewish religion as a system over against Pauline theology, and “systems which have not been accurately described cannot be compared.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, Douglas Campbell writes that “Judaism is best viewed as a coalition of different Judaisms” and that “there were many Judaisms in existence at the time of Paul.”<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, these are merely snippet views of studies that speak to the larger issue of the nature of Second Temple Judaism, which we cannot explore fully here. However, at the very least such work demonstrates that the issue is complex and gives reason to proceed judiciously when making use of Sanders’s findings. The thread that ties together various critiques of Sanders is that his category of “covenantal nomism,” while helpful in moving us toward a better understanding of first-century Judaism, ultimately falls short of categorizing every element within the religion. In fact, it is doubtful that any one label could accomplish this. If this is the case, then it is possible that legalism could have existed within elements of the religion.

What is more, if the question of Judaism is set aside for the moment, one could make the argument that it is a temptation in virtually any religious system—not least the Christian faith—to think that one’s actions somehow put the god of that religion in his or her debt at some level.<sup>24</sup> If we add to this notion the elevation of the law in Jewish culture after the exile, then there is at least the possibility that Paul could have been responding to some form of

<sup>21</sup> Michael Bird, “Justification” 114.

<sup>22</sup> Jacob Neusner, “Sanders’s *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*,” in *Judaic Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: A Systematic Reply to Professor E. P. Sanders* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 246.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 117. Other studies that demonstrate the varied nature of first-century Judaism include Friedrich Avemarie, “Erwählung und Vergeltung: Zur optionalen Struktur rabbinischer Soteriologie,” *NTS* 45 (1999) 108–26 (who argues that both ideas of election and human working are present in rabbinic “soteriology”); idem, *Tora und Leben: Untersuchungen zur Heilsbedeutung der Tora in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 55; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996); Sigurd Grindheim, *The Crux of Election: Paul’s Critique of the Jewish Confidence in the Election of Israel* (WUNT II/202; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Francis Watson, “Not the New Perspective,” n.p. [cited 8 December 2010], online at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/staff/watsonart.shtml> (unpublished paper); idem, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 17–18 (Watson writes that it is “unfortunate that, in reaction against modern Lutheran readings of Paul, it is now widely assumed that all strands of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity held broadly the same view of the relationship between ‘divine grace’ and ‘human response’”).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, referencing Robert H. Stein, writes that “if Judaism were not legalistic at all, it would be the only religion in history that escaped the human propensity for works-righteousness” (*The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993] 115). See *ibid.* 93–121 for a thorough treatment of the question of whether or not Paul is responding to legalism.

legalism.<sup>25</sup> Once this is admitted, the nature of the justification discussion is altered and allows us to rethink some texts that are difficult to explain fully from a more corporate, New Perspective understanding of justification.

Thus, what I am arguing for is that we consider an alternative framework that allows for soteriological legalism within elements of Judaism. When such an assumption is granted, in my opinion several key justification texts are better illuminated than with a more strictly corporate approach to justification. While many texts could be examined, three that are highly relevant are Gal 2:16, Rom 3:20, and Rom 4:6–8. In the first two passages, Paul alludes to Ps 143:2, while in the third he explicitly cites Ps 32:1–2. All of these, I contend, point to an individual, anthropological view of justification that Paul aims primarily at a Jewish ethnocentrism that stems from legalism.

## II. PAUL'S USE OF PSALM 143:2 IN GALATIANS AND ROMANS

The bulk of our attention will be given to Paul's allusion to Ps 143:2 in Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:20. Since the allusion comes at a critical juncture in both places, it is likely that Paul saw this passage as a foundational proof-text of sorts for his argument for justification.<sup>26</sup> It is especially noteworthy that it comes at the beginning of Paul's discussion of works of the law versus faith in both epistles—Hans Dieter Betz calls it “the theological presupposition which undergirds the whole rejection of the doctrine of meritorious ‘works of

<sup>25</sup> For example, Everett Ferguson writes, “The Jews understood the national tragedy of 586 B.C. as due to the failure to keep the law of Moses. Following the exile the study of the law became a duty of supreme importance (cf. 2 Baruch 85:3) and brought the class of professional scribes (*soferim*; cf. Ezra 7:6) to prominence as the interpreters of the law” (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity* [3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003] 539). Here I am also not arguing that legalism explains the whole of Paul's issue with the law (as tends to be the case, for example, in the work of Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992]; idem, “Paul and the Works of the Law,” *WTJ* 38 [1975] 28–42, who follows, among others, C. E. B. Cranfield [“St. Paul and the Law,” *SJT* 17 (1964) 43–68]). Rather, I am suggesting that Paul had a multifaceted view of the law based on Scripture, his conversion, his mission to the Gentiles, and his view of salvation history, and different texts on the law reflect different elements of his thought. In specific texts where he speaks of how one is justified before God (faith vs. works of the law), the problem at the forefront for him is not as much salvation history or other issues as the anthropological issue of how one is counted righteous before God. To be sure, these issues were not neatly partitioned from each other in Paul's mind, but certainly it seems that different parts of his writing reflect different elements of his theology of law (cf. Douglas J. Moo, who argues that Paul often has in mind the “commanding aspect of the Mosaic economy,” while not necessarily disparaging the entire OT [“‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *WTJ* (1983) 88]). In texts dealing with faith as the means of justification over against law, Paul many times seems to be responding to a form of Jewish ethnocentric legalism.

<sup>26</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 140; Ernst Käsemann also notes that the use of the allusion in both Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:20 “shows that the passage is of constitutive importance for the apostle” (*Commentary on Romans* [ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 88). I use the term “proof-text” above without the negative connotations of a kind of de-contextualized, cut-and-paste proofing of what one already believes on other grounds. I simply mean that here Paul found in the Hebrew Scriptures evidence for a truth he knew to be fundamental to faith in God.

the Torah.”<sup>27</sup> Yet, while the allusion is frequently noted in commentaries, its relevance for the justification discussion is not often fully appreciated.<sup>28</sup> We will look at both contexts and draw some implications from each.

1. *Galatians 2:16*. Galatians 2:16 is part of the larger pericope of Gal 2:15–21, which Betz—well known for analyzing the structure of Galatians in terms of Greco-Roman rhetoric—has labeled the *propositio* of the letter, meaning a statement of the central issues.<sup>29</sup> It is the “propositional statement of Galatians that then is unpacked in the arguments that follow.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, this set of verses is critical to the letter.

Thus far in the book Paul has given a sketch of certain facts regarding his gospel, his apostleship, and Peter’s failure with regard to the gospel. In verse 15, Paul’s focus changes somewhat. Many commentators observe that while his words are likely still reporting his interchange with Peter, their import is now primarily for the Galatians.<sup>31</sup> The grammatical structure of verses 15–16 is most likely a “single, overloaded sentence,” where all of verse 15 acts as the entire subject of the sentence that extends through verse 16.<sup>32</sup> In this case, verse 15 literally reads, “we by-nature-Jews-and-not-sinners-from-the-Gentiles.” This phrase serves as the subject of the main verb and other clauses of the sentence through the end of verse 16.<sup>33</sup>

Paul uses the phrase “Jews by nature” (φύσις) no doubt to show a level of solidarity between himself, Peter, and the other Jewish Christians.<sup>34</sup> In fact, this agreement—also in line with the way a *propositio* would function—is critical to the argument Paul is making. Peter, as a Jew, actually knows bet-

<sup>27</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 118.

<sup>28</sup> Some, of course, do recognize its significance. One example is Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, who includes in his comment on Psalm 143 a survey of several NT studies that examine the significance of Paul’s allusion to the psalm in Galatians and Romans (Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150* [HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008] 773).

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.* 14–25. While Betz pushes his approach to its limits, it provides insight nevertheless, and many have derived benefit from it (e.g. see Longenecker, *Galatians* cix–cxiv, 80–81; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* [BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993] 20). For more on rhetoric in Galatians, see also Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 25–36.

<sup>30</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians* 83; cf. Witherington, *Grace in Galatia* 98; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (SacPag; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 98.

<sup>31</sup> “From a literary point of view, this unit is a continuation of Paul’s speech to Peter, but it is apparent that the speech now has a broader audience in view than Peter and those with him at Antioch” (Matera, *Galatians* 97). So also Longenecker, *Galatians* 80; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia* 171; Timothy George, *Galatians* (NAC 30; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 187; Ernest de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921) 117.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 112. Cf. Bruce, *Galatians* 137.

<sup>33</sup> Not every commentator understands the grammar exactly this way, but this does not affect my overall argument.

<sup>34</sup> The word describes a “condition or circumstance as determined by birth” (BDAG, s.v., “φύσις” 1069). See also Rom 1:26; 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24; 1 Cor 11:14; Gal 4:8; Eph 2:3; outside of Paul only in Jas 3:7; 2 Pet 1:4.

ter than his actions would demonstrate. Therefore, it is Paul's Jewish identity that undergirds what he says in verse 16. In other words, there is a foundational component of his doctrine of justification that is profoundly Jewish.<sup>35</sup>

Moving on to verse 16, then, we find a participle, "knowing," followed by a *ὅτι*-clause ("we know that"), where the object of the "knowing" is the fact "that a man is not justified (*δικαιοῦται*) by works of the law but only (*ἐὰν μὴ*) through faith in Jesus Christ." This is then followed by the main verbal clause: "even we have believed in Jesus Christ," followed by a *ἵνα*-clause: "in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law." This is a highly compact and pregnant statement, replete with exegetical questions that, unfortunately, we cannot fully explore here.<sup>36</sup> However, because the answers to these questions are usually influenced by deeper presuppositions about Paul's view of justification—presuppositions that we are considering—then the bypassed questions are largely secondary to the issue at hand.

Next we come to Paul's allusion to Ps 143:2. The allusion, another *ὅτι*-clause, rounds off Gal 2:16: *ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ*, "for by works of the law no flesh will be justified." As already mentioned, the allusion is to Ps 143:2 (142:2 LXX), where the psalmist asks the Lord not to enter into judgment with him, *ὅτι οὐ δικαιοθήσεται ἐνώπιόν σου πᾶς ζῶν* (MT: *כִּי לֹא יִדָּוֶן לְפָנֶיךָ*), "for every living thing will not be justified before you." Below is an alignment of Ps 142:2 (LXX), Gal 2:16, and Rom 3:20 for comparison:

Psa 142:2 (LXX)	οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶς ζῶν ἐνώπιόν σου <sup>a</sup>
Gal 2:16	ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ
Rom 3:20	ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ

<sup>a</sup>The words *πᾶς ζῶν* are aligned here with *πᾶσα σὰρξ* for comparison purposes. In the actual text they follow *ἐνώπιόν σου*.

First, it should be noted how the use of *ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ* in Rom 3:20 ties Paul's language even more closely to that of the psalm, leaving little doubt that this is at least an allusion.<sup>37</sup> Next, even a cursory glance reveals that Paul has

<sup>35</sup> So Thielman, who writes that "Jews by nature" already understand that "no one can be justified by 'works of the law'" (*Paul & the Law* 239). In addition, as Dunn observes, adding a qualifying conjunction here—"though we are Jews by nature"—lessens the impact of this appeal to unity (*Galatians*, 133; e.g. Mußner's translation: "Wir, *obwohl* von Natur aus Juden" (*Der Galaterbrief* [HTKNT 9; Freiburg: Herder, 1974] 167, emphasis added).

<sup>36</sup> There are four critical questions concerning, respectively, the use of: (1) the verb *δικαίωω*, (2) the phrase "works of the law," (3) the phrase *ἐὰν μὴ* ("but" or "except"), and (4) the phrase *διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* ("through faith in Jesus Christ" or "through the faith[fulness] of Jesus Christ").

<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed discussion of whether this is an allusion or quotation, as well as possible reasons for Paul's alterations, see Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 255–56. See also Moisés Silva, "Galatians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 790; Mußner, *Galaterbrief*

adapted the phrase for his own use. He has added his distinctive ἐξ ἔργων νόμου and has substituted πᾶσα σὰρξ, “all flesh,” for πᾶς ζῶν, “every living thing.”<sup>38</sup> The phrase πᾶσα σὰρξ likely interprets πᾶς ζῶν, making use of more distinctly Pauline language. It is also connected to the use of ἄνθρωπος earlier in the verse. Of course, “flesh” is not evil in itself, but in its fallen state it is “subject to the debilitating forces of desire, decay, and death.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is the “human being” (ἄνθρωπος) who is “flesh” (σὰρξ) who performs the works of the law.<sup>40</sup>

Such adjustments of the text, however, do not necessarily mean that Paul “substantially [altered] the meaning of the original psalm verse,” as Matera argues.<sup>41</sup> I would argue, on the contrary, that Paul is appealing to the same idea found in the psalm, only contextualizing it into his present situation.<sup>42</sup> Psalm 143:1–2 is essentially a plea of the psalmist for help from God. He asks God to hear him based on God’s faithfulness (v. 1), pleading with him, “Do not enter into judgment with your servant [μὴ εἰσέλθῃς εἰς κρίσιν μετὰ τοῦ δούλου σου], for no one living will be justified before you” (v. 2). Thus, Paul seems to allude to a psalm that highlights the unworthiness of an individual before God to demonstrate that no one has ever been considered inherently worthy before God, and this would include on the basis of works of the law. Presumably Paul directs such an argument at those who somehow believed that something other than or in addition to Christ provided them salvation. Therefore, on the surface the text appears to support the traditional notion that justification is about the individual in need of grace and forgiveness due to lack of worthiness before God. Before saying more here, however, we must examine the psalm’s use in Rom 3:20.

174. Heinrich Schlier also provides a brief explanatory list of Paul’s alterations (*Der Brief an die Galater* [10th ed.; KEK 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949] 58).

<sup>38</sup> In the LXX, the phrase πᾶσα σὰρξ often refers to “all mankind” (e.g. Ps 64:3; Jer 12:12; Ezek 21:10; Joel 3:1), with a similar use in the NT (cf. Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; 1 Pet 1:24). The specific phrase, “οὐ (or μὴ) + verb + πᾶσα σὰρξ,” carries the sense of “no person [+ verb],” e.g. “no one is justified” (cf. BDAG, s.v., “σὰρξ” 915; also Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29).

<sup>39</sup> George, *Galatians* 190. For Paul, the word always connotes the weakness of humanity in distinction from God, though it possesses a spectrum of meaning that is essentially neutral on one end and highly negative on the other (as in the “works of the flesh” of Gal 5:19; see James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus—Flesh and Spirit: An Exposition of Romans 1.3–4,” *JTS* 24 [1973] 43–51; Douglas Moo, *Romans 1–8* [Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary; Chicago: Moody, 1991] 39–40). Jewett connects Paul’s use of “flesh” with the “Judaizer’s claim that circumcised *flesh* was acceptable as righteous to God” (*Romans* 266).

<sup>40</sup> Betz, *Galatians* 118.

<sup>41</sup> Matera, *Galatians* 94.

<sup>42</sup> See Albrecht Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (THKNT 9; rev. Joachim Rohde; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973) 91; also Käsemann, who argues that Paul interprets the psalm for his specific purpose (*Romans* 88); Schlier, *Galater* 58. Thielman writes that the psalmist “states confidently that God, because of righteousness (vv. 2 and 11) and mercy (v. 12), will do (future) what the psalmist asks. Paul, in Gal. 2:16–21, likewise says that since no one is righteous before God, the only hope for anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, is trust (πίστις) in God’s deliverance” (*From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul’s View of the Law in Galatians and Romans* [NovTSup 61; Leiden: Brill, 1989] 65).

2. *Romans 3:20*. The only difference in the allusion in Rom 3:20 from Gal 2:16 is the addition of ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, which ties the phrase even more closely to the LXX text of Ps 142:2.<sup>43</sup> Again, we may note the important location in which we find this particular allusion. Paul is about to move from how the law testifies to sin (Rom 3:9–18) to how righteousness is found apart from the law (Rom 3:21–22).

While Paul's arguments in Galatians and Romans are not exactly the same, the same idea seems to be present in the allusion to Ps 143:2.<sup>44</sup> Humanity, in its utterly helpless state, has nothing to offer God and is entirely dependent upon his mercy.<sup>45</sup> The catena of Rom 3:9–18 demonstrates that the law is a refuge for no one, because it condemns all, including Jews. Therefore, a belief that obedience to precepts of the law at any level provides justification before God obscures the fundamental necessity of grace, while at the same time ignoring the impartiality of God by illegitimately separating Jew from Gentile. This, in essence, is (ethnocentric) soteriological legalism, and it is the reason Paul employs Ps 143:2 at this point. The psalm provides the foundation for the argument that God's dealings with human beings are always fundamentally first about receiving from God. All obedience must flow continually from this recognition or some form of works-righteousness necessarily ensues.

a. *Richard Hays on Romans 3*. However, Richard Hays has offered a different interpretation. Hays examines the use of the psalm in its setting in Rom 3:20, though his work has implications for its use in Galatians as well.<sup>46</sup> He argues that the psalm shows that hope is not found in human "works," which for Hays mainly has to do with "ethnic status."<sup>47</sup> But when one looks at the wider context of Psalm 143 where God's "righteousness" refers to his faithfulness, we see that Paul is not concerned with "the subjective quest for salvation" after all, but rather "God's integrity" or "God's justice."<sup>48</sup> For Hays, this is ultimately why Paul alludes to the psalm in both instances. It is about the "righteousness of God," defined as God's faithfulness, which, as Hays argues elsewhere, is connected to the righteousness of the believer,

<sup>43</sup> Dunn surmises that the fact that the text is not introduced with γέγραπται, "it is written," likely "indicates Paul's awareness that he was quoting the text in a tendentious (but he would say, legitimate) form" (*Romans 1–8* [WBC 38; Dallas: Word, 1988] 153). Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) 1:197.

<sup>44</sup> See Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (2d ed.; EKKNT 6; Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1987) 1:174–75.

<sup>45</sup> So Otto Kuss: "Der Psalm ist das Klagelied eines Einzelnen, der sich in der Verfolgung seiner Sündhaftigkeit und der Sündhaftigkeit aller Menschen bewußt wird" (*Der Römerbrief* [Pustet: Regensburg, 1963] 1:109).

<sup>46</sup> See Richard B. Hays, "Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3," *JBL* 99 (1980) 107–15 (reprinted in idem, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005] 50–60). He makes a similar argument in idem, "The Letter to the Galatians," in *NIB*, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000) 240–41.

<sup>47</sup> Hays, *Galatians* 241.

<sup>48</sup> Hays, "Psalm 143" 114–15. N. T. Wright follows Hays in this line of thought (see N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *NIB*, vol. 10 [Nashville: Abingdon, 2002] 459).

“interpreted primarily in terms of the covenant relationship to God and membership within the covenant community.”<sup>49</sup>

To be sure, Hays is correct that Psalm 143 has God’s faithfulness as a central theme. However, I am not convinced that this is Paul’s primary reason for making use of it. Likely, what attracted Paul to the psalm in the first place is the use of the verb δικαιώω, which can be connected nicely to his present argument. But the text of the LXX here—translating the Hebrew word קצַר—uses δικαιώω specifically with reference to the fundamental unworthiness of humanity to withstand the judgment of God. It seems to me that we should explore this point fully before moving too quickly to the assumption that Paul is appealing to God’s faithfulness through “righteousness” language. Of course I would agree that the implication here is that only *God’s* faithfulness and righteousness can provide any measure of hope. But I am not convinced that this is the central point Paul is making.

Paul’s clear interest is in the unworthiness of human beings before God, and this provides support for the idea that he is responding to a form of legalism. In this case, Ps 143:2 undergirds an anthropological view of justification that argues that humanity has nothing to commend itself before God and that God’s mercy must intervene. Hays does agree with the idea that the text is in part about “the unconditional inadequacy of human beings to stand before God,” but he does not examine the idea any further than this.<sup>50</sup> But if we ask why Paul has an allusion regarding humanity’s inadequacy here and in Rom 3:20—two critical places in his justification argument—it is only logical to go further and assume that some Jews likely thought they were adequate to stand before God based on something other than God’s mercy. At this point, it becomes difficult to avoid the conclusion that some form of legalism is at work here.

In response to this, Hays and other New Perspective scholars would likely make the case that the “adequacy” assumed before God came from Jewishness and not a “treasury of merits” or something similar. And I would agree, but, as noted above, this kind of ethnocentrism is fundamentally related to a deeper legalism. When we ask what it was that provided the necessary Jewishness that, in turn, provided the necessary adequacy before God, the answer is: outward demarcation by works that were performed. To my mind, this is still legalism. Granted, it was not an overly explicit, merit-craving legalism as it is sometimes caricatured, but in the end it is still legalism—ethnocentric legalism.

To sum up, then, if we follow Hays and shift the focus away from the concept of human inadequacy and move it primarily to the faithfulness of God, the argument can be made to fit a more corporate approach to justification. However, if the legalism door is cracked open a bit, it makes a good deal of sense to see Paul alluding to a psalm about humanity’s lack of worthiness before God in order to target those who assumed they possessed some level of worthiness before God through works, even if those works were performed in a more ethnocentric manner. Of course, such an argument will not be per-

<sup>49</sup> Hays, “Justification” 1131.

<sup>50</sup> Hays, “Logic” 115.

suasive if one is insistent that there is absolutely no legalism present here. However, this would be a presupposition held on grounds other than the text, and, as argued above, these grounds may not be as solid as is often assumed. In any case, what remains is a choice between what makes better sense of the evidence, a framework that allows for such an assumption or one that does not.

b. *The context of Psalm 143:2 and Romans 3:20.* Along these lines, another piece of support for allowing such a “legalism framework” is the fact that it is challenging for the corporate approach to justification to explain why Paul would appeal to such a passage if his main concern was merely with how certain works provided an ethnic status that set Jews above Gentiles, with no real concern for the individual’s status as a sinner before God. It is difficult from the psalm’s original context to see any reason to limit the discussion to ethnic, boundary-marking works—no doubt the psalmist faithfully kept such works and assumed that, at least externally, he was a covenant member in good standing.<sup>51</sup> It seems more likely to see him referring to moral failure in the psalm and not simply the more external works that marked out Jews from Gentiles.<sup>52</sup> If so, it is logical to assume that Paul is referring to something similar.

In other words, if the issue with which Paul was fundamentally concerned was the separation of Jew from Gentile, then an appeal to Ps 143:2—where someone within the boundaries of the covenant still feels the need to cry out for God’s mercy—may actually work against Paul’s argument. According to the more corporate view of justification, Jews within the covenant had no tormented conscience, and it is only in light of Christ that a need for a savior comes to light. But here in Ps 143:2 is someone whose conscience does not appear “robust” and who fully recognizes his own moral failure. It is difficult to understand why Paul would appeal to this psalm at this moment unless he sees a principle regarding lack of worthiness before God at work in the psalm that holds true for his own doctrine of justification.

To my mind, there are only a couple of ways that such a point can be circumvented. The first is to argue that the psalmist was indeed referring to covenant-oriented works and not something beyond this. As already mentioned, this seems doubtful. The psalm, in part due to its use of  $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\varsigma \zeta\tilde{\omega}\nu$ , “every living thing,” seems clearly in line with the Jewish idea of the universal sinfulness of mankind.<sup>53</sup> Such an idea was bound to include all kinds of moral

<sup>51</sup> Such a point is even more compelling in light of Paul’s explicit citation of David in Romans 4. See below on Rom 4:6–8; cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 219; Gathercole, *Where is Boasting* 246–47.

<sup>52</sup> As Leslie C. Allen writes regarding this verse in the psalm, “The relativity of all human morality over against divine absolutes means that he can make no demands upon God” (*Psalms 101–150* [WBC 21; Waco, TX: Word, 1983] 284). Silva writes that Paul’s allusion “casts considerable doubt on the attempt to restrict ‘works of the law’ to ceremonial practices,” because it is highly unlikely that this is what the psalmist is referring to in context (“Galatians” 791).

<sup>53</sup> For example, Job 4:2; Ps 14:1–3; 130:3. Allen calls it a “confession of general sinfulness,” which “implies that the covenant relationship can be sustained only on the basis of continual divine forgiveness” (*Psalms* 281).

failure and not simply the more ceremonial aspects of the law that marked out ethnicity.

The second way is that Paul is using the psalm in a manner different from its original context. That is, Paul has taken a text referring to an individual before God in need of mercy, reworked it somewhat, and applied it mainly to boundary-marking works so that he can attack the hubris of Jews who thought they were above the Gentiles, but without attacking any kind of soteriological legalism. For this to be sustained, one would need to make the argument that Paul would alter the psalm in such a way—in this case he would not only be modifying the words of the psalm, but also the psalmist's main intention. To be sure, such an argument is not outside the realm of possibility, since Paul uses Scripture somewhat fluidly at times.

However, the question remains whether this is the best approach. If the idea that legalism could have been present in first-century Judaism is allowed to stand, then Paul is appealing to a very fitting text, one that demonstrates that no human being is justified before God when left to his own devices, which in Paul's context were works of the law. This solves the problem, mentioned above, that rises inevitably upon the corporate view. That is, despite the fact that the psalmist was within the bounds of the covenant, he knew that this ultimately did not justify him before God. Inherent in all God's interactions with humankind is the assumption that the individual has nothing to offer on his own and that all hope must ultimately rest upon God alone.<sup>54</sup> The psalmist knew that any action he performed for the sake of God, including those that externally demarcated him as a faithful Israelite, were worthless apart from God's mercy.<sup>55</sup> Paul latches on to such a notion to demonstrate to Jews who presumed upon their works—especially those that marked them out as Jews—that such works did not, in fact, justify them before God.

Therefore, my contention is that Paul, while adapting the psalm for his present context, is still appealing to the same principle at work in the psalm: despite outward compliance with the Mosaic law, all humans are in need of the mercy of God due to lack of worthiness before him.<sup>56</sup> In other words,

<sup>54</sup> This raises the larger issue of how grace and obedience work together, which of course is a complicated discussion. Suffice it to say for our purposes that I agree that God has always called for obedience, but there is a difference between obedience offered "in the flesh" and obedience offered in faith that stems from a place of mercy within the believer.

<sup>55</sup> On the subject of pessimistic anthropology, Timao Laato has contrasted Pauline and Jewish thought, arguing that Jewish anthropology was more optimistic than Paul's (*Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach* [trans. T. McElwain; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 115; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995]). While I am largely in agreement on this point, I would also argue that a pessimistic anthropology was not entirely new to Paul, as the OT provides at least some evidence for it, though perhaps not as explicitly as Paul. Thus, it may be that Paul is more in line with OT anthropology than some elements of early Judaism.

<sup>56</sup> N. T. Wright appears to sense the tension of Paul's appeal to Ps 143:2 when he admits that works of the law "will never justify, because what the law does is to reveal sin. Nobody can keep it perfectly" (*Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009] 118). But admitting that such a premise factored into Paul's argument seems to go against the contention held by proponents of the New Perspective that there is no assumption in Paul's theology that the law was meant to be kept perfectly in any sense. Elsewhere Wright writes, "No Jew who failed to keep Torah, and knew that he or she was failing to keep Torah, needed to languish for long. . . ."

works of the law “have *always* been an improper way to seek God’s righteousness,” and faith has always been the route to God.<sup>57</sup> Paul is reminding Jews of this whose actions imply otherwise. Thus, the language Paul uses here is more anthropological than often recognized, and it is the very language that undergirds Paul’s doctrine of justification.

To be sure, the New Perspective rightly highlights Paul’s mission to the Gentiles as a key component in these passages. Certainly Paul’s statements do not comprise a theological treatise in a vacuum; his mission was inextricably bound to his theology of justification. Justification by law necessarily excludes Gentiles from the people of God, which is a grave misunderstanding of God’s purposes in the Messiah. I would want to maintain that both of these ideas, soteriology and ecclesiology, are tightly interwoven throughout Paul’s argument.<sup>58</sup> However, this does not mean that the Gentile mission is the more fundamental issue at hand. Paul’s zeal here stems from what this particular form of ethnocentrism implied: a culpable, fatal misunderstanding of how God works with human beings that gives ground for boasting in one’s own works before God.<sup>59</sup>

### III. PAUL’S USE OF PSALM 32:1–2 IN ROMANS 4:6–8

Another place where a similar argument can be made is Rom 4:6–8, where Paul explicitly appeals to David by way of Ps 32:1–2 (31:1–2 LXX). Before this, between Rom 3:20 mentioned above and Romans 4, we find threaded through Rom 3:21–31 what I contend is an anthropologically oriented view of justification that Paul defends against a Jewish “law-righteousness” that resulted in ethnocentrism. In Romans 4, then, Paul supports his position by demonstrating how Abraham and David were justified before God apart from works. If we understand Paul to be opposing legalism, such an argument is natural.

I should note, too, that since Paul is opposing *ethnocentric* legalism, it is also natural for him to shift from a more technical discussion of the inner workings of justification to the broader concept of who is part of Abraham’s family as he moves through Romans 4—a concept rightly underlined by the New Perspective and N. T. Wright especially.<sup>60</sup> Wright correctly points out

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Remedies were close at hand, prescribed by God’s grace within the Torah itself” (N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992] 145). For his position to be tenable, it would seem that this statement must somehow be reconciled more satisfactorily with the previous one.

<sup>57</sup> Moo, “Works of the Law” 97. I am not intending to deny the theological distinction between “Law” and “Gospel,” so prominent in Lutheran thought. To my mind this is a separate discussion and largely depends on how one defines these terms.

<sup>58</sup> This point is stated well by Bird, “Justification” 113–54.

<sup>59</sup> Dunn wrongly separates these two elements, arguing that Paul “has the devout Jew in view, but not as the type of the universal *homo religiosus*” whose piety “somehow puts God in his debt” (*Romans 1–8* 154). My point is that the devout Jew’s ethnocentrism testifies to an assumption that his piety at some level does make God a debtor.

<sup>60</sup> “The flow of thought from Romans 4:9 onward indicates that the question toward which Paul is working in the opening verses is rather a question . . . who are the family of Abraham?” (Wright, *Justification* 217).

that Rom 4:1–8 is not merely an “illustration” or “biblical proof” of an abstract doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>61</sup> Paul’s mission to the Gentiles within God’s larger story of Israel and the church is not set aside. This certainly needs to be heard, but it should also not cloud our exegesis of Rom 4:1–8. These verses are best interpreted, in my mind, when we understand that the individual element in justification is always fundamental in Paul’s mind. It is the driving force that propels him as he sees a prejudice against Gentiles as an indicator of a deeply rooted soteriological problem, not merely an ecclesiological problem.

Moving into Rom 4:6–8, then, Paul writes, “just as (καθάπερ) David also speaks of the blessing of the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works.” The word *καθάπερ* indicates that what Paul is saying here is parallel to what he has just said about Abraham, which was that Abraham demonstrates that faith is “reckoned as righteousness” apart from works (4:3). If one *were* to work, the reward would be given as a debt (ὀφείλημα), not as grace (χάρις) (4:4). But this is not how God relates to people. Thus, Paul appeals to David for more evidence, going on to cite Ps 32:1–2 (31:1–2 LXX), which has David speaking of the blessing of the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works (ὁ θεὸς λογίζεται δικαιοσύνην χωρὶς ἔργων). This man has his “lawless deeds” (ἀνομίαι) forgiven and his “sins” (ἁμαρτίαι) covered (v. 7). His sin (ἁμαρτίαν) the Lord does not take into account (οὐ μὴ λογίσσεται κύριος) (v. 8).

Like in the Ps 143:2 allusions, here is a man—in this case clearly David—who is “in the law” in the sense that he, unlike Abraham, lived during the Mosaic era. David was circumcised and faithful to the ceremonial aspects of the law. It would seem that, given the assumptions of the New Perspective, in Paul’s mind David should have felt fine within the bounds of the covenant. He possessed no tormented conscience or pathological sense of unworthiness. He obeyed the boundary-marking ordinances of the law and was well within the covenant. Why, then, does Paul invoke David’s experience here as foundational evidence for his doctrine of justification by faith? If Paul, on the view of the New Perspective, was mainly concerned with the social separation created by the law, how is David one of the quintessential figures to whom appeal should be made? His circumcision and Sabbath-keeping and food observances helped keep Gentiles out of the family of God. Yet, Paul appeals to his testimony here at a key point in his discussion of justification by faith.<sup>62</sup> While Abraham is more easily incorporated into the New Perspective argument since he is the prime example of someone justified apart from boundary-markers (as they did not yet exist), this is not so easily accomplished with David.

To be sure, as Wright points out, Romans 4 is not any kind of “smoking gun” that fatally hamstring the New Perspective, and certainly the issue is more complex than simply citing a few passages as trump cards.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, it remains that this passage, along with the Ps 143:2 allusions, are at

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 216.

<sup>62</sup> As far as I can tell, N. T. Wright never adequately addresses this point (e.g. in Wright, *Romans* 492–93, or elsewhere; even in Wright, *Justification* 220, where he touches on it, he does not seem to see the problem David raises).

<sup>63</sup> Wright, *Justification* 220.

best challenging to fit into the more corporate understanding of justification, and especially so since they are not merely peripheral evidence. They provide the scriptural foundation to Paul's argument. What is more, these passages fit well into a framework that allows for a stronger individual element in justification. That is, they fit well if one understands Paul's problem with works in general and works of the law specifically to be not first about the relationship between Jew and Gentile, its significance notwithstanding, but about how the individual is counted righteous before God apart from works and in spite of sin.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

My intention in this article has not been to argue against the New Perspective understanding of justification in favor of the traditional view. Rather, it has been to reopen some exegetical evidence with the assumption that Jewish legalism may have played more of a role in Paul's polemic than has been assumed since the publication of Sanders's work on the subject. If this is granted, some critical justification texts are better explained than if one approaches them with the idea that Paul was primarily concerned with Gentile mission and not the more fundamental issue of how humanity relates to God in light of sin. These texts are more difficult to explain upon the more strictly corporate understanding of justification. In light of this, I would argue that the more individual approach to justification should continue to inform our understanding and reading of the texts, while we continue to listen to and interact with the important corporate elements in Pauline soteriology.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The present article is a condensed version of the central argument of my dissertation, which currently is in progress at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. While all shortcomings are, of course, my own, I wish to express gratitude for comments from my supervisor, Tom Schreiner, and my fellow doctoral students in the NT department, especially Kevin McFadden.