

## INTRODUCTION



Prior to 1977 and the publication of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, New Testament scholarship tended to read Paul, the apostle of grace, against a backdrop of legalistic<sup>1</sup> Jews busily trying to earn their way into heaven by obeying the law. Ferdinand Weber's important 1880 work on Judaism propelled this understanding into the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> According to Weber, an individual Jew's destiny was determined by the weighing of his or her fulfillment of the law over against transgressions, as if on a scale. Those having done more good than bad would be saved, while the rest would perish. Weber did not see God's election of the Israelite nation impacting individual salvation. Everything depended on personal accomplishment or transgression of what God had commanded.<sup>3</sup> This often led either to self-righteousness or to uncertainty before a God who seemed distant and unapproachable.

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<sup>1</sup>“Legalism” is defined in this work as the position that one can gain God's favor apart from God's grace and mercy through the accomplishment of what the law requires.

<sup>2</sup>Ferdinand Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie oder Die Lehren des Talmud*, republished in *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften* (ed. Franz Delitzsch and Georg Schnedermann; 2d ed.; Leipzig: Dörffling Franke, 1897). Weber's understanding dominated NT scholarship from the end of the nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century. Wilhelm Bousset (whose writings stayed in print longer than Weber's) championed Weber's synthesis. Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck's famous reference work on rabbis drew upon the synthesis. Emil Schürer's 1890 *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* is still in print (trans. Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994). Bousset's famous pupil, Rudolf Bultmann, extended Weber's influence into the latter half of the twentieth century through his own students.

<sup>3</sup>An individual could, however, hope for a transfer from the “treasury of merits” accrued by the Jewish patriarchs of antiquity.

Weber's synthesis did not go unchallenged. Jewish scholars such as Solomon Schechter and Claude Montefiore voiced their concern.<sup>4</sup> George Foot Moore also took exception in his classic *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*.<sup>5</sup> Yet their work had little effect on the consensus. The dissenters faulted the Weberian school for an inadequate study of the primary sources. Their analysis of Judaism on its own terms yielded a picture very different from Weber's caricature. Unfortunately, New Testament scholarship did not take note of the critique until it arose from within its own ranks.

Building on the work of his predecessors, E. P. Sanders mapped out a picture of Judaism that was far more grace-oriented than New Testament scholarship had been willing to admit. Sanders conclusively demonstrated that the Jews were not guilty of trying to earn their way into heaven by their good works. On the contrary, the Mosaic law and its demands were always placed within the gracious framework of God's election and covenant with the nation Israel. This election *did* impact individual salvation. An often-cited passage in the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10:1, says: "All Israelites have a share in the world to come." This emphasis on God's election of the people Israel is abundantly attested in the literature of intertestamental Judaism.<sup>6</sup> A place in the world to come was already secured merely by being a member of the elect people of Israel. The only exceptions to this rule in the Mishnah were those who deliberately forsook their relationship with God.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the Jews did not agonize over salvation. Obedience to the law was to be a *response* to

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<sup>4</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1909; repr., Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights, 1993); C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London: Macmillan, 1938).

<sup>5</sup> George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927–1930).

<sup>6</sup> See chs. 1 and 4, especially the discussion of *Jubilees* and the Qumran community.

<sup>7</sup> After saying that all Israelites have a share in the world to come, *m. Sanh.* 10:1–4 lists those who are excluded: the wicked kings Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh, the individuals Balaam, Doeg, Ahithophel, and Gehazi, the flood generation, the people of the Dispersion (Gen 11), the Sodomites, the ten spies who advised against taking the land, the wilderness generation, the rebellious Korah, and the apostate cities. Those who denied the law of Moses would be excluded. The only questionable category is the denial of a place to those who reject the resurrection. On this category, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 147–52, esp. 151–52. With respect to the Qumran literature, one would have to abandon the community, whether by sin or by choice, to forfeit one's place in the world to

God's election.<sup>8</sup> Hardly a burden, obeying the commandments reminded the Jews that they were the chosen people and that the Lord was near.<sup>9</sup>

Nor need a member of God's people despair if he or she broke any of the laws. The Jews upheld a whole system of sacrifices and atonement for setting aright the situation caused by sin.<sup>10</sup> The laws concerning sacrifice and atonement were meant to console and encourage consciences troubled by sin. They provided a means of receiving God's mercy and grace when confronted with human failure. Even those who abandoned the covenant could be restored if they repented of their sin. E. P. Sanders coined the now famous term "covenantal nomism" to describe this perspective. The Jews' observance of the law's requirements, the "nomism," was always embedded in the framework of God's gracious election and covenant, along with the merciful provision of sacrifice and atonement for failure.<sup>11</sup>

Sanders's book on Judaism opened the floodgates to an entirely new way of reading Paul's letters. No longer was Paul confronting Jewish legalism.<sup>12</sup> Consider, for example, Gal 3:15–18. Paul says that salvation is based on God's promise to Abraham and not the law. The law came 430 years after this promise. Paul concludes that the law cannot be added on as an amendment to the promise. Nowhere does Paul's line of reasoning imply that the Jews were trying to earn their way into heaven. The problem is not with the Jews trying to do the law, or even with the Jews perverting the law.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, throughout Romans 2 Paul interacts with

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come. Only the most serious sins compromised one's place among the elect in *Jubilees*; see ch. 1.

<sup>8</sup>See chs. 1 and 4 for references to God's election of Israel *preceding* the giving of the law.

<sup>9</sup>The rabbis nowhere complained about the commandments; Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 110–11; Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 148–69. Of the 613 commands of the law, only a hundred or so were still applicable at the time of the Tannaim. The arrangements of the tabernacle, the conquest of Palestine, and several other commands applied only to specific groups such as priests, judges, soldiers, Nazirites, and others; Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 140–42.

<sup>10</sup>On the atoning value of sacrifice in Jewish literature of the period, see ch. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Sanders himself succinctly defines "covenantal nomism": "Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression" (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75).

<sup>12</sup>Jewish scholarship has still at times felt the need to defend itself against the charge of legalism; thus Bernard S. Jackson's "Legalism," *JJS* 30 (1979): 1–22.

<sup>13</sup>See ch. 3 for a discussion of this text.

a Jewish position that corresponds remarkably well with Sanders's "covenantal nomism." Paul speaks of Jews who were comfortable in their salvation and election merely by their possession of the law. The problem with the Jews was not legalism but a cheap grace that automatically granted a place in the world to come for merely being a Jew in possession of the law.<sup>14</sup>

If the Jews saw the Mosaic law as a response to God's grace and not a means of earning it, what then *was* the problem for Paul with the Mosaic law? The last twenty years have witnessed a barrage of works appearing on this topic almost yearly. Already in 1985 A. J. M. Wedderburn lamented: "With some NT writings we are in danger of saturation with commentaries, so that each new commentary that emerges evokes the reaction, 'Not another commentary on . . .'. At first sight it might seem almost as bad with works on Paul and the Jewish law."<sup>15</sup> The annual output of studies on Paul and the law has not diminished since 1985. If anything, it seems to have *increased*.<sup>16</sup>

The new approaches share in common an agreement with Sanders's thesis that the Jews never maintained that one had to obey God's law without any failure whatsoever. A Jew would have relied on divine election and a system of atonement for violations of the law. Such an understanding of Judaism renders comprehensible how Paul could call his own obedience of the law in Phil 3:2–9 "blameless." In Rom 2:14–15 and 2:26–27, he speaks of Gentiles who actually obey the law.<sup>17</sup> In Gal 5:14, Rom 8:4, and 13:8–10 the apostle envisions Christians fulfilling the law. So if Christians fulfill the Mosaic law and even pagan Gentiles are capable of doing it, how can anyone claim that Paul thought that no one could obey the law perfectly? If Paul did not see a problem with doing the law, what fault *does* he find with it?

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<sup>14</sup> See ch. 7.

<sup>15</sup> A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Paul and the Law," *SJT* 38 (1985): 613.

<sup>16</sup> Since virtually every new book on Paul and the law includes a survey of the literature, I do not intend to overview all the positions and perspectives that have emerged in the last twenty years. For excellent surveys of the various books, articles, and monographs, see Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1–101; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 13–31; Donald A. Hagner, "Paul and Judaism—The Jewish Matrix of Early Christianity: Issues in the Current Debate," *BBR* 3 (1993): 111–30; Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 14–47; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law, and Justification* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 27–53.

<sup>17</sup> The possibility that these are Gentile Christians will be addressed in the notes to ch. 7.

Pauline scholarship is gravitating toward what has been called “the new perspective on Paul and the law.” James D. G. Dunn, its leading advocate, maintains that Paul’s problem with the Mosaic law is that it had been *misunderstood* so as to exclude the Gentiles from God’s plan. The Jews had understood possession of the law as a boundary marker to identify the people among whom God’s grace is to be found. The Gentiles would have to submit to circumcision and to Sabbath and dietary regulations if they wanted to be included in the world to come. According to Dunn, the Jews’ sin (from Paul’s perspective) was pride in their national and ethnic identity based on exclusive possession of the law. The Jews were forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews; God’s grace was to be found only within the nation of Israel. For Paul, on the other hand, the boundary marker of God’s people was not circumcision, Sabbath, or other rituals of the Mosaic law, but rather faith in Christ. Since God’s grace is in Christ and not membership in an ethnic people, the Jews were wrong for their national pride. The Gentiles did not need to observe those aspects of the law that distinguish Jews from Gentiles, that is, the “works of the law.” From Dunn’s standpoint, when Paul speaks positively of the law, it is the law understood apart from Jewish ethnic identity or boundary markers. Whenever Paul speaks negatively of the law, he has in mind primarily these ethnic boundary markers.<sup>18</sup> This is a very different understanding of the problem with the law.<sup>19</sup> Yet it all rests on the premise that the Jews did not believe that God required people to obey the Mosaic law perfectly.

Not all scholars have found the new approach convincing. With the exception of Thomas Schreiner, most of those dissenting do not see Paul combating a legalism by which the Jews were trying to earn their way into heaven. Nevertheless, many still believe that Paul’s problem with the law is that it places a legal demand on people that no one could

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<sup>18</sup>For a more recent articulation of this point, see James D. G. Dunn’s “Was Paul against the Law? The Law in Galatians and Romans: A Test-Case of Text in Context,” in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts* (ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 464–65.

<sup>19</sup>Advocates of the “new perspective” approach in recent years also include N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael Cranford, “Abraham in Romans 4: The Father of All Who Believe,” *NTS* 41 (1995): 71–88; idem, “The Possibility of Perfect Obedience: Paul and an Implied Premise in Galatians 3:10 and 5:3,” *NovT* 36 (1994): 242–58.

successfully accomplish.<sup>20</sup> So does Paul see doing the law as possible or impossible? This question has become the dividing line in Pauline scholarship on the law. The debate rages between those who think that Paul's understanding of the law has absolutely nothing to do with the need to obey the law perfectly and those who still think that it does.

Contrary to the "new perspective," this work will contend that the apostle does *not* see people doing all that the law requires (chs. 6–10). This does not deny that there is a strong ethnic component in Paul's thinking. The law is indeed the special possession of the Jewish people, but that insight, as valid and crucial as it is for proper understanding of Paul's thought, does not mean that the law need not be strictly obeyed.<sup>21</sup>

How is it possible for Paul to see doing the law as problematic given the much more optimistic outlook on the law among the Jews of his day? E. P. Sanders demonstrated that the doing of the law was always embedded within the gracious framework of God's election and covenant, what Sanders called "covenantal nomism." Whenever one failed in the performance of the law's demands, one could avail oneself of the sacrificial system, atonement, repentance, and thereby God's mercy. But Sanders himself admitted that Paul is no "covenantal nomist":

Paul's "pattern of religion" cannot be described as "covenantal nomism," and therefore Paul presents an *essentially different type of religiousness from any found in Palestinian Jewish literature. . . . Paul in fact explicitly denies that the Jewish covenant can be effective for salvation, thus consciously denying the basis of Judaism.*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>For example, Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, and Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*.

<sup>21</sup>For a recent study exploring the ethnic dimension to Paul's thinking, see Terence Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). Even while granting that Paul's thought includes a strong ethnic dimension, that does not exclude that Paul saw obeying the law as problematic. I will return to this point in chs. 8–10.

Daniel Boyarin thinks that Paul was initially troubled by the ethnic exclusivity of the law and from there moved to Christ as the solution; *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 46. His approach runs in the opposite direction of this work, which maintains that Paul's understanding of God's grace in Christ led the apostle to reevaluate the law. Boyarin's thesis depends on Dunn's "new perspective" approach to Paul; Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 51–56, 275–77. Problems in Dunn's approach will likewise affect Boyarin's (even granting Boyarin's modifications on pp. 54–55). Nor does Boyarin seriously consider the possibility of an openness toward, and even encouragement of, proselytism; see Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, on this point.

<sup>22</sup>Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 543, 551 (emphasis his).

It is unfortunate that this conclusion was not based on a detailed comparison of Paul and Judaism with respect to the categories Sanders deemed central to first-century Judaism, namely, election, covenant, and sacrifice. Sanders proceeded on the basis that Paul's categories of thought were simply different from those of Judaism. Yet how do the crucial elements in Jewish thinking fare in Paul the former Pharisee? If Paul had abandoned a system that can be described as "covenantal nomism," what happened to the key aspects of that system? This study will show that the key motifs of covenant, election, and sacrifice are radically redefined for Paul in terms of Christ (chs. 3–5). If the gracious framework of Judaism is denied salvific efficacy in Paul, what happens to the demands of the Mosaic law that are embedded within that system? This study contends that one should expect the law's character as a demand to come to the fore and to emerge as problematic.

Sanders wrongly minimized Judaism's belief that God intended the law to be obeyed strictly and in its entirety. Judaism maintained a balance between the need for strict obedience of the law and the possibility of atonement for God's elect, between a judgment according to works and a judgment according to mercy (ch. 1).<sup>23</sup> Yet when that gracious framework collapses, the law's character as a demand, the counterbalancing element, often emerges as problematic (ch. 2). Against this backdrop it is understandable that the issue in Paul would indeed revolve around doing what the law requires.

Sanders contended that a wide variety of Jewish writings from 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., ranging from sectarian Judaism to a more representative Judaism, manifest "covenantal nomism" as a common underlying pattern and set of assumptions. Chapter 1 of this book reviews several of these documents. While affirming with Sanders the importance of God's election and merciful regard toward the Jewish people, ch. 1 shows that Sanders did not adequately account for the tendency among Jews to regard the law as requiring strict and perfect obedience. Philo and the author of *Jubilees* upheld sinless, law-observant individuals as models for their readers. The men of the Qumran community were to strive toward the ideal of "perfect righteousness"; they were to observe "all" the law. Rabbi Akiba's statement in *m. Ḥabot* 3:16, when rightly

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<sup>23</sup>Sanders himself recognized that one must do what the law requires, and yet one's obedience need not be perfect. When Sanders discusses the law *apart from* the gracious framework, he speaks of the legal requirement for obedience (for example, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 107, 109, 112). He denies the need for strict obedience in contexts where he speaks of Judaism *as an entire system* inclusive of election, covenant, and sacrifice (see *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 146, 176, 204; 137, 483). I will return to this point in ch. 1.

understood, contrasts a strict judgment with a judgment that permits some sin. In covenantal nomism, as Sanders articulated it, doing what the law required (nomism) was always embedded within the grace of the covenant and God's election of Israel. Chapter 1 sharpens Sanders's tension between the embedded nomism and its gracious framework: the law requires strict and rigorous obedience. In other words, Jews *did* maintain that the law enjoins perfect obedience—contrary to the claims of many Pauline scholars.

Chapter 2 considers Jewish literature in the years following the fall of the temple in 70 C.E. as well as several works from the Diaspora, especially the apocalyptic writings. These writings depart from the pattern of covenantal nomism. Jews began to question the election of Israel after the demise of Jerusalem (e.g., *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and *3 Baruch*). Likewise, Diaspora Jews, such as the authors of *2 Enoch* and the *Testament of Abraham*, were not as concerned about the ethnic privileges of an elect Israel. Yet Israel's election constitutes one of the important poles in Sanders's covenantal nomism. What is to mitigate the strict demands of the law if there is no sacrifice for sin or the grace of God's election? The recurrent picture in these documents of a strict weighing of deeds at the judgment represents the logical outcome when the gracious framework of Judaism is compromised.

The significance of Jewish works that depart from covenantal nomism is that they provide a point of comparison for Paul. Although the temple was still standing, the covenantal framework collapses (or at least is radically redefined) in Paul's writings as well. Chapter 3 evaluates the role of the Mosaic covenant in three key passages: Gal 3:15–17; Gal 4:21–31; 2 Cor 3:1–18. In each of these texts Paul was consistent in one important respect: he consistently denied any salvific or life-giving capacity in the old/Mosaic covenant. This departs radically from the function of the covenant in covenantal nomism.

Likewise, ch. 4 shows that Paul treated Israel's election in a way that compromised covenantal nomism. All Israelites do not have a share in the world to come simply by being members of Israel. The benefits of Israel's national election according to Romans 9–11 are realized only with faith in Christ. In fact, Paul's use of election language for the church shows that the church has become the true locus of saving election.

Chapter 5 addresses a final component of the gracious framework of covenantal nomism: the possibility of atoning sacrifice. While Paul spoke of Christian living as a sort of sacrifice, there is no hint that such behavior bears any relationship to the *atoning* sacrifices of the Old Testament. The scholarly community stands divided over whether Paul was alluding to the sin- or guilt-offering, or even to the Day of Atonement (e.g., Rom 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom 3:24–25). If Paul intended such allusions, it is

important to recognize that these allusions are always in the context of Christ's saving activity. Paul nowhere granted that the atoning sacrifices of the Old Testament offer any help in mitigating the effects of sin. The solution to sin resides strictly in the work of Jesus Christ. In effect, the gracious covenantal framework of Judaism has collapsed for Paul in favor of a new framework of grace grounded in the work of Christ.

Chapter 6 discusses Gal 3:10, a verse that has traditionally been understood to indicate that no one perfectly obeys all that the law commands. This chapter affirms that traditional understanding in the face of a multitude of recent alternatives. Those who maintain the traditional view typically face two important objections. Sanders contended that the Jews never believed that one had to obey the law perfectly. The law, for the Jews, was always embedded within the gracious framework of God's covenant and election. Chapters 1–5 should have dispelled that potential objection. The Jews *did* speak of perfect obedience. The gracious, mitigating framework has collapsed for Paul, leaving behind only the law and its rigorous demands. It should be no surprise that the law's requirements proved problematic to Paul. The second objection stems from the question of whether Paul saw perfect obedience as impossible elsewhere. In Phil 3 the apostle labeled his observance of the law "blameless." That objection is addressed in ch. 9.

Chapter 6 also includes a discussion of the disputed phrase "works of the law" (ἔργα νόμου) and the relationship between the law's ethnic aspects and its requirements in general. While "works of the law" in Gal 3:10 is best understood as referring to the law's requirements in a general sense, the same issue with respect to ἔργα νόμου arises in ch. 7's discussion of Rom 2. Unlike Gal 3, Rom 2 revolves around Jewish ethnic privilege. But in Rom 2 Paul critiques Jewish ethnic privilege on the basis of whether or not the Jews had done what the law requires. The demand that the law places on those who would follow it stands side by side with its function as an ethnic boundary marker. Recent Pauline scholarship has become too polarized on this point; it is a both-and relationship. The law functions both to distinguish the Jewish people and to place a burden of obedience upon them. In Rom 2 Paul questions the value of Jewish privilege based on God's election. Naturally, the embedded nomism comes to the fore. He questions whether the Jews had obeyed the law as it requires.

Chapter 8 takes up Rom 3:27–4:8, a key passage for understanding the "works of the law" as bound up with Jewish ethnic privilege. As in Rom 2, "works of the law" in Rom 3:27 (in light of the immediate context through 4:8) refers both to Jewish particularity and to the necessity of doing what the law requires. The emphasis upon achievement is clarified

in Rom 4:4–5 when Paul discusses works in general. By ruling out works in general as the basis for a relationship with God, Paul can rule out the works of the Jewish law in particular. And if the Jewish law is no longer the basis for God’s justifying activity, then the law can no longer serve to exclude the Gentiles from God’s plan. Since Rom 4:4–5 act as a supporting premise, Paul’s logic proceeds from a recognition of the “works of the law” as a human accomplishment. Paul’s reasoning is understandable in light of Rom 2: Paul had denied any saving value in being a member of the elect Jewish people in possession of the Mosaic law. With the denial of the gracious framework of covenantal nomism, the law no longer acts as a sign of Jewish privilege; rather, it entails an enslaving obligation. It entails “works.”

The latter half of ch. 9 discusses a passage where the enslaving function of the Mosaic law takes center stage. Paul indicates in Romans 7 that the individual who is “under the Mosaic law” struggles in vain to accomplish what the law requires. Sin and the flesh stand in the way of successful accomplishment of what the law demands. This passage corroborates the dark situation described in Rom 3:19–20 and in Gal 3:10. Humanity has proven itself incapable of living up to the high standards of the Mosaic law. Consequently, “the law of life” brings death. At the end of Rom 7 Paul must turn to Jesus Christ for a solution to the problem posed by the law’s enslaving demand. Once again Paul’s critique of the law focuses primarily on the necessity (and extreme difficulty, if not impossibility) of doing what it requires. Yet if Paul is serious about human inability to accomplish what the law requires, one cannot help but wonder about the apostle’s statements in Phil 3. How can Paul call his observance of the law “blameless”? The first part of ch. 9 works through that question. E. P. Sanders’s analysis of Judaism provides the background necessary to evaluate Paul’s claim of “blamelessness.” A recurrent motif in Sanders’s analysis of Judaism was the consistent recognition that human beings fall short of God’s will. The “righteous” are typically sinners who availed themselves of God’s mercy and election even while falling short of the perfect measure toward which they were striving. Biblical figures are often characterized as “blameless” at the same time that the biblical text admits their sins. Paul can admonish his own audience to be “blameless.” One ought also to note, with respect to Phil 3, that Paul’s boast as a Jew included not only his Jewish identity but also his zeal for and accomplishment of the law. The law always involves the demand for rigorous obedience alongside its ethnic particularity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Blamelessness with respect to the law ought to be distinguished from perfect obedience. Perfect obedience is unerring success in doing all that God commands in the law.

Chapter 10 analyzes a final Pauline text: Rom 9:30–10:8. This passage also discusses the law as a source of Jewish particularity. Yet even here Paul’s critique consistently returns to the importance of doing what the law requires. Paul contrasts the demands of the law with the law’s own witness to the necessity of faith in Christ. Paul reinterprets Deut 30:12–14’s comments about the possibility of doing what the law requires by deleting the references to doing the law and turning the verses into a witness to the saving work of Jesus Christ. Paul’s discussion of election in Rom 9 prepares for his contrast between doing and believing in 9:30–10:8: God’s choice does not depend on human effort or accomplishment. Hence 9:30–10:8 can extend Paul’s point to encompass the demands of the law. Since the covenantal framework of Judaism has collapsed in Paul’s thought with the revelation of God’s salvation in Christ, the law’s requirements fall into the realm of a merely human endeavor. Jewish privilege has been replaced by the dilemma of living up to the rigorous standards of the law. Paul calls the attempt to attain righteousness through the requirements of the law an establishing of “one’s own” or “their own” righteousness.

To summarize: the ultimate (and unanswered) problem for a reading of Paul that still sees the doing of the law’s requirements as a problem or “plight” (to use Sanders’s terminology) is that it was not a plight for the Jew or for Paul (Phil 3:2–9). How is it possible that Paul would see a problem in trying to do the law in light of Sanders’s depiction of a more grace-oriented first-century Judaism? While first-century Judaism was certainly not legalistic in its understanding of the law, Paul’s own perspective led, nevertheless, to an understanding of the works of the Mosaic law as a merely human endeavor in contrast to God’s own saving activity in Christ. In effect, the gracious framework of Judaism does not produce salvation; it has been replaced by a christological framework. New Testament scholarship has not yet fully explored the consequences of a Jewish apostle (Paul) abandoning “covenantal nomism” in favor of a “christological nomism.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>On the parallels between covenantal nomism and Paul’s theology, see especially Morna D. Hooker, “Paul and Covenantal Nomism,” in *Paul and Paulinism* (ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982), 47–56. See ch. 3 as a corrective to her treatment of covenant in Paul. While noting the general similarities between Paul and covenantal nomism, she does not explore how the shift in framework from the Mosaic law and the Sinaitic covenant to Christ might impact upon the law, precisely the issue of what follows.

No one has offered this approach. A few scholars such as Thomas Schreiner and Bruce W. Longenecker have offered hints in this direction, but no one has explored it in depth.