



The Resolved Church

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A Response to The New Perspective of Paul (NPP)

by Pastor Duane Smets

The New Perspective of Paul (NPP): A scholarly re-interpretation of Paul's thought concerning justification by faith which has been held by Protestants since the reformation. The new interpretation is that justification is not a legal status of one's standing before God but rather filial declaration by God that Jesus is the messiah of God's people.

Main Points of NPP:

- Judaism was a religion of grace and inclusivism rather exclusivistic communal competition and striving for individual righteousness with God.
- Law was not something one used to earn favor with God but was merely a Jew's identity mark as being a people of God.
- Jews boasting that they were elect/favored/chosen was the main problem Paul is addressing in Romans.
- Justification does not have to do with one's standing before God but one's identity with a people group of God.
- Jesus does not satisfy the wrath of God and then transfer his righteousness to us.
- A person does not need to individually put faith in Jesus but just realize God accepts them as they are and join the community of God.

Main Proponents of NPP:

- Dr. James D.G. Dunn
- Dr. E.P. Sanders
- Dr. N.T. Wright

My Contentions:

- Judaism was clearly one of exclusivism and religious competition both according to Jesus and Paul and this is not eisogesis (Mat 5:17-20, Phil 3:4-8). Notice Jesus distinction of the individual ["whoever" vs. "others" and what they are called] and notice Paul's use of "I" and "myself."
- "Law" is used in three different ways in Romans. To minimize these contextual and exegetical observations and to reduce them to merely being a "boundary marker" is to do violence to the text.
 - 1) universal moral law > ex. Rom 2:14-15
 - 2) Jewish Torah > ex. Rom 7:1-6
 - 3) principle of the way sin works > ex. Rom 7:21-23.
- The main problem Paul is addressing in Romans is sin, idolatry deep in mankind's heart, not boasting (Rom 1:18-:24).
- A thorough study of the Greek word, *dikaioisune* clearly shows that righteousness is not merely communal identity. Here is a link to my work on the *diakio* word group in Romans 1-8:
www.theresolved.com/downloads/dikaioisune.pdf
- A study of the word "propitiation" in Rom 3:25 and a study of the word "counts" (*logidzomai*) in Rom 4:23-24 clearly teach the imputed righteousness of Christ.

- Proponents of NPP utilize a form of "chronological snobbery" as C.S. Lewis once described it. Basically this means they caricaturize the classical reformed view of justification by faith as being primitive and scholastically unwarranted and that if one was to believe this "new" theory, only then could they claim intellectual warrant.
- NPP's charge of cultural eisegesis cannot stand up to its own criteria. When pressed with exegesis of specific words and specific texts it becomes difficult to see how the postmodern virtue of pluralistic inclusivism is not driving hermetical decisions of NPP, particularly when dealing with the writings of Paul.
- I believe NPP is dangerous and is heresy because it eliminates not only the Jew's need for Jesus but as a result all other's need. Faith is not merely a realization of what you already are. This is a serious conflagration between the doctrines of justification and santification.
- An acceptance of this doctrine will set the church back to a pre-reformation setting and the gospel will be lost. As Martin Luther said, "justification by faith" is the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls.

Below is a brief bibliography on the subject:

In favor of NPP:

- James Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*.
- E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.
- N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*
- N.T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision*

Refuting NPP:

- D.A. Carson, Peter O'Brien, and Mark Seifrid (eds.), *Justification And Variegated Nomism*. 2 Vols.
- Piper, John. *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright*.
- Ed. Michael Horton and Ryan Glomsrud, *Justified: Modern Reformation Essays*

Tons of good article & audio links here:

http://www.theopedia.com/New_Perspective_on_Paul

Links I've found particularly helpful:

http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086_CHID560462_CIID1660662,00.html

<http://www.whitehorseinn.org/blog/?s=%22wright+wednesdays%22>

<http://theresurgence.com/2010/03/22/is-the-new-perspective-on-paul-dangerous>