

NICOLAI TECHOW

Sinners, Works of Law,
and Transgression
in Gal 2:14b–21

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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Sinners, Works of Law, and Transgression in Gal 2:14b–21

A Study in Paul's Line of Thought

Mohr Siebeck

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*To My Wife Maria and Our Children
Adam, Johannes, Christoffer, and Judith*

Preface

This book has been many years in the making. It is a revised, updated, and much expanded version of the dissertation for which the University of Copenhagen awarded me the Ph.D. degree in 2004. Life's changing circumstances and obligations finally allowed me to give it the concentrated attention needed for its publication. It has been a long process during which I have incurred a great debt of gratitude.

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All the above are to be credited for the corrections and improvements they have brought into this work while I am fully to blame for those they did not.

I dedicate this book with great and heartfelt gratitude to my wonderful wife, Maria, and our four amazing children, Adam, Johannes, Christoffer, and Judith who have often endured my absence in body and/or mind, still tolerate and smile overbearingly at my nerdiness, and love me through it all. What a miracle! Their love is a beautiful reflection of the grace of my Lord, Jesus Christ,

“who loved me and gave himself up for me.” To him I will be eternally grateful!

Soli Deo gloria!

Fjellhaug International University College
Copenhagen, August 2023

Nicolai Techow

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Introduction

1. The textual and thematic focus of the present study

My interest in the present work is with an aspect of Paul's flow of thought in one of the passages in which he rejects justification ἐξ ἔργων νόμου.

Thus, this investigation places itself within the discussion of the subject often called "Paul and the Law." In the wider perspective, it aims at contributing to the discussion of the historical meaning of Paul's negative statements concerning the law, particularly the discussion between what could be called "social-ethnic" and "moral-religious" interpretations.

The subject of "Paul and the Law" is both difficult and has been and is a center of intense scholarly discussion. Further increased by the subject's close relations to other areas of study such as Second Temple Judaism, the quantitative growth of relevant secondary literature makes it ever more difficult to keep abreast of all areas of the discussion. Against this background, it has seemed preferable to limit the present study's focus both thematically and with respect to the Pauline text material.

Thus, while the present study does fall within the larger context of the vast and difficult subject of "Paul and the Law" and does have the wider aim just mentioned, its focus is deliberately kept very narrow. It is an exegesis of one particular Pauline passage, namely, Gal 2:14b–21; and not a full exegesis of that passage but an exegesis with a particular focus which is the following.

In Gal 2:14b–21, Paul's rejection of justification ἐξ ἔργων νόμου (2:16) is placed within a context of – and thus somehow connected to – thoughts about concepts of gentile and Jewish sinfulness (cf. 2:15, 17). And the present work asks what the flow of thought in Gal 2:14b–21 indicates about this relation. In general and overarching terms, the questions with which I approach this text are the following.

- (1) What are the concepts of gentile and Jewish being "sinners" in play *in this text*?
- (2) How is Paul's rejection of justification ἐξ ἔργων νόμου related to what he writes about Jewish and gentile sinfulness *in this text*?
- (3) What do *these* relations indicate as to what Paul's "target" is in his exclusion of ἔργα νόμου from justification *here*?
- (4) Why, *in the flow of thought in Gal 2:14b–21*, is justification not ἐξ ἔργων νόμου?

Thus, the focus of the present study is on these particular primary questions asked with respect to this particular text. The aim is to account for *the flow of thought* in the text. In the discussion of the different alternative answers to the questions mentioned, the main evaluative criterion used will be an answer's ability to explain the flow of the argument and make an account for its data. Consequently, only secondarily and only in the form of suggestions which will need further investigation is it asked what this text suggests regarding the relationship between sin and the "what"s and "why"s of justification οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου in Paul's letters and thought *more generally* (be this question approached synchronically or diachronically).

Of course, neither the choice of text nor general questions are arbitrary. Abstracted from this particular text, the questions of the relation between Paul's hamartiology and soteriology, of the target of Paul's rejection of justification ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, and of his reasons and arguments for this rejection are all central to the broader debate about "Paul and the Law." And Gal 2:14b–21 is the first passage in Paul's letters in which the expression ἐργα νόμου and an explicit rejection of justification ἐξ ἔργων νόμου occur. Therefore, the results of this investigation do have significance for the wider question to the discussion of which it aims to contribute. Moreover, the questions asked in this study both seem to be relevant on the very surface of the text itself and, not least combined with an eye to the wider perspective, provide a means of ordering and prioritizing the many more concrete and detailed questions encountered by any interpreter of Gal 2:14b–21. Thus, they provide a basis for establishing a reasoned route through the (most important) questions and the material.

Nevertheless, in written, scholarly discussions of "Paul and the Law" representing attempts to account for the details of the *flow of thought*, in particular, Pauline passages, texts such as Rom 1–5 and 7, Phil 3, and Gal 3 tend to be given relatively more attention than the details of the flow of thought in Gal 2:14b–21.¹ And when this passage is discussed, the focus is more often on 2:21 or on 2:16 itself and its relation to the preceding context (explicitly referring to the Antioch conflict) than on the flow of thought from 2:14b to 2:15 and via 2:16 on in 2:17–21. Thus, the described textual and thematic focus of the present work does not lessen the burden of secondary literature to a level at which it is easily surmountable and at which it is no longer impossible to

¹ Cf. already Ezra Hon-Seng Kok, "The Truth of the Gospel: A Study in Galatians 2.15–21" (PhD diss., Durham University, 1993), 24–26, available at Durham E-thesis Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1555/>. The situation seems not to have changed qualitatively since 1993. I am aware that Kok's study has been published, but a copy has not been available to me: *The Truth of the Gospel: A Study in Gal 2:15–21* (Jian Dao Dissertation Series 7; Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2000). Therefore, I refer to it as available at the Durham website.

cover everything and consequently necessary to pick and choose what seems most relevant. But the intersection of the particular questions asked here and this particular text does appear to represent an area somewhat less overrun than others in the larger field of “Paul and the Law.”

2. Social-ethnic readings of justification in Paul

To further frame the present work, it can be seen as part of a dialogue with a dominant tendency among Pauline scholars since the break-through of the so-called “New Perspective on Paul”² (from here often simply NPP),³ namely, what I shall refer to as “social-ethnic” readings of justification in Paul as they come to expression in exegesis of this particular passage, that is, Gal 2:14b–21.

The NPP itself, of course, is represented by a wide array of interpretations, not least of Paul’s negative statements concerning the law, which are in focus here. Nevertheless, a cluster of theses held in common by all its representatives describes its main distinctives and holds together its different variants in what can reasonably be called a distinct paradigm. Three of these theses are of special relevance to the present study, the first because it represents the NPP understanding of the Jewish background against which Paul’s statements are to be understood, the second and third because our passage of investigation, Gal 2:14b–21, is one of the most often appealed to texts in support of them.

1) The first thesis is that the concept of “covenantal nomism,” clearly distinct from and in contrast to “works righteousness,” best describes the soteriology of Second Temple Judaism.⁴ The earlier understanding of Judaism as a religion of “works righteousness” is said to be without verified historical

² It was James D. G. Dunn who first used this designation. See James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Ryland’s University Library of Manchester* 65 (1983): 95–122. This article was reprinted as James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *Jesus, Paul and the Law. Studies in Mark and Galatians*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (London: SPCK, 1990), 183–214. My page references will be to the latter.

³ Good introductions to the debate include: Stephen Westerholm, “The ‘New Perspective’ at Twenty-Five,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume II: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 1–38; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul: Whence, What and Whither?,” in *The New Perspective on Paul*, by James D. G. Dunn (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1–97; A. Andrew Das, “Paul and the Law: Pressure Points in the Debate,” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Given (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 99–116.

⁴ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977).

basis and is often argued to read Luther's medieval Catholicism back into the Judaism of Paul's day. The Judaism of Paul's day represented, as Sanders and his followers argue, a "pattern of religion" well labeled "covenantal nomism" in which the law and obedience to it are always to be understood within the context of the covenant. One "gets in" or is "transferred" into the – salvific – covenant solely by God's elective grace, being born into the people God in his mercy has chosen and with which he has made his covenant. And one "maintains" one's membership or "stays in" the covenant by obedience to the Torah. This obedience flows out of thankfulness for and joy over God's grace, is always to be understood within the covenant context, and it is not perfect obedience but rather a level of observance by which one does not set oneself outside the covenantal boundaries. Thus, the NPP was and is, first of all, a new perspective on the Judaism of the Second Temple Period.

2) Being thus, first of all, a new perspective on the Judaism of Paul's day, the NPP became a new perspective on what Paul meant when he says that we are *not* justified by the law or by works of law. The second thesis is that when Paul speaks negatively of νόμος or ἔργα νόμου in contexts of justification, his target is to be understood as an "ethnic" or "social" rather than a "moral" category.⁵ This was and is one of the main distinctives of the NPP, which marks it off from what preceded it. Briefly put, the works by which one "stays in" are not – at least not primarily – moral but Jewish. In other words, one is saved by being or living as a Jew. And when Paul writes that we are not justified by the law or works of law, then the law and works of law are not to be understood (or at least only in a very secondary way) as moral categories as if Paul's meaning were that we are not justified by good works, because no one in Judaism thought so. Instead, the law and works of law are to be understood as primarily ethnic categories, so that Paul's meaning is that we are not justified by being or becoming Jews. Paul's teaching of justification by faith, then, is not a message that human beings can be justified before God in spite of their moral sinfulness. Instead, the good news is that gentiles,⁶ to be saved, do not

⁵ Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," 194, italics original: "'works of the law' do *not* mean 'good works' in general ... The phrase 'works of the law' in Galatians 2.16 is, in fact, a fairly restricted one: it refers precisely to these same identity markers ... those regulations prescribed by the law which any good Jew would simply take for granted to describe what a good Jew did." Ibid., 198, italics original: "[I]t is *nationalism* which he denies not *activism*." Ibid., 201: "Paul is not disparaging good works in general, far less is he thinking of good works as earning merit." Of course, Dunn is representative for the new perspective as a whole only in what he denies in these quotations, not in what he affirms. See also Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 29; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 171.

⁶ In accordance with *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), I do not capitalize "gentile/s" except when quoting scholars or modern translations that do.

need to become Jews with everything that doing so involves in terms of circumcision, calendar, food, and other “ethnic” observances. Thus, according to several proponents of the NPP, the interpretive paradigm of the Protestant reformation was simply wrong. This was⁷ and is still⁸ said explicitly, even though some proponents have become less clear and categorical about it in the last 10 to 15 years. The thesis of the NPP – passed on to its heirs as one of their tendencies – with which the present study primarily is to be seen as in dialogue is this one, a preference for primarily “social-ethnic” readings of justification in Paul.

3) The third thesis of the NPP is that in terms of development, unlike Luther, Paul did not struggle with a plight of individual guilt to which justification by faith in Christ became the solution.⁹ Sanders himself argued that Paul’s thought did not at all move from a perceived problem with *ὁ νόμος* or with man’s sinfulness to a solution, namely, salvation in Christ, but rather the exact other way around: Paul became convinced that salvation was in, through, and by Christ, which meant that it could not be in, through, or by the law.¹⁰ And the problems Paul describes with human sinfulness and the negative aspects of the law are (some of) the answers Paul found *later* to the question of *why* salvation is not in, through, or by the law. Briefly put by Sanders, Paul’s thought did not move “from plight to solution” at all but “from solution to plight.” While most NPP representatives (as well as many, but not all,¹¹ opponents) follow Sanders in this reversed model of Paul’s thought development, there are exceptions.¹²

⁷ See, e.g., N. T. Wright, “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 61–88, 71.

⁸ See, e.g., E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle’s Life, Letters and Thought* (London: SCM, 2016), 42–44, 455–59.

⁹ Krister Stendahl, of course, argued already in 1960 that this whole idea was the result of Luther reading his own individual development back into Paul, a development made possible by the introspective turn introduced with Augustine. See Krister Stendahl, “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays*, ed. Krister Stendahl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78–96. The first version of this article was published as Krister Stendahl, “Paulus Och Samvetet,” *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 25 (1960): 62–77.

¹⁰ That Paul’s thought had moved “backward” from Christ to negative views or aspects of the law had been argued earlier by, for instance, Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 175.

¹¹ See especially Frank Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul’s View of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 61; Leiden: Brill, 1989).

¹² One such notable one is N. T. Wright. He argues that Paul did indeed struggle with a plight to which Christ became the solution. But the plight was quite a different one from Luther’s. The problem was not individual guilt, much less Paul’s own, but the national

However, all agree that the development of Paul's thought was not that of Luther's. Few would disagree with this, even among the opponents of the NPP.

Of course, by now, more than 40 years after the publication of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, many interpreters have moved "beyond the NPP"¹³ in different ways or are breaking new ground that could shift the discussion qualitatively.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the tendency to read that by which we are not justified according to Paul as a primarily "social-ethnic" category is still strong not only among "proper" NPP interpreters but also among many "beyond."

Thus, in the following, I shall refer to two major lines of interpretation: The "social-ethnic" and the "moral-religious."

By the "social-ethnic" line of interpretation, I refer to interpretations taking Paul's exclusion of ἔργα νόμου from justification primarily or exclusively along "social-ethnic" lines (and taking ἔργα νόμου in 2:16 to be a primarily "social-ethnic" category): When Paul says that no one is justified ἐξ ἔργων νόμου or ἐκ νόμου or the like, the point is primarily or exclusively that one is not justified by being or becoming Jewish or by adopting a Jewish lifestyle, living up to an "ethnic" parameter.¹⁵

problem of Israel's collective guilt as a people for which it still suffered under exile, a problem Paul shared with many other Jews of his day.

¹³ My wording alludes to Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (rev. and exp. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

¹⁴ See perhaps especially now John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

¹⁵ Interpreters belonging in this line of interpretation include: Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 259; Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 67; John M. G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 78, 82; René Kieffer, *Foi et Justification à Antioche: Interprétation D'un Conflit (Ga 2, 14–21)* (Lectio Divina 111; Paris: Cerf, 1982), 46–50; Michael Winger, *By What Law? The Meaning of Νόμος in the Letters of Paul* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 136–43; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina 9; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 28–32, 93; James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: A. & C. Black, 1993), 135–37; James D. G. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Gal. 3.10–14)," in *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, 215–36; Kok, "The Truth of the Gospel," 116–25; Sam K. Williams, *Galatians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 62; Don B. Garlington, *An Exposition on Galatians: A Reading from the New Perspective* (3rd ed.; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 149–50; N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 96; Ruth Schäfer, *Paulus bis zum Apostelkonzil: Ein Beitrag zur Einleitung in den Galaterbrief zur Geschichte der Jesusbewegung und zur Pauluschronologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 257–58, 322–29. As is well-known, J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 251–52, 260–63, 271, 276–77, argues that ἔργα νόμου refers to observance of the law understood as human doing as opposed to God's divine action, πιστις Χριστοῦ referring not to human

By the “moral-religious” line of interpretation, I refer to interpretations taking Paul’s exclusion of ἔργα νόμου from justification primarily or exclusively along moral lines (and often but not necessarily always taking ἔργα νόμου in 2:16 to be a primarily moral category). When Paul says that no one is justified ἐξ ἔργων νόμου or ἐκ νόμου or the like, the point is primarily that one is not justified by (observance of) νόμος understood primarily though not necessarily exclusively as a moral standard.¹⁶

faith in Christ but to God’s action in Christ’s faithfulness. However, the human activity denoted by ἔργα νόμου is in Martyn’s interpretation still observance of the Jewish law, an activity establishing or maintaining status as Jew, that is, the concept is still dominantly “social-ethnic.” Hendrikus Boers, “We Who Are by Inheritance Jews; Not from the Gentiles, Sinners,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 2 (1992): 273–81, 277–78: “Justification by faith is not a negation of justification through the doing of good works – good works are neither required nor negated – but justification without prior entrance into a favoured community – justification as a Gentile ... Faith does not stand in opposition to justification for the doing of good works, but to justification through works of the law as the distinguishing mark of belonging to an exclusively favoured community.” Watson, *Beyond the New Perspective*, 128–30; Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. L. E. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 11:181–348, 238–39; Stephen Anthony Cummins, *Paul and the Crucified Christ in Antioch: Maccabean Martyrdom and Galatians 1 and 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 196–98; Mark D. Nanos, “The Question of Conceptualization: Qualifying Paul’s Position on Circumcision in Dialogue with Josephus’s Advisors to King Izates,” in *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 105–52, 138–39; Mark D. Nanos, “The Myth of the ‘Law-Free’ Paul Standing between Christians and Jews,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4, no. 1 (2009): 1–21, 10 note 33; Mark D. Nanos, “Introduction,” in *Paul Within Judaism*, 1–29, 8, 18.

¹⁶ Interpreters belonging in this line of interpretation include: Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 116–17; apparently also Gijs Bouwman, “‘Christus Diener der Sünde.’ Auslegung von Galater 2, 14b–18,” *Bijdragen. Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie En Theologie* 40 (1979): 44–54, 48–49, 52–53, who understands ἔργα νόμου as representing the desire to establish one’s own righteousness, legalism; Stephen Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 118, 120; Michael Bachmann, *Sünder oder Übertreter: Studien zur Argumentation in Gal 2,15ff* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 59; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 91–100: Bachmann argues that the reference of ἔργα νόμου is to the level of command rather than the level of doing; Sabbas Agourides, “Peter and Paul at Antioch (Galatians 2,11–21),” in *The Truth of the Gospel (Galatians 1:1–4:11)*, ed. J. Lambrecht (Rome: Benedictina, 1993), 59–76, 71: Agourides takes ἔργα νόμου to refer to “legalism” along the well-known argument presented by Cranfield; Jan Lambrecht, “Paul’s Reasoning in Galatians 2:11–21,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law: The Third Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (Durham, September, 1994)*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 89; Tübingen: Mohr

3. Gal 2:16 and ἔργα νόμου in context

Frequently, without much further ado, appeals are made to the context of Gal 2:16 as an argument for a primarily or exclusively “ethnic-social” understanding of ἔργα νόμου. Thus, for instance, Dunn, in his classic article, “The New Perspective on Paul,” wrote:

Galatians 2.16 follows immediately upon the debates, indeed the crises at Jerusalem and at Antioch which focused on two issues – at Jerusalem, circumcision; at Antioch, the Jewish food laws with the whole question of ritual purity unstated but clearly implied. Paul’s

Siebeck, 1996), 53–74, 56, 69; Jan Lambrecht, “The Universalistic Will of God. The True Gospel in Galatians,” in *Pauline Studies: Collected Essays*, ed. Jan Lambrecht (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 299–306, 302; Jan Lambrecht, “Once Again Galatians 2,17–18 and 3,21,” in *Pauline Studies*, 205–9, 208; Vincent M. Smiles, *The Gospel and the Law in Galatia: Paul’s Response to Jewish-Christian Separatism and the Threat of Galatian Apostasy* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998), 119–28; Hans-Joachim Eckstein, *Verheißung und Gesetz: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu Galater 2,15–4,7* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 22–23; also Philip F. Esler, *Galatians* (London: Routledge, 1998), 81, 181–84. Esler argues that while the issue in Galatians is certainly one of social identity, and while the law and works of law are certainly an “ethnic-social” category, this “ethnic-social” category is strongly “moral-religious,” and ἔργα νόμου refers to the Mosaic law in its entirety, including not least its moral aspects. Esler builds on Anthony Cohen’s distinctions (which Esler sees as roughly corresponding to those of Frederik Barth) within ethnic identity boundaries between the boundaries as seen from the outside and publicly visible to all on the one side and, on the other side, that which is much more important for the group’s self-understanding, namely, the boundaries as seen from the inside where “value orientations” including moral orientations play significant roles. Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 226–28; Ben Witherington, III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 175–78; Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (New Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 145–48; see also his statement, *ibid.*, 155, that for Paul, “[j]ustification can no longer be ... a matter of approving the righteous (those who do right by observing the law) but of accepting sinners (“the ungodly” of Rom 4:5; 5:6), despite their sinfulness”; Debbie Hunn, “Christ versus the Law: Issues in Galatians 2:17–18,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2010): 537–55, 550–51, who argues this from the concept of gentile sinfulness in 2:15 and Jewish sinfulness in 2:17 among other things. Robert K. Rapa, *The Meaning of “Works of the Law” in Galatians and Romans* (Studies in Biblical Literature 31; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 140, 177 note 53, seems to fall within this category also; he agrees that ἔργα νόμου transcend the ritual matters, while thinking they were “expressed through” these; Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, “The Concept of ‘Works of the Law’ in Jewish and Christian Literature,” in *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. Pearson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 117–46, 135–38; Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 183–90; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 161–62, 175–76; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 158–62; A. Andrew Das, *Galatians* (Concordia Commentary; St Louis: Concordia, 2014), 243–49.

forceful denial of justification by works of law is his response to these two issues. His denial that justification is from works of law is, more precisely, a denial that justification depends on circumcision or on observation of the Jewish purity and food taboos. We may justifiably deduce, therefore, that by “works of law” Paul intended his readers to think of *particular observances of the law like circumcision and the food laws*.¹⁷

Similarly, Heikki Räisänen:

The context of Gal 2.15ff. makes it abundantly clear that when Paul here speaks of the “works of the law” (v. 16) he has the keeping of *ritual* requirements in mind. It is that part of the law which constitutes a wall between Jews and Gentiles that had been “torn down” (v. 18) by Paul and Peter, when they had admitted uncircumcised Gentiles to the congregation and mixed with them, at table as elsewhere. It was *this* construction that Peter was in fact building up again through his changed behaviour, thus indicating that his previous life style had been an error, a transgression.¹⁸

Again, N. T. Wright:

What, then, are the “works of the law,” by which one cannot be “justified” in this sense? Again, the context is pretty clear. They are the “living like a Jew” of Galatians 2:14, the separation from “Gentile sinners” of Galatians 2:15. They are not, in other words, the moral “good works” which the Reformation tradition loves to hate. They are the things that divide Jew from Gentile: specifically, in the context of this passage (and we have no right to read Galatians 2:16 other than in the context of Galatians 2:11–15) the “works of the law” which specify, however different Jewish groups might have put it at the time, that “Jews do not eat with Gentiles.” What one might gain by such “works of the law” is not a treasury of moral merit, but the assured status of belonging to God’s people, separated from the rest of humankind.¹⁹

John Barclay, at least in his earlier work, joined the chorus:

The immediate context of the Antioch dispute makes clear that “works of the law” are equivalent to “living like a Jew,” and Paul’s point is that this distinctively Jewish pattern of behaviour is not an essential feature of justification, either for Jews or for anyone else (ἄνθρωπος ... πάντα σάρξ).²⁰

Also Frank Matera:

The context of this letter and the recent research of E. P. Sanders and J. Dunn ... suggest that the expression [ἔργα νόμου] primarily envisions circumcision, dietary laws, and the

¹⁷ Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” 191, italics original. Cf. also James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 354–66. Dunn’s understanding has, of course, been far from static. For a short note on his development, see the excursus “A brief note on parts of Dunn’s development” following my summary of Dunn’s interpretation of Gal 2:14b–21 below.

¹⁸ Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 259, italics original.

¹⁹ Wright, *Justification*, 96.

²⁰ Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, 78.

observance of Jewish feast days, all of which were viewed as identity markers that distinguished Jews from Gentiles.²¹

The immediate context of this unit [2:15–21], the Jerusalem conference and the incident at Antioch, as well as Paul’s remarks in 4:10, suggest that by legal works (*ergon nomou*) Paul means circumcision, dietary regulations, and the observance of certain Jewish festivals. Such “works” distinguished Jews from Gentiles, identifying the former as the covenant people and the latter as sinners; legal works were the proud signs of Jewish nationalism.²²

Thus, Todd Scacewater is correct in stating that

Gal 2:16, interpreted polemically against Peter’s actions in 2:11–14, is a foundational pillar for the NPP’s understanding of what Paul means by “works of the law.” In sum, the NPP deviates from the traditional interpretation of 2:11–21 by understanding Peter’s actions at Antioch as an attempt to maintain covenant righteousness, which was a sociological issue rather than a soteriological one.²³

The interpreters quoted above before Scacewater appear to presuppose that the inference from “context,” especially the Antioch Incident, to a primarily “ethnic” meaning of justification οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου is more or less self-evident. It is part of my thesis in the present work that this inference is not as self-evident as it seems to some interpreters. The fact that other interpreters, looking at the same context, have seen it – just as self-evidently – pointing in the other direction should alert the reader to the pitfalls of assumed self-evidence.²⁴ At least it must be said that one has not argued for one’s

²¹ Matera, *Galatians*, 93.

²² *Ibid.*, 99. In the same vein, Kok, “The Truth of the Gospel,” 79, 121, 123, takes the logic from the Antioch context to what justification and ἔργα νόμου in Gal 2:16 is about. For further examples of an more or less exclusively “social-ethnic” understanding of ἔργα νόμου, see, e.g., Watson, *A Sociological Approach*, 67; Watson, *Beyond the New Perspective*, 127–28.

²³ Todd A. Scacewater, “Galatians 2:11–21 and the Interpretive Context of ‘Works of the Law,’” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 2 (2013): 307–23, 309.

²⁴ Thus, for instance, Calvin already wrote: “In short, they [the “Papists”] hold that no mention is here made of the works of the moral law. But the context clearly proves that the moral law is also comprehended in these words; for almost everything which Paul afterwards advances belongs more properly to the moral than to the ceremonial law; and he is continually employed in contrasting the righteousness of the law with the free acceptance which God is pleased to bestow” (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* [trans. William Pringle; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854; accessed via Logos Bible Software, 2010], 67). Likewise, according to Colin Kruse, the context strongly indicates that Paul is referring to something broader than identity markers and more fundamental than a misunderstanding of the law (Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law, and Justification* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996], 68). Cf. also Helmut Merklein, “‘Nicht aus Werken des Gesetzes ...’. Eine Auslegung von Gal 2, 15–21,” in *Bibel in Jüdischer und Christlicher Tradition (FS J. Maier)*, ed. H. Merklein, K. Müller, and G. Stemberger (Athenäum Monografien: Theologie 8: Bonner Biblische Beiträge; Frankfurt am

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