

# Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 14, Old/New Paul and Intro. to Romans

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's New Testament History and Literature, lecture 14 on the New and Old Paul and an Introduction to the Book of Romans.

All right, let's go ahead and get going.

Today I want to move from the book of Acts and begin for the next few weeks at least to look at Paul's letters. As we said, in a sense Acts provides a transition into an introduction to the rest of the New Testament in that the major characters and figures that play a significant role in Acts end up being the authors of the letters, especially Paul who is one of the dominant figures in Acts. It is natural then to find a collection of his letters immediately after Acts and dominating much of the rest of the New Testament.

So today we'll begin to look at those letters starting again with Romans. We'll follow them in canonical order, not necessarily the order in which they were written, but we'll follow the order in which they occur in the New Testament.

So, we'll start with Romans, but let's open with prayer. Father, I thank you again for so graciously disclosing yourself in the form of the Old and New Testament and that we have the privilege of thinking about analyzing, and reading that very revelation. I pray that we will not take it for granted, the gracious gift of the revelation of yourself in your Word, and that we will bring all our mental energies and all the tools at our disposal to try to understand it as fully and accurately as possible. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

All right, so the Apostle Paul and this is Paul after taking a New Testament exam with his hand on his head. As I said, the letters of Paul are not arranged chronologically but generally are arranged in their order of length. So, the reason Romans comes first is not because it was written first, but because it was the longest letter that Paul wrote.

The first letter that Paul wrote would either go to Galatians or 1 Thessalonians. My preference would be for 1 Thessalonians, and I'll tell you later in the semester why that's the case. But before we look at Paul's letters in specific, just a brief introduction to the letters themselves and Paul as a person might help us to understand a little bit more about his letter writing.

But first of all, when we think of Paul's letters, it's important to grasp what New Testament scholars call the occasional nature of Paul's letters. By occasional that

doesn't mean he wrote them on occasion. The occasional nature of his letters meant Paul's letters emerged as responses to rather specific situations and problems.

So again, going back to the book of Acts, we read of all the places Paul visited, and all the churches he established. It was in response to certain problems and situations that arose in those churches that Paul sat down and wrote these letters. So, we don't have a complete theology of everything Paul thought.

We don't have a theological textbook that reflects Paul's thinking on any given issue. Instead, we have a series of very contextually specific letters addressing very specific circumstances and problems that are the only window into Paul's thinking and his theology. So, what that means is we need to be aware of the occasional nature of his letters.

We need to be aware of the circumstances, situations, and problems that gave rise to them. Now, there have been two common analogies that are not original to me, but you find them referred to in a number of treatments of Paul's letters or Paul's thoughts. There are a couple of analogies that perhaps help us to understand and explain how it is we have to approach Paul's letters or what it's like to read them.

The two analogies are a phone conversation and reading the mail, getting in someone's mailbox and reading someone else's mail, or reading a letter that was not intended for you. So, the first one, reading Paul's letters are like reading one end of the phone conversation in that, or listening to one end of the phone conversation in that when you hear someone else talk on the phone, sometimes I often do this with my wife or sometimes my daughter when they're talking on the phone. Just by listening to what they say and how they say it, you kind of try to figure out who they're talking to and you try to figure out what they might be talking about.

Just by listening to one end of the conversation, you can't hear what's going on on the other side. But you have to, based on what you do here, try to reconstruct what's going on at the other end of the line. Because that's the only way you can make sense of what you actually hear.

And Paul's letters are similar to that. By reading Paul's letters, you are listening to one end of the phone conversation. You only hear what Paul is saying.

You don't know what's going on on the other end of the line. So, you have to try to, based on reading the letters themselves, you have to try to deduce and reconstruct what most likely was Paul responding to. Who was he writing to? What was the situation that he may have been addressing? The other one is reading someone else's mail.

Again, if you received a letter that was not intended for you and you read it, there's a good chance you may not understand large parts of it because you're not privy to the rest of the conversation or who the other party was that wrote it or what the situation was, a relationship between the two, or the problem that may have caused this letter to be written. And so, you only have the letter itself. And the same is true with reading Paul's letters.

We only have his letters, a record of his side of the communication. And so based on that, we try to reconstruct as much as possible what most likely was going on in the church in Rome or the church in Galatia or the church in Ephesus or Colossae or any of the other cities that Paul wrote to or Thessalonica. What was the circumstances or situation or problem or issue that gave rise to Paul writing this letter? So, in response, to what this reminds us of, we must reconstruct a plausible scenario from Paul's letters that help us to interpret his letters.

So, in a sense, it's kind of a circle. We look at Paul's letters to try to figure out what we can know about the readers and their circumstances and problems, and then we use that to interpret the letter itself. But again, the letters must be understood in some sense as responses to very specific situations.

And I would, hopefully, I'll be able to demonstrate that there are several sections of Paul's letters that don't make sense unless we understand something about what it was Paul was addressing. I think there are several sections of Paul's letters that make more sense when we do, and there is a big difference in the way we read a text. Maybe we'll end up, there's some sections where I'm going to demonstrate that we should read very differently from what we've been led to believe by understanding what situation and the problem that Paul is addressing.

That can often make a difference in how we interpret the letters. Yep. Right.

There are hints in some letters that maybe Paul does not necessarily assume that everyone will be privy to a specific situation. For example, in a couple of them, especially the letter to the Colossians, at the very end of it, he actually tells them to send his letter on to someone else, to the city of Laodicea. So, in some of Paul's letters, there is a hint that it was to be read more, by more than just the immediate audience for which it was intended.

There are other letters that seem to be much more context-specific. For example, in 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses a number of issues that it does seem a little more important to reconstruct what might be the nature of the situation. But there are other letters where Paul did seem to intend that this wouldn't just be read by the specific church, but it was to be circulated and read more broadly.

And then already, already, interestingly, already by the end of the first century, apparently, remember we looked at a text from 2 Peter, back when we were talking about canon, where the author, 2 Peter, refers to a collection of Paul's letters. So at least by the end of the first century, there was already a collection of Paul's letters circulating fairly widely. We're not sure how many, but you're right.

So that does need to be balanced, the specific circumstances to which these letters were addressed, needs to be balanced by the fact that there appear to be some instances, like the book of Colossians, where he intended his letter to circulate more widely than just to the church in Colossae. To then become a little bit more specific and just, again, very, very briefly talk a little bit about the person, Paul himself. I mean, who is this figure or character in early Christianity, and what led to the inclusion of all these letters bearing his name in the New Testament? First of all, the first thing to remember is Paul was actually a citizen of two separate worlds, quite literally.

First of all, and in many respects the most important background for understanding Paul was his Jewish world. Paul was raised as a devout Jew, a Pharisee, and although he apparently belonged to a Pharisaic school that was a little bit more liberal at times, Paul ended up acting very, very radical and right-wing in the way he lived out his Judaism. And that can be seen by the fact that Paul himself refers in his own letters to the fact that he attempted to destroy the church.

So concerned was he with this newfangled religion that we call Christianity, and he saw it as such a threat to Judaism and obedience to the law that he was going to do anything to stamp it out. So, Paul was of the zealot type, a Pharisee, but with zealot tendencies. If you remember when we talked about the Pharisees and the zealots, Paul was kind of a Pharisee with strong zealot tendencies.

Out of zeal for the law, he would even exterminate Christians because he saw this new faith in Christ as a threat to his ancestral religion. So, Paul was thoroughly a Jew of all the Jewish training, and obviously, that's reflected in the extent to which he borrows from the Old Testament in his writings. But at the same time, Paul was also a citizen of Rome.

And what that meant is Paul would obviously be familiar perhaps with Greco-Roman training and upbringing. Paul would be familiar, obviously he wrote in the common language, the Greek language of the day. But at the same time, Paul would often use his citizenship.

He was quite willing to exploit it. Not a couple of times his Roman citizenship got him out of some serious problems when you read the book of Acts. So, Paul was a person of two worlds, clearly brought up in the world of Judaism and strict adherence of the

law, a Pharisee of the zealot type, but at the same time also a Roman citizen and a child of the Roman world as well.

Now, this all continued until the event that we read about in Acts chapter 9, and that is Paul's conversion. And in addition to Acts chapter 9, Paul himself refers to his conversion very clearly in one other place, and actually we could probably say two other places, but the other one is Acts chapter 1. And what I want to discuss briefly is that the traditional view of Paul's conversion goes something like this. Paul was raised as a Pharisee and raised to meticulously, obey and keep the law, but the more he tried to keep the law, the more frustrated he became with that, his ability to do so, the more guilty he felt with his failure to obey the law, and the more troubled he became in his conscience until finally he simply gave in, and perhaps God's spirit working in his life and prompting him, he finally gave in and he recognized that he just couldn't do it on his own and couldn't keep the law, and that drove him to rely on Jesus Christ, and that drove him to faith in Jesus Christ as opposed to his own ability to keep the law.

Because remember, again, the more he tried to keep it, the more frustrated he became, and the more disillusioned he became with the law and his ability to keep it, the more guilty he felt in his conscience of his failure, and that finally drove him and pushed him to simply throw himself on Jesus Christ and accept God's salvation that he's provided through Christ. Now, although that's been a very popular conception, I'm not sure that's an accurate one when you actually read the New Testament. And, for example, let me read two of Paul's own descriptions of his life in Judaism.

Again, remember, the traditional view is Paul was becoming less and less satisfied and feeling more guilty and frustrated because he couldn't obey the law, and finally, in other words, he's being set up and pushed and prepared to accept Jesus Christ as his Savior. But listen to these two accounts. We find one of them in Galatians chapter 1, the others in Philippians 3, were kind of autobiographical accounts of Paul's life as a Jew.

And here's what he says in chapter 1 of Galatians. He says you have heard no doubt of my earlier life in Judaism. So, Paul's actually writing as a Christian now, but he's referring to his life as a Jew prior to that.

He said you have heard no doubt of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church. Again, there are his zealot tendencies.

I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But then he goes on and says, but when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.

So that's account number one. Philippians chapter 3, here's another account where Paul describes in autobiographical fashion his previous life. Again, he's writing as a Christian, but describing his previous life in Judaism.

He says for it is we who are the circumcision who worship in spirit, in the spirit of God and boast in Jesus Christ and have no confidence in the flesh. Then Paul says, even though I too have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more.

I was circumcised on the eighth day. I was a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, I was blameless.

Now I ask you, does that sound like someone who was frustrated with his ability to keep the law, or someone who had a guilty conscience, or what some have called an introspective conscience, who was becoming more and more frustrated and more and more aware of his inability and his failure to keep the law, so that he's being prepared, in a sense, for the gospel? It doesn't sound like that to me. It sounds like Paul was completely confident in his abilities as a Pharisee. When it came to righteousness, he says, I was blameless.

In Galatians, it says, he advanced far beyond his contemporaries in his ability to keep the law. And so confident was he in his Judaism that he would even attempt to destroy the church. So, this was not somebody who was being prepared to accept the gospel.

This was not someone who was confronted with their failure and guilty conscience because they thought they were unable to keep the law, and he finally threw himself into the gospel. Instead, this is someone who is completely confident in his life in Judaism, and the only thing that changed Paul is when Jesus Christ broke into his existence and knocked him down that day on the road to Damascus. Otherwise, that was the last thing on his mind.

He was not being prepared or becoming less satisfied with Judaism. He was completely confident in his religion. But it wasn't until Jesus Christ revealed himself, according to Galatians 2, and broke into his life, then Paul evaluated his former life in Judaism as falling short.

But until Christ came along, Paul was completely satisfied with his ability to keep the law and with his life in Judaism. So, what happened to Paul then on the Damascus Road? Most likely, what happened on the road to Damascus, the event recorded in Acts 9 that Paul refers to in Galatians, was that this was both a conversion and a commissioning or calling of Paul. So, on the one hand, notice the rest of Galatians.

The section that I read is after describing his life in Judaism. He says, But when God, who had set me apart before I was born, and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles. So, there are the elements of both his conversion, so he is converted from one religious system that leaves out Jesus the Messiah, to one where Jesus is at the center.

That's his conversion. Yet at the same time, it's a commissioning. He is commissioned to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

And that's why in the book of Acts, all those missionary journeys in that map that end up with Paul in Rome, Paul simply fulfilling his commission from Jesus Christ, his conversion to Christianity slash commission, to preach the gospel, not to Jews, but to Gentiles.

All right, so having said that, the first letter that we want to look at, and what I'm going to do is, I'm going to pick up on the mail analogy, and the way I'll introduce the letters is, let's open a piece of mail from the early church. So, the first piece of mail from the early church that we want to open is the letter addressed to the Romans.

Unlike the gospels which don't have any indication of the readers or the author, Paul's letters, as was typical of a first-century letter, include usually both a clear indication of the author or authors, and also an indication of the readers. So, we can understand quite a bit about the author and readers just from reading these letters. But the letter to the church in Rome, that's the first letter we'll open.

The starting point is to recognize that we're not the first ones who have read Romans. More than any other book in the New Testament, if you have ever read Romans and tried to understand it, more than any other book, your reading of Romans has been influenced by other people who have read it before you. Romans played a significant role at very crucial periods in history.

This is, anyone know who that is? Martin Luther. Martin Luther is German. Martin Luther, we'll say Luther.

Martin Luther and you may know him as the author of such hymns as The Mighty Fortress Is Our God. Martin Luther, the book of Romans played a significant role in his life. The book of Romans was a catalyst, in a sense, for sparking the Reformation.

It was in the book of Romans that Luther, his thinking about salvation by grace through faith, and not by good works, his thinking on was formed. And his thinking began to take root. So, the book of Romans played a key role in, in a sense, Luther's conversion and his rethinking of what the gospel was, what it meant to be justified and saved by grace through faith and not by works.

And again, sparking off the well-known Reformation. There are a number of other persons, for whom Romans has played a key role. Here's another one.

That's what you look like after studying theology for about 50 years. Does anyone know who this is? Carl Barth. Very good.

Karl Barth, a famous Swiss theologian, in my opinion, is one of the most brilliant thinkers in Christianity and one of the most brilliant theological thinkers. The book of Romans also played a key role in Karl Barth's own Reformation in Germany, where he reacted against the German liberalism of the day and found in the book of Romans, in a sense, a renewed interest in the gospel. And again, almost sparking his own Reformation.

So, these are two very key figures in the history of Christianity, but brilliant minds whose minds and thinking and theological systems and subsequent Reformation-type movements were influenced to some extent by their reading of the book of Romans, where they were confronted again with God's revelation to them and God's grace. So, these are two of the... and there are others. These are two of the individuals, though, that we stand on their shoulders as we read the book of Romans.

And we'll demonstrate how that is. Now, who is the author of the book of Romans? Well, that's rather obvious. It's the first letter in the collection of Paul's letters.

And in fact, in the very first verse of Romans, Paul names himself as the author. But there's something interesting in the very back of the letter in chapter 16. And chapter 16, like many of Paul's letters, he ends his letters by greeting, say, greet certain persons.

And verse 22, here's chapter 16, verse 22. I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord. I thought Paul wrote this letter.

Most likely, this is simply a reflection of a very common way of writing letters in the first century. That is, it was very, very popular and common to employ the services of what was called an amanuensis, basically a secretary. And you would dictate to some level, usually you would dictate your letter to them and they would write your letter down.

Often, it appears then that the author of the letter himself would sometimes sign the letter in his own handwriting at the very end of the letter. And there's debate was, would, you know, after writing it, would Paul then read it and say, yes, this is fine, go ahead and send it off. But clearly, even in Romans, we find reflected the very common first-century method of producing letters, that is to employ the services of a secretary or amanuensis.



And that appears to be what Paul is doing. So Tertius was his secretary who actually penned the book of Romans. So probably Paul dictated or said what he wanted to be written in the letter.

And I would guess that almost all of his letters probably were written, and produced that way. That's just, that was the way you wrote in the first century. Why did Paul write the letter of Romans? Romans is, Romans has been rather difficult at times to figure out because Romans seems to, at times not reflect a specific problem or crisis.

In fact, some have concluded that Romans is basically a summary of Paul's gospel. And there's a lot of truth to that. But many have held back from seeing Paul responding to a very specific crisis or problem as he does in some of his other letters.

But when reading the, when reading Romans, there appear to at least be three reasons that emerge out of the letter itself, why Paul would write this. Besides giving a Gordon College New Testament survey class something to talk about. The first one is a mission, a missional purpose.

That is, Paul seems to write because he wants to secure Rome as a basis for further missionary activity. That is, you get a sense in Romans that Paul's ultimate plan is to move west, as far west as he can in his, in preaching the gospel. And he wants to kind of use Rome or secure Rome as a basis for his missionary activity.

And, so he's probably writing this letter in some respects to gain their support. For example, this is what we read towards the end of the letter. And this is where this becomes clear.

He says this is the reason that I have often been hindered from coming to you, the Roman church. I'm reading from chapter 15 of Romans. But now with no further place for me in these regions, I desire as I have for many years to come to you when I go to Spain.

So, Paul's ultimate goal is to get to Spain. I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share the resources with the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

They were pleased to do this and indeed they owe it to them for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought to be of service to them in their material ones. So, when I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain. And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

So, do you get the picture? Paul hopes to visit Spain and he seems to want the Roman church to rally around him and support him in doing this. So, part of the reason for writing Romans is a missional one, just to get Rome's support and to secure it as a base for his activity, which he hopes will carry him all the way to Spain. Another purpose is apologetic.

Yeah, a fundraising letter. Yeah, he doesn't quite use the language that strongly, but you're right, it may include obviously physical support. When we get to the book of Philippians, we'll see that that's one of the reasons he writes Philippians is both to thank them for, but also to encourage their continuing financial support.

And so, it's possible that what he's asking for is not only their prayer support or whatever, but he is asking for their financial support as he sets out for Spain. Yeah, you're right. Yeah, I don't think it's random at all.

I think, yeah, that's probably intentional that he mentions these other places that have supported him. Apologetic, another purpose that some have discerned in Romans is an apologetic purpose. By apologetic, I don't mean that Paul is sorry for what he preaches or teaches.

By apologetic, we mean explaining and defending what it is he preaches and what it is he thinks. So, this may go with the first one in order to gain their support. Paul then outlines what it is he teaches or preaches, that's possible.

But clearly, as we said, a lot of people have seen in Romans one of the most detailed explanations of the gospel that Paul preaches. And so that does seem to be one of the reasons for an apologetic one to describe and explain and defend the gospel that he will proclaim and that he does preach. A third one, and maybe the most important one, is a pastoral purpose.

That is that, especially when you get to chapter 14 in Romans, Paul seems to be very interested in or very concerned with the Jew-Gentile relationship, which we've seen has been an important issue in the book of Acts, kind of climaxing in the Jerusalem Council in Acts chapter 15. Remember that? But in Acts chapter 15, Jerusalem Council, the debate was on what basis do Gentiles become God's people. This issue surfaces in Romans chapter 14.

So apparently, there was probably an issue or problem in the relationship between Jew and Gentile on this very issue. On what basis do Jews and Gentiles relate to each other? And on what basis will Gentiles be accepted as the people of God along with Jews? And so, part of Romans was a pastoral purpose. That is, it was addressing a problem in the congregation of disunity between Jews and Gentiles.

Now, what could have engendered this is, one thing we do know, if the book of Romans was written around, probably around 57 AD or something like that. Don't worry, I won't ask you that on an exam. But assume it was written around 57 AD.

About eight years earlier, in 49 AD, Claudius, who was the emperor of Rome at that time, and the very last sheet in your notes, I have a list of all the emperors starting with the 2nd century. But Claudius, who was the emperor in 49 AD, issued an edict. There are various suggestions why, but an edict that Jews had to be expelled from the city of Rome.

And so, all Jews were expelled. When he died in 54 AD when Claudius died, that edict was rescinded and Jews were allowed to return to Rome. What may have happened then is, that during that period of roughly five years, the church would have continued to grow and would have continued to become a largely Gentile phenomenon.

And now with Jews coming back and finding the church has grown more and more and increasingly Gentile, that may account for some of these problems that Paul must now address as he writes the book of Romans. And again, in my mind, this may be one of the crucial purposes of the book of Romans. And it might explain why he spends so much time defending his gospel to demonstrate the Jew and Gentile are both equally God's true people.

So be able to recognize those three. Again, there may be a couple of other purposes, but I think all three of these purposes emerge from the book of Romans. There's no reason why Paul has to have only one purpose.

I mean, you think about it. Sometimes when you write letters, you don't always have just one reason you're writing. You might sit down to write a number of things.

So perhaps Paul was trying to do more than just one thing. And so at least these three seem to describe why Paul sat down and wrote the book of Romans. All right.

Any questions so far? Does anyone kind of understand of why Romans is written? Well, the next thing I want to talk about is more broadly kind of how we interpret Romans as a whole. But what I'm going to say also influences other books of Paul, especially Galatians. But Paul makes it clear numerous times in Romans, and I've given you key verses.

He makes statements such as, we are justified or saved by faith and not by works of the law. And so, I've given you two of the crucial passages in chapter three. In 3:21 and 3:22, he says, now apart from the law, and by law he's referring not to just any law or Roman law.

I take it he's referring to the law of Moses in the Old Testament. Apart from the law, apart from the law of Moses, the righteousness of God has been revealed, a righteousness of God through faith in Christ. So, notice how he contrasts righteousness.

He seems to be saying there's a righteousness of God that comes not through keeping the law, the law of Moses, but now a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. And so, notice what he says in chapter 3:28, a few verses later. For a person is justified by faith in Christ apart from works of the law.

And the question is, what did Paul mean by that statement? What did he mean that righteousness comes only by faith in Christ and not by works of the law? And why was Paul convinced that you could not be righteous by the law, but only by faith in Christ? Why was Paul so certain that keeping the law could not bring about salvation, but only faith in Jesus Christ? How do we explain this contrast between being justified or righteous by faith in Christ and not by works of the law? How you answer that question, again, to go back to our very beginning of talking about Romans, how you answer that question depends more than anything on how you've been raised and taught to read the book of Romans. The first person, let me see, one of the first persons to wrestle with this question at length that, and I shouldn't say necessarily the first person to wrestle with it, but probably the one that most of you owe a debt of gratitude to, is Martin Luther. And that's because Luther read this, Romans, and he said the way you understand that contrast is the problem, the problem with relying on the law is it is legalism.

That is trying to earn God's salvation by performing good works. So what Paul is speaking out against then, when he says you can't be justified or you can't be saved by keeping the law, but only by faith in Christ, Paul is responding to legalism. He's saying no one can be saved by performing good works.

You can't do it. You can't do enough work to earn and merit God's favor. So, the only option is to abandon good works and to solely trust in Jesus Christ, to have faith in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross and his resurrection for your salvation and your justification.

We'll talk more about the word justify or justification at a later time. But Luther was convinced that Paul was addressing the issue of legalism when he said you can't be saved by works of the law, but only by faith. That is, you can't earn God's favor.

You cannot be saved by performing good works, but only by giving that up and abandoning that and solely trusting in Jesus Christ. So how many of you have read Romans like that or that's what you think? There are a few of you, okay? If, again, if you do, you've been directly influenced by Martin Luther.

And more than anyone, his legacy of reading Romans has impacted the way we've been taught to read it today. Now, this is Martin Luther's view of Romans that Paul is combating legalism, again, the main reason the law can't justify is that no one can do it. We cannot earn God's favor.

The problem Paul is addressing is trying to earn God's favor by keeping the law. And you can't do that. No one can keep God's commands to the extent necessary.

No one can keep it perfectly. We all fall short. Therefore, the only recourse is to trust in Christ and his death and his work on the cross.

That view predominated until, actually, until the 20th century. When in the 1970s, a scholar named E.P. Sanders. All you need to know is the last name Sanders.

E.P. Sanders. So, this is, again, several hundred years later, Sanders comes along and he challenged Martin Luther's way of reading Romans. Obviously, Martin Luther wasn't there anymore to defend himself.

But he challenged Luther's way and said, no, Luther misunderstood Paul. Luther was reading his own situation back into Paul. And that is, if you remember, Luther was raised in a situation where he looked around his church and he thought that they had become so legalistic and relied on buying indulgences and this and that.

And he became increasingly frustrated with that and his inability. And it's through that that he was confronted afresh with this message of, you can see why when he would read the verse, you're not saved by works of the law, but faith in Christ. That he would equate that with his own situation.

No, we're not saved by the good works that we perform. We're not saved by trying to earn God's favor, but only by God's grace and through faith in Jesus Christ. But Sanders said, no, Luther and those who have followed him have not paid attention to the Old Testament and to the literature of Judaism.

Remember, we talked a little bit about some of the literature of Judaism, like the Mishnah, and we mentioned a few pieces of literature, the Talmud, etc. Well, he said, when you read the literature, the Jews in the first century and in the Old Testament were not legalistic. They did not think that they earned God's favor by obeying the law of Moses.

Sanders said, instead, they thought, every Jew would have thought that you're saved by God's grace. It was God who delivered and rescued you. It was an act of God's grace that he saved you.

Where the law came in is it was simply a way of expressing your obedience to God. Obeying the law didn't get you in. Only grace, God's grace, and faith got you in.

But what kept you there was obedience to the law. And hence the term gnomism. That is, gnomism is basically the works of the law that were a response to God's grace.

The works of the law just demonstrated how God's people were to live. Those who had been, we would say today, saved by grace, those who had experienced God's grace as God's people, the Jews then would express that and continue that through obedience to the law. Again, he called that gnomism.

Well, covenantal gnomism, but just remember the word gnomism. It forms a nicer parallel with legalism. So gnomism means that the law functioned to express how the Jews were to live as God's people.

And so, he said the only problem Paul had with the law then was not that it was legalistic. The only problem was that it wasn't Christian. Christ had already come.

So, he said with the coming of Christ, the law is no longer necessary to determine who are God's people. Basically, that was Sanders' suggestion. So, Paul is not speaking against these legalistic Jews who are trying to earn God's favor by keeping a list of rules and regulations.

They would have thought that they were saved by God's grace, and they would have kept the law as a means of remaining as God's people, of living out their lives as Jews. So, when Paul says you're not saved by works of the law, but by faith in Christ, basically what he's saying, now that Christ has come, the law doesn't really play a role any longer. That was Sanders.

Now there's one more piece to the puzzle. Another person came along named James Dunn, a British scholar. And he said Sanders was right that the Jews were not these cold, hard legalists that we've made them out to be.

All of them were trying to earn God's favor and thought that they could somehow do enough good works to please God and that that's what would save them. But instead, he said Sanders was right. The Jews thought that they were saved by God's grace.

And the law then was simply a means of maintaining that and expressing their identity as God's people. But what had Paul so upset? Well, Dunn's answer was the problem Paul was addressing was not legalism, a la Martin Luther, trying to earn God's favor. Neither was the problem just gnomism.

But he said the problem was nationalism. That is, the problem was by focusing on the law, the Jews were too closely tying the promises of salvation to being a Jew. In other words, the difficulty was Jews were excluding Gentiles by focusing on the law, by making the law a factor.

So that they weren't using the law to earn God's favor. They were using the law to basically exclude Gentiles and to show that the true people of God are those who are in the covenant with Moses, and they keep the Mosaic law. That's what identifies me as God's people.

So, if you don't obey the law of Moses, you're missing the main identity marker. You're missing the crucial feature that marks you out as God's people. So, the problem then was nationalism.

The promises of God, the promises of salvation were too closely linked with the law of Moses and with being a Jew. And Paul wants to remove that and open up the promises to include not just Jews but Gentiles as well. So, the problem is basically a national one, not legalistic as Luther thought.

Almost, in a sense, behind their back was a snook. I think I got it all wrong, but they aren't going to do it. You're right.

There's, although there probably, probably the church in Rome would have been both Jewish, there would have been both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, and that's very good thinking, I think you're thinking the right way, is what would this have said to, especially to non-Christian Jews, most likely Paul is addressing, would be addressing Christian Jews at this point, who belong to the church. And thanks for clarifying that.

And in fact, one interesting thing is most, we think, well, Jews all the way in Rome. But yes, this is something that scholars call the diaspora or the dispersion. Jews, there were strong Jewish communities in most of the cities that Paul addressed.

Even in Corinth, Paul tells us that in Corinth, in Corinthians, in Acts, we read about that. Most of these cities, including Rome, would have had sizable Jewish populations. So that's a very good question.

Most likely, Paul's addressing a church that is both Jew and Gentile. And the difficulty may be with Jews still wanting to cling to the Old Testament law as their identity marker, according to Dunn, and then wanting the Gentiles to follow suit and also keep the law of Moses. So again, this is what is often called the new perspective or new look on Paul, or Paul's kind of undergone an extreme makeover since the time of Martin Luther.

And now that he's seen as not, Paul is seen as not telling us that you need to stop trying to earn your salvation by doing as many good works as you can. Instead, the problem is a very different one, he's telling the Jews they need to stop excluding Gentiles by limiting the gospel to only those who observe the law. Another way of looking at it, especially Luther and the Sanders-Dunn, the new look, Sanders and Dunn are kind of the new look.

Actually, Dunn, I think, is the first one who used the word new perspective or new look on Paul. Another way of looking at it is this, is the problem, according to the old approach I'm basically suggesting Luther and the new approach is Sanders and Dunn. According to the old approach, the problem that Paul was addressing was the human inability to keep the law because of sin.

So, when Paul says you can't be justified by works of the law, why? According to Luther, because of sin, nobody can keep the law to the extent necessary. If you wanted to be saved by keeping the law, you'd have to keep it perfectly. Because of all sin, no one can do that.

Therefore, it's legalism to try to earn God's favor by keeping the law. And therefore, the only option is faith in Jesus Christ. So, the main problem was the human ability to keep the law because of sin.

According to the new perspective, the main problem is not human ability and sin. The main problem was Jewish exclusivism. That is, the Jews excluded Gentiles by too narrowly tying God's promises of salvation to the law of Moses, to being a Jew.

Therefore, excluding Gentiles. Another way to compare them is to see that they're both addressing different questions. According to Luther, he said the question Paul was addressing was, how is a sinner made right before a holy God? As a sinner who stands before a holy God, how am I made right? How can I enter into a relationship with a holy God? So, the focus is vertical.

Whereas under the new perspective with Dunne and Sanders, they say, no, that's not the main question Paul's answering. Paul instead is answering, how did Gentiles and Jews relate to each other? How did Gentiles become included in the people of God? Do they have to keep the law? Do they have to live life like a Jew? And finally, the focus is different. According to Luther, the focus was more individual.

Again, how do I as a sinner stand before a holy God? Whereas the new perspective is more communal. It's not about individuals relating to God. It's about Jews and Gentiles relating to each other.

What does it mean to belong to the true people of God? On what basis will Gentiles be included in the one people of God? Dunne saw basically two. James Dunne saw



the law mainly in terms of what he called identity badges or markers. That is the law was seen as especially the circumcision for males, especially Sabbath and food laws.

Those are the things that really marked out the Jews as God's people. It distinguished them from Gentiles. And so again, when Paul says no one can be saved by keeping the law, basically what he's saying is that salvation cannot be restricted by these identity markers.

Belonging to God's people is not just belonging to the Jewish nation and obeying the law. And identifying with these badges, these identity badges, such as circumcision and food laws, etc. But now it comes solely by faith in Jesus Christ.

So, if it's based on Jesus Christ, then Jews and Gentiles can now both equally be God's people. Good. So, do you see the differences between the two approaches? Again, one's very individualistic.

How do I stand before a holy God? Not by legalism, not by earning God's favor by doing good works, but only by faith in Christ. Whereas the other one says, no, no, the issue is who are the true people of God? How will Gentiles be accepted as God's people? Do they have to observe the law of Moses? Or can Gentiles become God's people? Can they be included even apart from the law of Moses? That's the problem that the New Perspective said Paul was addressing in Romans. So, I guess you wonder, well, who are we going to follow? A possible solution is, again, I wonder why we necessarily have to exclude either of them.

So, I'll be New Perspective and I'm not going to exclude. I'll include them both. So, on the one hand, I think the New Perspective is probably correct that Paul is addressing the issue of the Jew-Gentile relationship.

Jewish exclusivism is a problem. Forcing Gentiles to observe the law of Moses as a sign that they belong to the true people of God is an issue that Paul is addressing. So, I think we can agree with the New Perspective.

And certainly, we shouldn't portray every last Jew as some cold hard legalist in the New Testament. From that perspective, the New Perspective probably has gotten it right, as Paul is addressing the issue. Who are the true people of God? On what basis will Gentiles be included in God's people? Do they have to live lives as a Jew? Do they have to observe the law of Moses as an identity marker that marks them out and distinguishes them as God's people? However, in addressing this issue, this issue, in my opinion, is part of another issue.

This issue of who are the true people of God, on what basis will Gentiles belong to the people of God, when you start raising those questions, that's part of the other issue, what is required of salvation? Is faith in Jesus Christ enough, or must one rely

on the law of Moses? Or we might say any other work that would distinguish someone as God's people. How does one... So, how do Jews and Gentiles relate? What's required to belong to the people of God? What is required of Gentiles, if they belong to God's people, simply raises a larger issue. How does one stand before a holy God? So, I think, in this instance, Luther was right also.

So, I think the appropriate response and the appropriate way to read Romans, in my opinion, is to see both approaches, and both perspectives being addressed throughout the book of Romans. And so, we'll look at it that way and read it from that perspective. And this issue, again, will come up just as acutely in the book of Galatians.

All right, there are a few passages I want to look at in just a little bit more detail in Romans but have a good weekend and I will see you on Monday. Bye.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's New Testament History and Literature, lecture 14 on the New and Old Paul and an Introduction to the Book of Romans.