

SELF-DECEPTION AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

The New Perspective on Paul

The “new perspective” on Paul (NPP) is the name given to a revolution (dare I say a “reformation”?) in studies of the genuine epistles of Paul.¹ Although this movement is definitely not monolithic, I want to focus on the core of the position that is shared by virtually all of its proponents.² One enters the covenant relationship (or is justified before God) by grace through faith, but the faith that justifies requires good deeds to maintain the covenant status. Paul is not addressing how a sinner stands before the holy God, but how gentiles can be included within the covenant on the basis of faith in Christ rather than by works of the Law of Moses.

As E. P. Sanders stated: “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. . . . Obedience maintains one’s position in the covenant, but it does not earn God’s grace as such. . . . Righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect.”³