

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

### **Episode 394**

### **Saved by Grace or Judged According to Works?**

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**Guest: Dr. Kent Yinger (KY)**

### **Episode Summary**

Since the time of the Protestant Reformation, interpreters of Paul's writings have struggled to resolve the tension of the apostle's statements that we are saved by grace solely through faith (Eph 2:8-9) and also "to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Rom 2:7). If we do not receive eternal life, Paul asserts "there will be wrath and fury" (Rom 2:8). How are these ideas to be resolved? Is Paul self-contradictory or confused? We investigate these questions, especially the idea of the righteous and unrighteous being judged "according to deeds" in Paul's theology, with Dr. Kent Yinger, whose dissertation (later published by Cambridge University Press) focused on the problem.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 394: Saved by Grace or Judged According to Works, with Dr. Kent Yinger. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you feeling?

**MH:** Well, I'm in a non-chemo week. So I feel pretty good, except when I look at the Naked Bible Fantasy Football league. And then that makes me feel a little bit worse.

**TS:** Yeah. Me too, Mike. I lost by less than a point.

**MH:** Well, I'm 0-3. And in last place. [laughs] So...

**TS:** Yeah. We're both at the bottom. It's not...

**MH:** [laughs] We're both pretty pathetic, aren't we? [laughs]

**TS:** Yeah, yeah. I don't even want to talk about it, Mike. I'm probably siding with the listeners. I'm over it. I'm over Fantasy Football.

**MH:** [laughs] It only took three weeks to beat it out of you. [laughs]

**TS:** I'm done. Nah, I'm just kidding. I'll never be done. I'm going on 26 years, and I want to do at least another 26. So...

**MH:** Oh man. It's just brutal.

**TS:** Yeah, but other than that, everything's good? No new updates? You're just status quo?

**MH:** Yeah, I think we've sort of got the routine down. When I go in for chemo (it's every other week) I go in on a Wednesday. I get unhooked on a Friday. And then Saturday and Sunday I'm still kind of getting hammered by it. So I've got five days of misery followed by nine days of significantly less misery. I mean, I'm not normal. But it's certainly tolerable. So I think that's the way it's just going to roll.

**TS:** Yeah, I hear you. Well, do you know how many cycles you have to go through?

**MH:** No. The plan is... And we haven't put this out in an update yet, so this is a good place to do it. But the plan is after the third one, which is imminent, they are going to do another CAT scan of me so that they can see if (and to what extent and in what way) the tumor is responding. And at that point they'll loop in the surgeon, just so we have a surgical person that can see the before and after. And then they'll say, "Oh, it looks like you're going to need three more weeks," or "five more cycles," or whatever. You know, nobody really knows until we see what the response is, and then we just sort of go from there.

**TS:** Still, continued prayers, as always. Well, Mike, today we're talking about something we've already talked about before. I know I've referenced the podcast that you've done about grace versus works, and salvation and all that good stuff. So I take it you found somebody that wrote a book.

**MH:** Yeah, I did. It's an older book, as listeners will find out when we bring our guest on. The book was actually published in 1999. But it's what we look for: lots of primary source material that situates the New Testament (in this case, Paul specifically) in the context of Second Temple Jewish thought when it comes to affirming salvation isn't something merited or owed by God to us (to believers). Nevertheless, even though it's by his grace, God judges according to works. Like, how do we put those two things together?

And so our guest has written specifically a book on this. It was his dissertation way back in the '90s. And I think this will be a really good discussion. Because this is a question that's not going to go away. We get it in Q&A, as you alluded to, and just in general discussion. So I think this will be a good episode to orient people to not only the discussion, but a good resource for the whole question.

Well, we are excited to have Kent Yinger with us. Kent is a New Testament scholar. I'm going to let him introduce himself. This is typically what we do, Kent, when we have guests on. If you could just tell us a little bit about who you are, where you went to school, what your doctoral work was, what you taught. I know you're retired now, so where you taught. Just enough to get the audience acquainted with you, give them a feel for who you are and what you really enjoy as far as your academic points of expertise.

5:00

**KY:** Great; thanks, Mike. Great to be with you here and with your listeners, as well. I grew up in the Midwest, in Kansas. I did my studies at Wheaton and Gordon Conwell Seminary, and then Sheffield University in England. We spent about 15 years working as missionaries in Germany, then came back and I taught for a little while at Fuller and then worked there as well. And then we moved up to Portland in 2001, where I began to teach for Portland Seminary (it used to be called George Fox Evangelical Seminary) and taught there for 13 or 14 years and retired about seven years ago. I have a wife I've been married to for over 40 years. We have three grown children, five grandchildren. Still live in Portland. And I love to golf. Anyway, that's a little of who I am.

**MH:** What I want to do to start off this topic is, sometimes people can't really tell what the episode's going to be about—what the discussion's going to be about—by virtue of the title. And we really want to have the discussion revolve around your book, which is the publication of your dissertation. And the published book was titled *Paul, Judaism and Judgment According to Deeds*, and that was published in the *Society for New Testament Studies* (the Monograph Series) number 105, by Cambridge University Press in 1999. So this is an older book. But just trust me, it has not lost (and will not lose) its relevance. Because the book is about, how do we handle Paul's statement—his assertions? And they're clear that we are saved by grace through faith. And then you flip the page in any given Pauline letter, it seems, and he's talking about being judged according to deeds. And we often get questions like this. I get them in email. We've done almost 50 Q&As by this point, and this will pop up now and again. So what I'm going to do (to acquaint the audience with where you're going and then we'll just jump into it) is I'm going to read a little bit from the intro (page 1 of your book) and then I also have the dissertation in front of me, and I'm going to read a little bit from the dissertation, as far as the abstract. And I think this will orient readers. So in his book Kent wrote this, to begin:

Particularly since the Protestant Reformation, interpreters of Paul have pondered over the meaning of judgment according to deeds in the light of justification by faith alone. According to Romans 2: 6-11 [MH: especially verse 7] God will repay with eternal life those who do good, yet in Romans 3:28 "a person is justified by faith apart from works." Yet in spite of the immense effort expended by scholars

to resolve this puzzle, no consensus or even large-scale agreement on how to relate the two elements in Paul's thought has been reached.

So that's from page 1 of the book. And the dissertation (which, for those in the audience who have access to things like ProQuest Dissertation Database, which I realize is a minority of this audience, you could get this)... But I highly recommend the book in its place, because as Kent points out in the prefatory material, this is a revision. And having looked at both, just trust me, books that get careful revision and editing often sound better than dissertations. Dissertations read a particular way. So I want to promote the book. It's not something you have to go to the bank and get a loan for, you know? [laughs] Oftentimes the books we recommend here are super expensive. But this is not. This is going to be affordable, and I highly recommend it. But in the dissertation Kent writes:

Paul's use of the motif of "judgment according to deeds" corresponds terminologically, rhetorically, and theologically with its use in second temple Judaism. In order to demonstrate this thesis, the author examines the tradition history of the motif in the Jewish Scriptures [MH: i.e., the Hebrew Bible], the OT Pseudepigrapha, and the Qumran literature. By the beginning of the common era [MH: that's the first century A.D.] "judgment according to deeds" is a widespread, fundamental theological axiom, applicable to a variety of rhetorical purposes. The motif has an important soteriological function within what is now commonly termed Jewish "covenantal nomism"...

10:00

And for our audience, the definition of that is... And Kent brings this into the discussion a little bit later. But he notes that what the term means is:

Salvation is not earned by human initiative or merits, but it is granted freely by God's election and the giving of the covenant. One "gets in" by grace. Within this covenantal relationship, however, obedience to God's will (the Law) is required.

Now that's a quote from page 3 of the book, and he's following E.P. Sanders there. My audience knows that I would adjust and pick at some of the wording that Sanders uses there. And we might get to that toward the end of the episode. But what Kent is saying here is that it's very important to realize that Judaism itself, in this period between the testaments, if you're reading your Scriptures (the word of God, the Hebrew Bible) with any sort of (I hate to say it) intelligence, you're going to *know* that you're not meriting salvation as a Jew. That is not *why* you are saved. You don't earn it. So that part Paul obviously is very consistent with. And in the dissertation abstract, Kent goes on and says:

This judgment [MH: that this is consistent with covenantal nomism—the Judaism of the Intertestamental period] does not entail a one-for-one recompense of

good or evil deeds [MH: so when the discussion shifts to judgment according to works], [it] views works wholistically [MH: the idea is that your heart is revealed in this judgment]... One's deeds do not earn or merit God's grace and salvation; nevertheless, one's recompense—the blessings or the curses of the covenant—will be congruent with ("according to") this pattern of behavior [MH: whatever the pattern of your heart is]...

And so this is where Kent is going in the book. He's going to recognize, "Yes, we have a situation where, like Paul, Jews before him in the Intertestamental period understood that salvation was not by works." Now right away that might not sound correct to a lot of listeners because we're used to thinking of Jews in that way. But that's not the case, and we're going to talk about that today. And then on the flip side of the coin, where there is a discussion in the Intertestamental period and in Paul about judgment according to deeds, it's not about meriting salvation. We should be over that hump already. It's about God's response to the pattern of a person's heart—where they're at. The pattern of their heart will tell you if they believe or not.

And so with that little bit of an introduction, Kent, let's just jump in here. Because this is the whole faith-and-works discussion. I think our listeners can tell right off the bat here that this is where we're going. And again, we often get questions about this. And as Bible students, you run into these passages and you don't know what to do with them. Why does Paul seem to contradict himself? Well, he's not, as we're going to talk about.

So my first question, to loop you back in here, is obviously scholars have noted this for a very long time. Anybody who's a Bible student has run into both sides of this. So let's start with scholars. How have scholars tried to reconcile these two ideas in the past? I mean, before you did your dissertation and wrote the book, what was the discussion like in scholarly circles? How did they try to cope with this?

**KY:** Yeah, it really hasn't changed a whole lot since 1999 when the book came out. There are some scholars who would say these two poles can't be reconciled. They would say Paul was simply inconsistent. One thinks of the Finnish scholar, Heikki Räusänen. My own response to this (and how most people actually respond to Räusänen's suggestion) is that while it's not impossible, of course, (theoretically) that Paul could've been an inconsistent, incoherent thinker, this should be for most of us a solution of last resort [MH laughs] after trying everything else. Because Paul doesn't seem like an incoherent thinker when you read his letters. He seems fairly careful and knowledgeable about what he's talking about. It's not like he says, "You're saved by faith," and then he turns the page and sort of forgets that he just said that, and says, "Oh, yeah..."

15:00

**MH:** He's going to reference the Hebrew Bible on both sides.

**KY:** Yeah. And so while it's not theoretically impossible that Paul was incoherent, I would think a person would want to go there as a very last resort. So those that continue to try to resolve this puzzle (probably the majority, at least of evangelical folks) would say that justification by faith without regard for one's works must have priority. This is how they resolve it, by giving priority to one side of the polarity. And one thinks of Martin Luther here; there have been a lot of authors since. There's a fellow, Barry Smith, that wrote a couple of books in the early 2000s (*What Must I Do To Be Saved?* and so on), and they represent what one could call monergism, or God's action in salvation has absolute and sole priority. He does it all. And so judgment according to deeds (that is, where our activity comes into view) is not for determining salvation or justification. That's by faith alone. But that judgment is for something else. And a lot of folks would say, "Well, it's just for rewards. It's kind of for the cherry on top. You're going to get in no matter what, but whether you're going to have two crowns or five crowns or they'll be gold or silver or what, that depends on how well you live. But it doesn't have to do with whether you get in." Others would, because... This creates another judgment—a reward judgment—which is problematic because you don't really find it clearly in the Bible. [MH laughs] Some would say, "Well, it's not for rewards. The judgment according to deeds is a sort of secondary confirmation of one's justification by faith. It can't endanger or overturn that verdict by faith. But it just sort of gives a secondary confirmation, and it may or may not be entirely in line with what one would hope for." So this is a little squishy, I know. [MH laughs] But...

**MH:** Well, what strikes me about it is that, okay, yeah, there's a couple of passages where Paul talks about our works; and wood, hay, and stubble; and rewards. But to sort of glom onto that as though the other side doesn't exist, you know (in other words, a negative judgment), I don't know how you're doing that. [laughs] Because there's a lot of that kind of talk.

**KY:** There really is. There really is. So those are the folks that would give justification by faith apart from works priority. Absolute priority. There are a few (recently, particularly) who suggest the opposite—that judgment according to deeds has priority. That is, human behavior has priority in determining salvation. This is in some ways a reflection of what we used to think Judaism taught, and what Luther thought the Roman Catholic Church taught. So that people are saved, then, by obedience and not by faith alone. And you can think of a few scholars [inaudible]. Chris VanLandingham has written an influential book recently where, at least as I read it, he seems to be suggesting this. And there are others as well. And what they're doing is saying, "Look. The place of obedience in Paul's thought is a lot more important and determinative than the Lutheran side has given it credit for." And so they, in my view, have kind of flopped over to the other side pretty far, and are representing that.

**MH:** Yeah. For our audience, the key word here is “determinative.” Like, in other words, there’s a cause-and-effect relationship. So I don’t want people to miss that. But go ahead.

20:00

**KY:** Absolutely right. Good clarification. And then lastly, there are some, like myself, who suggest that Paul saw no conflict or tension between these two poles. I mean, everything we’ve said thus far sort of assumes that Paul felt a tension whenever he said these two things (saved by faith; you’re judged according to works). And my book started from the premise that I couldn’t find any tension in Paul. He seems to be able to say these two things with no sense that there’s a conflict in what he’s saying. I mean, let’s just read one passage where that comes out (I think) very clearly. And this is 2 Corinthians 5. And I’m reading from the New Revised Standard.

**We are always confident, even though we know that while we’re home in the body, we’re away from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight.**

Now here clearly, Paul has his “living by faith” in view. Yes, we do have confidence. So this is matter of real confidence, now and forever. And we would rather be away from the body and at home in the Lord. He’s even thinking of the future and the afterlife.

**So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.**

And it’s like all of a sudden, he moves immediately to how we live.

**...we make it our aim to please him. For [KY: why do we do that?] all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body [KY: our bodily lives, how we act], whether good or evil.**

And this is this judgment. It’s not... It seems to me, Paul says this. He doesn’t say, “Now wait a minute; don’t misunderstand me,” which is what we—our normal theology—would feel the need to insert. And Paul never feels that need. And so that puzzled me. And that really was the impetus for studying the thing. Why *didn’t* it puzzle Paul? [laughter]

**MH:** “Why didn’t Paul have this question about Paul like we do?” [laughter]

**KY:** And you know, the funny thing was that the more I studied the Old Testament and intertestamental literature, I found they didn’t have any difficulty, either. And so I suddenly thought, “Well gee, maybe Paul thought like they did.” And if we could understand them better, we might understand him better.

**MH:** Yeah. You know, this is why (and my audience is used to this)... We did a whole series on Hebrews. And you hit it in Colossians. We did a series on that, too. But whenever I get this question, the first thing I do is I inject “merit” into it. This idea that, “Oh, well, so you’re thinking (or you’re thinking somebody else is thinking) that salvation is deserved.” When you start using words like “merit” and “deserved” when we get into this abstract “faith and works” thing, typically people are going to recoil at that. Because it just sounds so icky (theologically icky), like God is in our debt. And they’re going to deny that. “No, no, no, that’s not what I’m talking about.” Well, then what *are* you talking about? I think it’s a good way to help people examine why they’re using the wording they’re using, and what they mean and don’t mean by the vocabulary.

**KY:** That’s right. That’s a good...

**MH:** I mean, I have had this sense for a long time, just like you articulated in the Old Testament... I mean, what Israelite who was literate and could actually read the Torah and sort of knew the heritage of what’s going on there... I mean, show me the Israelite that would think that God owes them something. [laughs]

**KY:** That’s right. That’s right.

**MH:** And it’s just so empty. Well, if that’s not what’s in view, then maybe this language about obedience, maybe we need to think about it differently and use different words so that we can get at what is meant and what is not meant. So yeah, again, I’m having you on the show because when I read this, it’s like, yeah, you know, this is really wrong-headed to think of Old Testament Judaism as being some kind of “works salvation” thing, as though God now owes us something. We’ve put it by virtue of the way we behave, now we’ve put him in our debt. Well, that’s just absurd.

**KY:** Absolutely. I think every Jew in the ancient world would have agreed entirely with you.

**MH:** Yeah. So I had that sense early on and it’s been really helpful to me when we get to talking about these things. Since we’re flirting here with the Old Testament, so you’re very clear: the Old Testament doesn’t teach salvation by works. But let’s say you have somebody in the audience or somebody in your class... I’m sure you had students in your class say, “Well, it sure looks that way to me, Dr. Yinger. Look at this verse (or whatever). What about obedience to Torah? It looks like they were saved by their measure of obedience.” How would you go about answering that?

25:00

**KY:** Yeah. I mean, it’s a huge subject. I don’t know if we can completely get into it here. I mean, those that feel that way, they’re obviously right that the Old Testament is interested in how people behave (how they obey, how *well* they



behave, how often, how fully they obey). And there's a lot of talk about commandments and keeping the commandments and so on. So that's all there. Nobody needs to deny that. The question becomes, "So why did *they* think they were doing these things?"

**MH:** Yeah, "What's the point?" [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah. And at least for Protestants, we assume they did it because they wanted to get on God's good side. They wanted him to smile on them, to be happy with them. And the way they would do that (so it's argued) was by doing what he wanted. So God is kind of skeptical, and if you do enough—if you please him enough—then maybe he will be happy with you and he'll let you in at the end. And that's kind of a simple way of painting the picture. And most of us in the biblical studies guild would say, "Well, that really misses what's going on there"—that most Israelites thought God was already happy with them. He had called this slave nation out of Egypt, not because they were worth anything. They were one of the least of all peoples in the ancient world. And yet he set his love upon them. This is what grace and election are all about.

**MH:** Deuteronomy 7.

**KY:** Exactly. And so they thought God was already happy. Well, then, why do you do anything? Well, the same reason: in any relationship, you do things to please your partner because you love them. And this was exactly how Israel's situation worked. Why were you to keep the Law? Because you love God, and God loves you. And this is how the relationship is set up. So it's not to earn anything. But at the same time, that obedience is important. You know, you think of a marriage, and a husband who says "I love you" and then cheats on his wife and spends all the money and doesn't have anything for the kids' clothing. You think, "Well, wait a minute. This isn't going to work." Well, it's not going to work between the people of God and their God, the same way.

**MH:** Yeah, you know, and this creeps into what... (I'll use the term "evangelical" even though I don't know that it really fits.) But I'm sure you're familiar with messianic Christianity or Jewish believers in Jesus. And there's a full spectrum there. We recently had Seth Postell on the podcast, who does a really good job of navigating the Christian and the Law. But there are some that will (I don't even know what the right word is) retroject or take this assumption... I don't know if I can come up with a single word. But they'll take this assumption about merit and earning and wanting God to be happy with them, and as Jewish believers in Jesus (or a particular messianic congregation), this will actually become part of their identity. You know? "Well, look at those believers over there. They don't observe Torah calendar. They don't do this Torah, that Torah, everywhere there's a Torah." And the question always becomes, "Well, what do they lose by that?"

What's the harm?" There are some that will traverse into this territory, even though you and I would agree, Judaism didn't. [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah.

30:00

**MH:** You know? But it's almost like this is sprinkled... This reformed notion... [laughs] This is going to sound really odd. This reformed notion of what Jews were thinking gets sprinkled on to messianic Judaism. It's just really odd. But you'll see it sort of crop its head up there. And I think maybe one of the reasons is because... Dare I say that Judaism now, I think, can over-read their own Bible and sort of drift off into this direction? And they really don't have a full grasp of Old Testament theology. I mean, that sounds audacious to say, that rabbinic Christianity or modern Judaism has sort of missed the boat with biblical theology. But I'll say that. Because if this is the track you're on, that we're making God happy with us as opposed to anybody else (these Gentiles or whatever), then you've really missed what's going on in the Hebrew Bible. And I think since we tend to jump from the Old Testament to the rabbis, we can fall into that. And what your book does a great job of is convincing people, "No, you shouldn't just jump to the rabbis. What we need to look at is the Judaism that Paul would've been familiar with—the Judaism that preceded his own era that he would've been very familiar with the writings and the studies—the literature of what we call the Intertestamental period or the Second Temple period." So this raises the question, "Okay, if you don't think that the Hebrew Bible taught salvation by works or merit, what about Second Temple Judaism? Did something change so that Paul had this in his head? Or is that a misreading?"

**KY:** I think it's a misreading. And most who've studied the Second Temple literature would agree, as well, that it continued (with some variety now), but it basically continued this covenantal view of the relationship between God and Israel, and of the way that Israel's allegiance (faith and trust in their God) cohered with their way of life and their obedience to his commandments.

**MH:** And again, the covenantal idea, if I can play the part of God here... God would look at an Israelite and say, "You do realize, don't you, that you didn't merit the covenant? You didn't merit inclusion in the covenant. You're in a covenant. There *is* a covenant because *I* decided that there would be one. And I loved you." So there we go.

**KY:** Yeah, in fact, for Second Temple Jews, I think the temptation lay more on the other side. That is, we think the temptation was to view oneself as meritorious—as having earned something. Because that was Luther's struggle, and we've inherited that and it's in our bloodstream. But on the other side, Jews' temptation was to think that they were somehow better, that is, that they were the favored ones. And this is what Paul struggles with much more than issues of merit. So you read in Romans, what he's really concerned about, "Do we have an

advantage over the Gentiles?” That’s really where... And that’s what a lot of Second Temple literature is doing. They are trying to figure out, if you will, “How does Israel’s privilege work itself out without becoming pride and haughtiness?”

**MH:** Mm hmm. Yeah. Just to telegraph, we may loop back to that... But you know, it works its way out if we think of the Abrahamic covenant. [laughs] You know?

**KY:** Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

**MH:** “The whole reason you people *exist* is because God wanted a new *adam*, a new people, and he goes about supernaturally intervening in the lives (and really the bodies) of Abraham and Sarah so that you would exist. And he disinherits humanity at the Babel event. But that’s not intended to be a permanent thing. Because as soon as he calls Abram and Sarah and enables them to have a child (and that’s where Israel’s going to come from), he makes a covenant that includes the nations.” You know? And the whole “kingdom of priests” idea. “Oh, gosh, what do priests do?” Well, one of the things they do is they’re mediators. [laughs] You know? It just seems like it shouldn’t have gone unnoticed.

**KY:** Yeah.

**MH:** But I agree with you. I do see that when Paul gets in the conversations with Jews in his writings, it’s hard to miss that. I mean, that pops up a lot—this sort of assumption of superiority or the assumption that “since we’re the elect, you’re not.” And that’s, like, your destiny. [sigh]

**KY:** Yeah. Well, and for Paul, of course, the big challenge was that there were some in the early Jesus movement that thought that you had to become Jewish in order to get in or to please God. And so this was Paul’s struggle. Well, no you don’t. “If you’re a Gentile, can you *remain* a Gentile (a non-Jew) and still be okay?” And he said “yes” and some said “no.”

**MH:** Mm hmm. Can you give us an example of... This audience will be familiar with the book of Enoch and Jubilees at least, and of course wider, the Dead Sea Scrolls (maybe not with particular scrolls). But can you give us maybe one or two examples in Second Temple literature where it’s pretty clear that they’re not thinking about salvation in terms of their own merit?

35:00

**KY:** Yeah, I was looking at the hymns in the Qumran scrolls—the thanksgiving hymns (1QH is kind of the technical designation). And in column 9, you find the psalmist saying, “Thy loving keeping is for the saving of my soul,” that is, clearly not attributing it to his own efforts. It’s God’s loving keeping that leads to the saving of his soul. “Over my steps is abundance of pardon, and when thou judgest me, greatness of mercy.” I mean, here’s... I mean, you can imagine

Luther or Paul saying this from a full heart. But then you go to column 6, just a little bit earlier, and he said, “I knew there was hope for them that are converted from rebellion and that abandoned sin.”

**MH:** Yes. There you have both sides of the coin, yes.

**KY:** And he got both of it, right there. Anyway, this wedding of divine mercy and the demand or expectation of human allegiance, I think, you find throughout this literature. And it’s not a big issue for them, just like we wouldn’t make a big issue of a husband and wife loving and caring for one another and being kind to one another. Sort of, “Well, this is kind of how it works.”

**MH:** Mm hmm. Now you’ve said a couple times already... You’ve used the “D” word: determination. You’ve pointed out that judgment according to works need not (and really *should* not) be understood as some sort of determination of salvation. That that isn’t the “why” of the judgment. “Well, we’ve got to figure out if you deserve it or not.” You know? So if the judgment of works isn’t the basis of salvation for the believer, what is? And what does the judgment accomplish? How would you think about that?

**KY:** Well, I think for Paul, clearly what *is* the basis is Christ.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**KY:** For Paul, Christ has become the end-all of his theology. In a way it’s changed everything. But we have to be careful when we say that. It doesn’t mean that it overturned everything he previously thought. What it did is it gave him a new lens through which to view all of that. So I think Paul’s theology in many ways is fully in line with Second Temple Jewish theology, except for the coming of messiah and the place of messiah within the overall working of God’s plan for the nations and for Israel.

**MH:** You know, for our audience, think of it this way. We’ve spent a good 15, 20 minutes here talking about how the basis of salvation in the Hebrew Bible (and Second Temple Jewish writers understood this) was mercy—the mercy of God, the grace of God. Okay? It’s God’s decision to offer salvation and have this covenantal relationship. So there is, if you will, a grace or a mercy slot or component to this. And it’s really the only component when it comes to salvation. But there’s this aspect of one’s relationship to God that is mercy and grace. So Paul believes that. As a Jew he believes that already. But what he does is in the mercy slot... He’ll substitute or swap in... The mercy component is Jesus, and that’s the fundamental difference. That’s how he defines or he comes to define and wants his Jewish audience to see that component—to see that slot filled, not by merely the fact that a covenantal relationship exists, but here we have this one, Jesus of Nazareth, who came to fulfill the Law, who came to be the second

Moses, who came... You know, all these things that Paul talks about. That now he is the orienting point for understanding the grace of God, the basis of salvation. Do you think that's a reasonable summary of the relationship between the two?

40:00

**KY:** Yeah, in some ways. It seems to me, Paul still thinks that we (Jews) need to listen to God, follow God, love God, and keep the Law. But once God has spoken in Christ (has sent messiah) and has revealed his will in him (which is really little different than the will he already revealed in the Torah) then one cannot say "I love God and I seek to orient my life towards him" if one at the same time rejects what God has just said.

**MH:** Sure.

**KY:** And so I think for Paul, this is really the crucial point. And this is why he's so insistent in Romans 9-11 and other places, that Christ is the end of the Law. Not that the Law comes to an end or has no longer any role, but that Christ...

**MH:** It's the destination point.

**KY:** Yeah, he's the determinative point. He's the crucial issue now.

**MH:** Yeah. I would agree. These things, to me (and I think to a lot of people in this audience) are going to be somewhat transparent. But there are going to be a lot of people who listen to this who need to hear the discussion. And to me, the discussion is important because of consistency—consistency across the testaments, as far as "what must I do to be saved?" Well, you need to trust God. You need to believe the things he tells you. And it doesn't stop there. You don't say, "Well, I love you, now I'm going to go over to Bel." [laughs] You know? For me personally, this sort of came to a head in my mind when I realized how incoherent it was to think that... See I'm one of these people that thinks Old Testament election has been fundamentally misunderstood. Because you have this notion that, "Well, Israelites were elect, so therefore they're guaranteed eternal life." Really? Like, we had this thing called the Exile. [laughter] You know? We don't have Baal worshipers in heaven. I'm sorry. You know? Just because they had a status or an opportunity... They had access to the true God. I like to use the word "access" a lot. They had access to the truth where others did not. They still need to embrace it and they need to reject all of its competitors. They need to reject other gods. They need to reject what the other gods promise or what they command or whatever. There's an aspect of exclusivity to the relationship that is illustrated by how we obey. It's illustrated by what we do—by virtue of what we do. This is where we're at. This is what we believe. This is who we're aligned with. This is so you can tell. [laughs]

**KY:** That's right.

**MH:** I don't know what it was that sort of sparked that in my head years ago, but just the awful incongruence of talking about election as though it were some guarantee when it comes to Old Testament Israel here. And I would say just across the board we shouldn't be thinking of election in terms of a guarantee. I think there's a better way to talk about it.

**KY:** Yeah, absolutely.

**MH:** You know, that honors this whole idea that we've been trying to articulate here. But when I realized that, "Well, if it means a guarantee, you've got Baal worshipers in heaven; you've got Ashtoreth worshipers. I wonder how that works." Because it's like, "Well, I'm in because I'm an Israelite. Look, I have the DNA," or something. You know? [laughs] "Ethnically that's where I'm at, so I have to be in, because we're elect." No, no, no, no, no. You never see any of that kind of thinking affirmed. And so I think because we haven't really thought sufficiently about something as obvious as the Exile... Like, who wants to study the Exile? "That's just awful. Doesn't make me feel good." [laughs] You know?

**KY:** Yeah.

**MH:** We just sort of bypass this. We miss it. So what in your mind is the judgment about? What does it accomplish? If we were sitting down here with Paul and with Jews that had preceded him, who's getting judged by works, broadly speaking? And why? What's God's logic? What's the scriptural logic behind it?

**KY:** Well, I think Paul, like all Second Temple Jews, was clear. He says this in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must *all* stand before the judgment..." So I think Paul is universal here. He sees this as a universal judgment that issues in either salvation or damnation (to put it in simple terms). What it does is to reveal publicly the character or the faithfulness of God's people, leading either to praise or to shame.

**MH:** It telegraphs where they were at.

**KY:** Yeah. In other words, during your life, the way you behave normally reveals what's in your heart: who you love, what you value. Do you care about God, or don't you care about God? Well, how you live reveals that. Now, not perfectly. We all go astray. We may even have seasons of what you could call "weakness," where we don't do what we in our deepest heart think is right. But at some point, we come back. We return. We repent. And that pattern of one's life is what will be publicly revealed at this judgment so that it's not like God sets up and he opens his book. He says, "Okay, on this day you did this, and you get a checkmark," or "you get a bad mark," or whatever. This is sort of what I call anachronistic.

**MH:** If somebody asks, he's got that information, though. [laughs]

45:00

**KY:** [laughs] Well, yeah, I think God knows all. But I don't think that's how it works. [laughter] I think the judgment is a picture—a metaphor—that one's way of life... This is why the psalmists talk about "judge me according to my way," that is, "What's my pattern of life?"

**MH:** Can you walk us through Romans 2? You mentioned Romans 2 before. And just read the text and just sort of annotate it for us in light of this discussion.

**KY:** Yeah, I mean, Romans 2 is just such an astounding text of Scripture, where Paul's trying to lay out his gospel to the Jew first and also to the Greek. But that raises the question, "Well, is there an advantage to being Jewish? Do you have to become Jewish to get in?" So on. So he's wrestling with all of these questions of his gospel. And he gets into chapter 2. And rather than giving a thorough exegesis of everything, let's just start at verse 6.

**<sup>6</sup> For he will repay according to each one's deeds: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;**

Now that's an astounding statement for the apostle of grace. "He will give eternal life to those who do good." Wow.

**<sup>8</sup> while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.**

So here we've got the traditional "two ways" theology. There's the way of glory; that is the way of obedience. There's the way of shame, which is the way of disobedience. He then flips it and kind of goes back through the same material.

**<sup>9</sup> There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil,**

but he adds something now,

**the Jew first and also the Greek,**

So now he brings in this relationship of Jew and Gentile into the equation.

**<sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.**

Now traditionally, Protestant theology at least has argued that Paul is in many ways speaking hypothetically here. He doesn't really believe, we would say, that if you do good, you will get eternal life. He thinks that's by faith alone by grace alone. Here we're back to these discussions of where's the priority and so on.

**MH:** Yeah, and words like “get.” This deterministic language, yeah.

**KY:** But I more and more have been... I've felt for a long time that Paul means every line here, and he means it as a Christian apostle in Christ. He still holds these truths—these axioms—deep in his heart. And he really believes that you must patiently do good and seek for glory and honor and immortality if you would be one of those who enjoys eternal life. In any case, the question becomes, “Well, if that’s true, then don’t Jews have an immense advantage?” Because they have the Law telling them what *is* good. Whereas the Gentiles are just lost in the dark. They don’t have a clue as to what the God of the universe wants. Well, Paul answers that in verses 12-16.

**<sup>12</sup> All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law,**

So these are the Gentiles.

**and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.**

So they each kind of have their own standards.

**<sup>13</sup> For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight [KY: that is, the Jewish people being righteous just because they have it], but the doers of the law who will be justified.**

And this phrase has occasioned no end of articles and books and so on. What in the world can the apostle of faith and grace mean by saying, “The doers of the law will be justified?” In any case, I think he meant it.

50:00

**<sup>14</sup> When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves.**

Is there some kind of a universal sense of right and wrong, to put it simply?

**<sup>15</sup> They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them <sup>16</sup> on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.**

So again, we have this universal judgment of everybody brought in here.

**MH:** Yeah. We also have the reference to the gospel through Jesus Christ in that last line. You know, it’s passages like this where I think the warning passages in the book of Hebrews are really instructive, as they offer us a means to compare



Scripture with Scripture and sort of, I think, give us some direction on how... I agree that Paul believed this. But what did he exactly believe? *How* did he believe it? You know? If you look at Hebrews, he consistently defines *conduct* (like going astray or warnings to not go astray and to not quit) with belief. In other words, if I could put it this way, the “works” talk is really another way of saying “stay in the faith.” We’ll loop Paul in here. “Be loyal to my gospel through Jesus Christ. And if you are, you will live a certain way. You will not go off into disobedience. You’ll not rebel. Your heart will be known. Your heart will be known by the way you conduct yourself if you stay in the faith.” Nobody practices allegiance unless they believe something. I mean, allegiance doesn’t just happen in a vacuum. There’s a lot of talk... And I really appreciate Bates’ work here on the gospel and allegiance. Way back in 2015 (or a few years before Bates wrote his book), I picked the phrase “believing loyalty” in *Unseen Realm*. And when that came out... I mean, the book’s not about that. It was just a chapter or two discussing this. But it’s really been helpful. Because I will be allegiant unto death. And I may stumble, but at the end of the day I’m not changing course. I’m not choosing another god or another gospel or no gospel at all. I’m choosing *this* gospel, as imperfect as I am, and in some cases, as rebellious as I am. But I am *not* trading the exclusivity of this for anything else, because I believe this is the only means of salvation. And that is going to orient what I do as far as works. It’s going to demonstrate—illustrate... You actually have a really nice quote to this effect in your... It’s the final line of your abstract in the dissertation. You have here:

[O]ne's works reveal what is hidden in the heart [MH: there’s your public display that you were just talking about], either loyalty or disloyalty to God and his covenant [MH: and again, I like the “loyalty” language]. Salvation by covenant mercy and judgment according to works are complementary.

You know, you’re going to be loyal if you believe in this particular thing, i.e., the gospel. That’s what you’re loyal to. That’s *why* you’re loyal. And that’s *why* your conduct is important. Because it shows if you’re a poser or if you’re real. [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah, absolutely.

**MH:** It’s not just lip service anymore. You *must have*... It goes back to the old things that, “works are essential to salvation but they are not the meritorious cause,” which is a nice ditty, and I think it’s really helpful, but that’s essentially where you’re landing here in that statement in your dissertation abstract. I really like the way you put it at the end of that. So you can’t just throw away the conduct part. You can’t do that because then we can’t validate your claim of being loyal to the gospel. How else would we validate it? How else would we know?

**KY:** Yeah. And I'm glad you brought in Bates and the allegiance discussion. I think this is one of the most helpful developments we've seen for a long time. If we can begin to shift our language away from the language of "faith and belief," not that they no longer play a role... Obviously you have to cognitively believe something if you're going to commit yourself to it.

**MH:** Yeah, it doesn't just... You don't get it by osmosis.

55:00

**KY:** Yeah. So belief and trust. Nijay Gupta, my former colleague at Portland Seminary, wrote a book on faith, where he stressed trust. And this remains a key element. But I still think that allegiance really defines the essential nature of biblical faith more accurately than any of the other English words that we want to use. You think of, "I pledge allegiance to Christ and to God."

**MH:** Yeah, especially in a first century context of suffering.

**KY:** Yeah! Absolutely.

**MH:** You know? Again, I don't know how else you could articulate the relationship between the two. In other words (to take it out of the abstract), of course you have to believe something. Bates starts one of his books with the illustration of the Japanese soldier on the island that still thinks World War II is going on to illustrate the allegiance. And it's a great illustration. But what Bates (this is just a bone I'm picking, because I like his work)... But what he fails to even bring up is that, well, the soldier is doing that because he actually believes something. He might believe... It might be, "The emperor is god, so I'm going to listen to the emperor." He might believe that anyone else other than the emperor telling him that the war is over is a lie. I mean, he believes certain things that direct and solidify his allegiance. In other words, you don't have a random Japanese guy wake up one day and say, "I'm allegiant to the emperor. I don't really know why, but I'm going to do this." No. There's two sides of this coin, and I do think New Testament soteriology make both essential. But they're essential in different ways. They don't have the same cause-and-effect value or relationship to the whole. And in the course of our theological discussion... And this is where you started even today, but it's where you start your books, too. It's the whole controversy about the Reformation, because we had this particular reaction to Roman Catholic teaching that has sort of steered the discussion ever since, as opposed to going back and saying, "Well, what does the Hebrew Bible really say, and did Jews pick up on that or not?" It's a weird contextualization, to contextualize Scripture by... And I don't want to minimize the Reformation. Yes, I think it meant something, and all that. But why would we contextualize Scripture by a 16<sup>th</sup> century document, as opposed to a Second Temple Jewish document? It doesn't make any sense to me, methodologically. But yet that's where we are.

**KY:** Well, spiritually and personally, it makes a lot of sense, in that many of us have been so deeply personally influenced by that movement.

**MH:** Sure. Yeah, that's fair.

**KY:** And so I think that explains why this is such a serious discussion and in many ways difficult discussion for a lot of people. Because it's very personal.

**MH:** You know, one of the things that you flirt with in the book... Here's where I'm going to pick at, as we wrap up. I know we've got to wrap up. But Sanders' definition of covenantal nomism:

[S]alvation is not earned by human initiative or merits, but it is granted freely by God's election and the giving of the covenant. One 'gets in' by grace. Within this covenantal relationship, however, obedience to God's will (the Law) is required.

So that's you riffing off Sanders and what he said. Here's how I would... I'm going to rewrite that and it's going to be twice as long. [laughter]

**KY:** Okay, go for it. [laughs]

**MH:** [laughs] Alright:

Salvation is not earned by human initiative or merits, but is *offered* freely by God's elective decision to (1) grant access to himself, the true God, and his truth, and (2) enter into a covenant relationship with those who embrace that access and its theological underpinnings. One gains access to the true God and his covenant family by grace, and it is only through membership in this family that redemption from divine estrangement is secure. God promises to remain loyal...

You flirt in the book with *hesed* (חסד) and I think that's an important part, because God is *hesed* and we are expected to be *hesed* in the relationship, as well.

God promises to remain loyal [MH: there's the noun hesed] (חסד) to this offer and plan. In return, he demands one's loyalty (חסד) [MH: he demands our khesed] in return. Those who embrace the offer and this access, because they believe in its validity and exclusivity, must be loyal to the true God. They must reject all other gods and their pseudo promises, terms, and demands. Both loyalty and rejection of other gods are demonstrated [by means of] obedience to the true God's laws. Embracing another god or rejecting the true God's offer and access means everlasting destruction, [because] other gods cannot save.

1:00:00

Now that's my long rewrite. Again, I get to cheat on the word count. [laughter] But to me, this... I hate to be so simplistic and say "it just makes sense." It makes

sense because of *hesed*. It makes sense because of both sides of the agreement—God expresses his loyalty to what *he* said *he* would do. And if we believe that, well then, we show it by being loyal in return. And this is what God wants. He doesn't want us to do a dog and pony show, like, "Do enough tricks and then I'll like you and let you in." That's not it at all. But he wants the response—he wants a commensurate response with his own loyalty.

**KY:** Yeah.

**MH:** So I think the discussion is really helpful. Bates' book, your book... I think it just has to take place, not only just to get biblical theology right, but I think to navigate what often looks contradictory but really isn't if you give it some careful thought.

**KY:** Yeah, yeah. And I certainly can affirm what you just said regarding Sanders' position. If I heard you right, your basic concern is the language of "granting" can be understood too much like a guarantee.

**MH:** Yeah.

**KY:** We've mentioned this before.

**MH:** Exactly.

**KY:** And so you're trying to adjust that to avoid it.

**MH:** You are a most discerning listener. [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah, so I mean, I would agree. You know, I don't think there's a lot of us that want to look at this as sort of a guarantee, regardless of how one behaves. This is the problem. It's always with regard to how one behaves in the relationship.

**MH:** Yeah, within it, yeah.

**KY:** Mm hmm.

**MH:** Well, I think this is going to be really useful to our audience. And again, as we wrap up here, folks, I know I recommend academic books. And if they're just too expensive I tell you. This one, though, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* by Kent Yinger, is paperback, so it's affordable. I highly recommend it if you're at all interested in the data. And this is what we try to do on this podcast. We care about data. We care about primary sources, biblical text, understood on its own terms and its own contexts. I think you need to go out and get the book. Because the book will also be a resource, just to mine primary

sources for this whole discussion. So this is why I wanted to have Kent on. And I'm really glad you were able to do it.

**KY:** Well, thanks, Mike. It's always for me a joy to talk about this. It's a subject that never dies, if you will.

**MH:** [laughs] Right. It's the controversy that keeps on giving. [laughter] Yeah, well, thanks.

**KY:** Thank you.

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**TS:** Alright, Mike, really great discussion. What is the name of his book again? And again, we'll have a link of his book on the website page. But what's the name of the book again?

**MH:** The book by Kent Yinger is *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*. It was put out by Cambridge University Press in 1999.

**TS:** Well, we plan on having Dr. Kent Yinger again for next week, so we'll be looking forward to that. And we'll be talking about *The New Perspective on Paul*. So I know that's a pretty popular topic out there. And I don't think we've really covered that on the podcast yet, have we, Mike?

**MH:** No, we haven't.

**TS:** Way overdue. So we'll be getting into that next week. And with that, Mike, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.