

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 395

The New Perspective on Paul

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### Episode Summary

The “new perspective on Paul” (NPP) has been one of the most talked-about and debated topics within New Testament studies for the last forty years. But while the topic title is familiar to many, identifying what the NPP is (and is not) presents more of challenge to Bible students. In this episode, Dr. Kent Yinger, the author of a well-written and accessible introduction to the NPP, helps us navigate what NPP is, why it’s important, and how it brings questions about Paul’s view of the Law, Judaism, and Christ into sharper focus.

Book:

Kent L. Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction*. Cascade Books, 2011.

Article mentioned:

Thielman, Frank. “Law.” Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 395: The New Perspective on Paul with Dr. Kent Yinger. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

**MH:** Well, pretty good, again. We haven’t had much of a status change as far as my health. So we’re just trying to do what it is we’re supposed to do. And Lord willing, the Lord will have these things be effective and just combine providentially to just work out the way that we’re hoping them to work out. A lot of people have been naturally sending me lots of things. And I’ve wanted to bring this up because you’re going to get a kick out of this, Trey. Somebody actually sent me in a card... And by the way, I want to thank everybody for... We get lots of cards and letters and email and messaging and whatnot. And we try to stay on top of it, at least in terms of looking at everything. So we’ve been successful there. Obviously, there’s too much of it to reply to everybody. But I actually got

this week... [laughs] Someone sent me a gospel tract. You know what gospel tracts are, right?

**TS:** Yeah.

**MH:** Okay. Somebody sent me...

**TS:** But explain to the audience in case there's somebody out there who doesn't know.

**MH:** Well, basically it's what the gospel is and how to be saved. Now the person said... There was a little note in there that they listen to the podcast and so on and so forth. But they sent me a tract, like I'm an unbeliever or something. And so I wasn't offended, but my first thought was, "How could you *possibly* listen to the podcast and think that I needed to read this tract?" Okay, that was my first thought. But then the second thought (and this is our segue into our episode here—there's actually a point to this) was, "You know, this is a good example of somebody who is listening to me, wanting to hear the precise set of words *they* would use to talk about the gospel. They want to hear that from my mouth. And if they don't hear it *exactly* the way *they* would say it—they don't hear that coming from me—it creates a question mark in their mind about my status. So I think that's actually a good segue into what we're going to talk about today with our guest. We're having Dr. Kent Yinger back on the New Perspective on Paul. Because a lot of this is about disagreement over terminology and how to take certain things that Paul says—how to define certain terms. But I was... There you go. I mean, the host of the Naked Bible Podcast gets a gospel tract [laughs] in a Get-Well card.

**TS:** Well, Mike, they probably haven't listened to the podcast. And second, they probably saw you in a Green Bay jersey and thought you needed help.

**MH:** [laughs] Yeah, it's from a Vikings fan! [laughter]

**TS:** Yeah.

**MH:** Or somebody who roots for the Bears or something like that.

**TS:** Yeah, probably Chicago or something, and they're having a rough time. So that's probably what it was. Yeah, that's funny.

**MH:** That would make more sense than the other stuff. You know?

**TS:** Yeah, you're thinking too much on this. You're going too deep on this. Yeah. It's not that complicated.

**MH:** I'm making it too theological or something. [laughs]

**TS:** Yeah, exactly. It's not that complicated, Mike. They're a Bears fan.

**MH:** Oh, boy. Yeah. So there we are.

**TS:** Yeah, I know. That's funny. But I'm sure you are getting a lot of stuff and support out there. So I know you appreciate it and whatnot. But on the New Perspective here today, Mike, lots of people... Isn't N.T. Wright a big guy on this?

**MH:** Yeah. He's going to be smack-dab in the middle of this. I mean, there isn't just *one* take on the New Perspective. I mean, Wright's got his take, and there are a few sort of nuanced positions on this. But yeah, he's right in the middle of this.

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**MH:** Well, we're thrilled to have Dr. Kent Yinger back with us for another discussion. This time we're going to be discussing his little book that I read a few years ago. The book came out in 2011. And I remember reading it and doing a little bit of... not blogging, but some email exchanges, kind of in a meet-up group, about this. The subject is the New Perspective on Paul. And the book is entitled *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction*. And it's just this wonderful, short little book that gets into this controversial topic (and if this is new to you you're going to find out why it's controversial) in a really accessible way. As we are accustomed to doing when we have guests (even though Kent has been on before), I want to let him introduce himself. And then we are going to jump into the New Perspective. For those of you who have not heard of this term (or maybe you've heard of it but you don't quite know how to define it), then this episode will be really, really helpful. And the book especially will be helpful for you. So Kent, thanks for coming back. Can you tell the audience who you are?

**KY:** Yeah. Thanks, Mike. Great to be with you again and to be able to join your audience in thinking through some of these issues. I grew up in the Midwest (Kansas). That's still kind of where my heart is. My studies were at Wheaton College, Gordon-Conwell Seminary, and then University of Sheffield in England. Worked as a missionary in Europe for about 15 years, and then have been in academic teaching for the remainder. Retired about seven years ago, after teaching for some years at George Fox or Portland Seminary in Portland, OR, as Professor of New Testament. I have a wife of over 40 years, three children, five grandchildren. Live in Portland, and love to golf. [laughter]

**MH:** So you are... I mean, again, and I'm sure people could tell when we had you on earlier, but you fall into the sweet spot for this podcast. You're a scholar who

is well-informed in the primary source material, but you're used to communicating your thoughts (the content) to the lay person. And again, we're always on the lookout for scholars who do this with intention (not by accident—they actually do it intentionally). And you're one of those. And this book is illustrative of that, as I think people are going to be able to tell pretty quickly.

**KY:** Yeah, and that's really why I wrote it, because I noticed so much controversy and just a lot of heat (and often not as much light) coming out of this discussion, and thought, "Well, maybe I can contribute by bringing a little clarity and calmness to the discussion." It's kind of a funny story how the book developed. It was actually a sabbatical project. I had a sabbatical a few years before that. And I had started on a project and was approved for the sabbatical for a project on a completely different topic. [MH laughs] And I got to about Christmas time that year and I looked at what I'd done and I said, "You know, I don't think I'd read this book if I got it." [MH laughs] I just lost all my passion for it. And so then you're in a quandary, because you've got to produce *something* for a sabbatical or you may never get another one. So I thought, "What am I going to write on?" Well, I'd been working on New Perspective issues for years and it was not anything new for me. And so I just picked that up and thought, "Well, maybe I can just provide a simple introduction for people." And that's what I did. It came out real quick. It was a joy to write. I've had a lot of great comments from people. Not everybody agrees, obviously, with the New Perspective.

**MH:** Sure.

**KY:** And the book is not a plea *for* the New Perspective. It's an attempt to give a balanced presentation (pros and cons, character, origin, and so on). So if people say, "What *is* this thing?" this book is a place they can turn and get a clear answer.

**MH:** Yeah, and again, having read it, that is absolutely the case. If you are... Even as an academic (I'm an Old Testament Semitics guy), I had a rough idea of what New Perspective was and what it meant, but I just figured, "Look, I don't have a whole lot of time to read this New Testament stuff," which of course those of us in Old Testament, we joke about that being the appendix of the Bible. [laughs] "But I don't have a whole lot of time to read New Testament stuff" (this is the way I'm rationalizing it in my mind) "so I'm going to read Kent's book. You know? It's for lay people." It was awesome. It was great. I mean, it answered all of the questions you would expect to have going into the discussion. It's very accessible. You define the terms really clearly. You provide a history. And it is exactly the way you just described it. "Okay, what are the pros and cons and the ins and outs? What do people fight over? What's sort of understandable to fight over, maybe, and what is just sort of a waste of time? Why are we arguing about this or that?" I mean, it really navigates all those things and takes the reader through the whole subject matter. But it's brief, it's short, and it's clear. I mean,

10:00

what more would you want? So I just highly recommend the book, which again is what motivated me in this case to have you back on. Because I think this is really an important book. This is another one like the “Judgment According to Deeds” topic we talked about before. It’s not going to go away. [laughs] This topic is not going to disappear. So again, avail yourself of the material. This is why on the podcast we look for scholars who are trying to do something for the average person in the pew. And you’re going to run into New Perspective. If you’re a serious Bible student, you *will* run into it. And this is a great place to start.

So with that as sort of the set-up, here we go! Okay, Dr. Yinger, what is the New Perspective and why should I care? [laughter] Let’s start there.

**KY:** Um, in many ways, the New Perspective is not new at all, but it claims to *recover* the old perspective—that is, Paul’s own perspective on his faith, on Christ, on salvation, etc. The reason it would be called “new” is because it’s so different from what traditionally Protestants have thought about Paul. Whereas Luther and others thought Paul had rejected his Jewish identity and his Jewish theology, the New Perspective argued, “No, Paul actually remained quite rooted in his Jewish identity and did not reject the Law, but redefined its place (if you will) in the lives of God’s people in Christ.” So the New Perspective is really as much a new perspective on Judaism as it is a new perspective on Paul himself.

**MH:** Yeah, relative to us, again, because of sort of Church-historical reasons, we’re used to thinking about Paul and certain things he says in his letters to and about Judaism... We’ve been sensitized, basically (I guess it’s fair to say), through vocabulary about how to read Paul. And if we could bring Paul back, Paul would say, “Eh, that’s not really what I was thinking.” So the old perspective (what Paul would’ve actually said) sounds new to us, because it’s not filtered through the circumstances of Church history. So the New Perspective, as you said, isn’t really new. It’s old, but it’s new to our ear. It has a new ring to it. And we really shouldn’t...

**KY:** Yeah. I think that’s a great way to put it. I agree.

**MH:** So how did this whole discussion, and of course the ensuing debate, get started?

**KY:** I mean, it’s hard to know where to start, because the discussion and the disputes have gone on long before 1977. But that’s usually the point at which people identify a turning point, when E.P. Sanders published *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, in which he argued that Jewish soteriology (the Jews’ understanding of salvation) was not what we might call legalism (that is, you do XYZ and then you get rewarded with salvation), but was very much a soteriology of grace. He called it “covenantal nomism.” And that was kind of the beginnings of this rethinking of Paul. Because then James Dunn (a New Testament scholar

from Britain) said, “You know, in many ways what Sanders just said, that sounds a lot like Paul as I understand him.” And so he actually used the phrase “a new perspective on Paul” and argued that Paul remained very much a Jewish theologian in what he said. He was not one who rejected Jewish theology and soteriology, but he reoriented it around Christ, remaining all the time, though, in basic agreement with most Jewish axioms about theology, including the one you and I talked about last time—judgment according to deeds.

15:00

**MH:** Yeah, and we talked a little bit in our last discussion, too, just very briefly about why this gets missed. And I’m going to read something from the other book that we talked about the first time you were on, your book *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*. Because I think it contributes something to helping us understand why we call this “new” when it’s really not new. It should be old, but to us it’s new. And one of the reasons for that, yes, it’s Church history. But the other reason is that we tend to look at the Hebrew Bible or the Law (the Torah) or the Pharisees or whoever in light of later Judaism (later Jewish writings)—the rabbis and sort of the theological output of what we would call the Rabbinic period, which for most people is going to be medieval. It’s going to postdate the New Testament. But there’s this whole other body of literature that preceded Paul—preceded the first century—that is the Intertestamental period or what scholars refer to as the Second Temple period.

Now this is a great paragraph. This is going to pertain not only to this discussion, but on this podcast, during Q&As, where I speak, and in email, I still get the question of, “Why are we reading the New Testament in light of the Intertestamental period, as opposed to the rabbis?” Or people conflating—thinking that those two things are the same. They certainly have a relationship, but you know, it’s not the same. So here’s what you wrote. You wrote:

Earlier studies of Jewish theology in the so-called intertestamental period generally drew upon tannaitic and pseudepigraphical sources indiscriminately [MH: now that’s the key word in that sentence], seeking to present a composite position.

What this means is that the assumption has been that Jewish theology drew upon rabbinic and pseudepigraphical sources indiscriminately (like it’s just a hodge-podge and there’s no development of thought) and this is what the rabbis said, like there was one set of rabbis, that there’s no multiplicity of opinion going on between the testaments. And you’re saying, “Well, that’s a bad idea. That’s flawed.” And then you go on and say:

This approach falsely assumed that later rabbinic traditions accurately portrayed ‘normative’ Judaism in the first century CE. Instead, it is now generally recognized that Judaism of the first century was a religion encompassing much more creative variety than the rabbis might suggest.



So I have often complained on this podcast [laughs] about people who are trying to do New Testament exegesis in light of rabbinical thought that postdates the New Testament by centuries, as opposed to looking at the Jewish thought—Judaism—of the centuries that *preceded* the New Testament in the Second Temple period. It's a backwards methodology. But this is what a lot of scholars did up until recent times and have done (some, of course, are still doing it). It's a lot of the way the Church in our own traditions characterize the Jews. We get our characterization of the Jews from rabbinic material that comes after the New Testament. Why are we doing that? It doesn't make any methodological sense.

And so what you're saying here is that when we want to understand Paul and what Paul is talking about in phrases like “works of the Law” and his attitude toward the Law and his attitude toward Judaism and his understanding of salvation, we should not be looking at rabbis that wrote centuries later or Christian writers who looked at what rabbis wrote centuries later and said, “This is what the Jews of Paul's day thought.” It's a wrong-headed, deeply misguided method, when we should be looking at what went before instead of what came after.

So Sanders, if I'm hearing you correctly (and I think I am), was one of the first guys to... Maybe not one of the first guys to wave the flag, but he got noticed in 1977 for drawing attention. If we're going to use flag-waving, how about the penalty flag? You know, out comes the penalty flag, that “we're just not doing this right, you know, this is really a flawed way to look at things.” So is that fair to say, that he's trying to draw attention to a deeply flawed method that we don't even think about? We've been doing it so long that we don't even think about it.

20:00

**KY:** Yeah, absolutely. And so Sanders' book was, even though it's called *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, the first two thirds of the book (so the greatest bulk) is about Judaism. And so it really... And even what he said about Paul has largely been, I won't say ignored, but rejected. His position on Paul (that he was idiosyncratic) has not really won the day. And so people often include Sanders as a New Perspective proponent, and that's not quite accurate because he would actually disagree to some extent with the portrayals of Paul that the New Perspective would hold to. But he was the one whose discussion of Judaism kind of kickstarted the discussion...

**MH:** Yeah, he got the ball rolling.

**KY:** Yeah.

**MH:** So why is anybody concerned about this? [laughs] In other words, why don't we just, “Well, yeah, Mike. That makes sense. We should be looking at the stuff that preceded Paul to know what Paul was thinking. Because he would've read that stuff. He wouldn't have been reading stuff that didn't exist yet. So okay, got

it. Checkmark. We've got that methodological point down. We're good now. So let's move on. Thanks for telling me to do that, but so what? Other than correcting my method here, what good is it? Why is anybody concerned about this? Or why does it really matter?"

**KY:** I can think of a lot of reasons. Let me just name a few. Understanding Paul's letters would be uppermost for me. And most of us that are Bible readers, we really want to understand what he's saying. He's not an easy guy to follow. [MH laughs] And so the New Perspective is saying, "To really understand Paul, let's step into his shoes more fully." And this is what the New Perspective is trying to do. So that's one reason: to understand Paul and his letters. Another would be to answer crucial questions that we as Christians or as human beings have. So, "What does God think of me, and how does this come about? How do I get saved?" to put it in kind of popular language. So the whole issue of soteriology... And this is really at the heart of what it means to be a Protestant. I mean, that's how Protestantism in many ways got started. "How do I find a gracious God?" Luther cried out. And this has remained, if you will, the heartbeat of Lutheran, Protestant, evangelical theology. And so to understand our deepest concerns and desires is another reason why the New Perspective, I think, has importance. Those are just two I'll throw out.

**MH:** How about some specific points? What are some specific points that get debated when it comes to reading Paul with respect to the New Perspective?

**KY:** Well, let's just grab a passage of Scripture. Let me think just a minute here.

**MH:** What about Romans 10? Romans 10:3?

**KY:** Romans 10. Okay. That's not the one I'd have gone to first, but any is as good as another, to be honest.

**MH:** Go to one *you* would go to. I mean, I always think of phrases like "works of the Law," "curse of the Law." But yeah, can we find a book that Paul doesn't really get into the Law? [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah, no, absolutely. Well, let's just... You said Romans 10, so let's just look at that. Verses 1-4 I guess is where we could focus. And Paul is discussing the place of Israel in God's plans in these chapters.

**Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them [KY: that is, for the Jewish people] is that they may be saved. Romans 10:1**

So Paul hasn't rejected them. He hasn't lost his interest. He actually still considers himself a part of Israel, as he'll say in many places. "For I myself am an Israelite," etc.



**<sup>2</sup>I can testify they have a zeal for God...**

So Paul actually sees Jewish interest in Torah-keeping and in obeying God as what he calls “zeal for God.” They do it out of a genuine love for God...

**... but it is not enlightened...**

And I would add to that, “That is, it is not viewed in light of the Christ event of God’s sending of his Son.”

**<sup>3</sup>For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God...**

And here, “the righteousness that comes from God,” there’s a huge discussion (the righteousness of God in Paul’s literature). But I suppose a shorthand for that, “being ignorant that God has revealed his way of redemption in Christ.”

25:00

**... and seeking to establish their own...**

Now this is probably the phrase that is misunderstood more than any other. We hear “seeking to establish their own righteousness” as a slogan, if you will, of self-righteousness—of meritorious achievement. They want to stand on their own two feet and say, “Look what I’ve done.” I would argue that Paul uses these kinds of phrases quite differently. They want to establish Israel’s position before God, that is, as the elect people of God. And therefore, Paul says:

**... they have not submitted to God’s righteousness.**

And Paul argues this throughout the letter to the Romans. He admits it is... And he’s all for the idea that the gospel is to the Jew first and also to the non-Jew—to the Greek. So Paul’s always wrestling with, “What is the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the plans of God?” And here he tips his hand that they want to establish Israel’s righteousness—their own righteousness as Jews—but in doing so they don’t submit to what God has now done in Christ, which is to open the way to non-Jews equally (and here we go on to verse 4):

**<sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.**

Now again [laughs] there have been books written, so we’re not going to solve this in one minute. But I think what he means here is that the Torah and adherence to the Torah as *the* signifier of who is in God’s people and who’s not, *that* has come to an end—what he will elsewhere call the “works of the Law.” Now righteousness is by adherence to messiah, not by adherence to Torah.

That's how one knows who is God's people and who is not. And it is now for everyone who adheres to Christ. I just say that instead of "believes."

**MH:** Yeah. So this is a good... It *is* a good passage to be thinking about this, because Paul's not going to condemn a love for the Torah. He's not going to condemn that. But what he wants to see is the preeminence of messiah put in its proper place. This becomes the orienting point, if you will, not to the exclusion of right behavior, or demonstrating what camp you're in—who you're aligning with, where your allegiance is at. So yeah, I think that's laid out real nicely in Romans 10. What's the passage you would've gone to?

**KY:** What was our question we were trying to answer?

**MH:** What are some of the key points here, some of the things that get debated by scholars? So we have the language of Romans 10 essentially, some of those things. But if you were going to isolate... What are the key points that people are fighting over when it comes to New Perspective? What do you think some of the more important ones are?

**KY:** Okay, some of the specific debates now that are going on?

**MH:** Yeah, debates or passages. Yeah.

**KY:** Okay, or passages. Well, we mentioned the phrase "works of the Law." This is probably as crucial an element of the whole debate as any. And traditionally, when we hear "works of the Law," I think most of us have thought it just refers to human deeds in general—what people do in general. So let's look at a passage like Romans 3. So you can start at verse 19 in Romans 3:

**<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be silenced, the whole world may be held accountable [KY: and he quotes the Old Testament]. <sup>20</sup>For no human being will be justified in his sight by deeds of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.**

30:00

So Paul is against, if you will (or he rejects), the idea that one now (since the coming of messiah) is considered among the righteous (that is, justified) by works according to the law.

**<sup>21</sup>But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed.**

And then when you get down to verse 24, there's kind of the crucial phrase... Yeah, actually I think I wanted to go back.

**<sup>22</sup>For the righteousness of God is through faith in Christ Jesus for all who believe. There's no distinction... <sup>24</sup>And are now justified by his grace as a gift.**

Well, this one isn't quite coming out as clearly as I had hoped. But we usually contrast works and grace or faith. And we think that's what Paul is doing. The New Perspective argued that "works of the Law" was, if you will, a semi-technical designation for Paul. It is all of those behaviors that mark one out as Jewish—as an adherent of the God of Israel and of his covenant.

**MH:** Yeah, somebody who's loyal to Yahweh.

**KY:** Exactly. And Paul is not against that at all. In fact, he will argue that he is upholding the Law in the book of Romans. But what he is against now is that that any longer marks the distinction between in and out (who belongs, who doesn't belong). That is, you have to be Jewish in order to be one of God's people. So when Paul contrasts works or works of the Law (and I think he uses "works" as a very shorthand for "works of the Law") he's not thinking about human behavior and obedience in general, but he's thinking about the very specific role of Jewish behavior in marking out Jews as Jews. So if you were circumcised, if you kept certain food laws, if you attended Jewish festivals, these all marked out Jews as Jews in the ancient world. These were the works of the Law—the deeds that marked one out.

**MH:** Yeah. So if I was an Israelite, and I very clearly say, "I reject all other gods. I believe that Yahweh is the true God. I am not going to follow any other god. I think their demands and their promises are phony. My hope of being removed from Sheol—removed from the grave—can be found in one God only, and that is Yahweh of Israel. And accordingly, I'm going to live in such a way that demonstrates what side I'm on and who I love, and that is I'm going to obey the Torah." So if I'm that Israelite and I walk into the marketplace or I meet this guy Paul at synagogue, what you're saying is that it would be a mistake to think that Paul would hear my testimony, as it were, of love for Yahweh, and he would say, "Well, you're just trying to earn your way into Yahweh's favor." And that would be a quite misguided way to look at it. And it would also be misguided to think that Paul would parse my testimony as indicating that I believe I'm going to have everlasting life because I've earned it and God owes it to me. Rather, what Paul wants me to do is he wants me to see that messiah has come and to embrace that, and then that becomes the orienting point for my loyalty—that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled all these things that the Law points us toward. This is what the Law was leading up to—*this one* to secure our redemption. So on and so forth. That Paul... And it's not that Paul wants me to add Jesus, like sprinkle Jesus on to Torah. But it becomes a new reason for really showing my loyalty to Yahweh probably in the same way, and maybe some new ways, but I can't reject Jesus as messiah. What I'm left with minus Jesus is no longer adequate. Because God

wants me to respond well. He wants me to respond correctly to the messiah that he's given me. Do you think that's a fair assessment?

**KY:** Yeah, absolutely. I might even put it a little more strongly, that it's not just that it is inadequate. It's that to *not* listen to God who speaks through his messiah...

**MH:** It's rebellion.

**KY:** It's rebellion. Exactly. It's unfaith or unbelief. Yeah.

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**MH:** Again, I can see where the friction is going to be with this notion that we are mistaken if we think Paul is looking at... I mean, there's always a few bad apples in every bunch. So we're not saying that there was no Jew that ever would've thought their works put God in their debt. I mean, somebody's going to come along and think something stupid like that, or something clunky. But for the most part, it's wrong to think that Paul is condemning a loving, loyal life to the Torah. I mean, why would Paul condemn that? That's what he would have striven to do. But in terms of salvation, in light of what Christ did (he came and what he did)—that *that* is the essential thing now.

So we're just not used to hearing that. And again, that's why it's new to a lot of our ears. I can remember being taught about the Jews and the Law in Sunday school or church after I became a believer as a teenager, that this meant legalism. It meant works righteousness. It meant the Jews thought they could earn their way into heaven, and all these things that I guess in popular Protestant evangelical theology this is the way we're taught to think about these things. And when somebody like you or anybody else who's a New Testament scholar comes along and says, "Eh, that's not really what Paul was after," they interpret that as you endorsing works salvation. [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah.

**MH:** Rather than waiting for you to explain what you think it means, they sort of draw this... These two dots immediately get connected in the wrong way. They take the objection and then define the objection the same way. I can see that would be a really big problem that some would have with New Perspective. But it's an unfair link to create.

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

**MH:** What about *pistis Christou*? I mean, those of us who are biblical scholars, we know... Even though I'm Old Testament I know what the basic debate here is. "The faith of Christ," loosely putting the genitive relationship there. Why is this phrase part of the New Perspective debate?

**KY:** Yeah, this particular debate over *pistis Christou* (literally “faith of Christ”) arose a little bit after the development of the New Perspective and centers on those passages in Paul where he uses that *pistis Christou* phrase. We can take, for instance, Galatians 2:16 is probably the central one. I’ll start reading with verse 15:

**<sup>15</sup>We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners...**

Again, notice how Paul’s mind always revolves around the relationship of Jew and Gentile. This is what really motivates all of his letters. It’s not, “How can I get saved?” It’s not the human question in general, but it’s the very specific *Jewish* question of, “What about Jew and Gentile?” and, “Does one need to be Jewish? Is that covenant still preeminent, if you will, or has the coming of Jesus made a difference?” So then he goes on to verse 16:

**<sup>16</sup>We know yet that a person is justified [KY: so here the question is, “How is one declared—considered—to be among the righteous?”] not by works of law but [KY: NRSV here says] through faith in Christ...**

Or “believing in Christ,” or “trusting in Christ,” something like this, which would be what you could call the objective genitive, that is, faith is put in its object (Jesus Christ). He’s the object of the faith. But Richard Hays and a number of other different authors have argued, one can understand this genitive phrase (“of Christ”) in a different way: as a subjective genitive, Christ being the subject of faith. That is, the one who exercises faith. If you understand it *that way*, what Paul means then, a person is justified not by works of the Law (that is, by something in their own life and behavior) but through Jesus’ faith (that is, his exercise of faith, the faithfulness of Christ himself).

**MH:** His loyalty to God’s plan.

40:00

**KY:** Right. Which in its ultimate form was the cross, where he demonstrated his obedience and faithfulness to God even unto death, as Paul would say. So in this case, salvation is tied not to *our* faith in someone (in Christ), but to Christ’s own faithfulness in what he did. This becomes very much, if you will, almost an objective basis for faith. So this is where the debate started from. My own perspective on this is that both sides of the debate are correct theologically. That is, I don’t think there are too many people that would argue against salvation being rooted in the faithfulness of Christ himself, nor would they argue against human allegiance to Christ as being necessary and an element in the enjoyment of the saving benefits of God. So kind of both sides ultimately theologically will agree, the question becomes, “Does this phrase itself in these instances point to one or the other?” So I’ve never made it a big issue because I think in terms of our soteriology it’s probably not going to lead to huge differences. I know some will disagree with that.

**MH:** Yeah. You know, I agree with you. To me, this is almost what I do with the atonement. I'm a "big tent" atonement guy. I don't feel compelled to pick any one theory of the atonement. Because they all contribute something.

**KY:** Yeah.

**MH:** You know, I object to the way the wideness of the contributions is used to get rid of substitutionary atonement. I think that goes too far. But since I'm not going to do that anyway, I don't really feel compelled to pick one. Well, in this case, you look at this verse... You know, "How am I justified? Am I justified because I put my faith in Jesus or because Jesus obeyed the Father's plan to go to the cross, die, and rise again? So which one is it?" And the answer is, "Yeah." [laughter]

**KY:** I agree.

**MH:** Why do I have to pick one? You know? But you're right. There are whole books written on this. This audience will know what SBL and ETS are. You can go to... There are whole sessions where scholars are duking it out on either side of this and want to convince the audience to pick something. And I'd be the guy in the back of the room going, "Man, I should've looked at my program book a little more carefully. Because I don't really care." [laughs] You know? "Maybe I should've done something better with my time in this time slot."

So last question here. And this is sort of a more general, kind of abstract... Other than the specific things we're talking about, what does New Perspective help us with, just generally? How does it help us think better about the New Testament and interpreting the New Testament?

**KY:** For me, one of the areas that's been most helpful is seeing how my life, my response to God, my obedience or my disobedience... Because for most of us they kind of interweave themselves in our lives, whether we want to admit it or not.

**MH:** Do you mean to say that your life is not an endless string of spiritual victories? [laughter]

**KY:** I'm still waiting to meet that person. Yeah. [laughter]

**MH:** I'm so disappointed. [laughs]

**KY:** You know, we all struggle with these things. And so because we struggle with being who we would like to be, most ideally, we also struggle with, "Well, what does God think about me? And what does this do to my relationship with God?" So for me, the New Perspective really helps me to think through, "What is



the role of my own life before God? Is it important? Does it count?" And the New Perspective says, "Yes. Of course it does. God always has been interested in forming people according to his image." And you can think of all the language of being transformed into the image of Christ and how much Paul was concerned with that. And so for me, that's one of the biggest areas of help with the New Perspective. And the reason it helps is because as long as we think that our enjoyment of God's presence, of his favor, of his smile, is based solely upon believing... I mean, if you want to put it in very simplistic terms, "I came forward to the altar forty years ago, and because of that, now I can live in the guarantee of his favor." That makes my behavior kind of irrelevant in the last analysis. And I don't know what to do with it.

45:00

**MH:** It certainly could.

**KY:** And yet I know... Kind of most of us know in our hearts, when we walk away from God, guilt descends upon us, and we have to deal with that. And the New Perspective, I think, gives me a much more organic way to deal with my life, which is such a mixture of good and evil and to sort through what does God expect. A book I wrote that just came out a couple years ago, *God and Human Wholeness*, really addresses that question, "What does God expect? Is he looking for this perfection?" And the book is a study of perfection in the Bible and theology. But if not perfection... Which is what I'm arguing. God never expected perfection, even when he created Adam. But what he does expect is wholeness. That with a whole heart the life we live will, as a pattern, be dedicated to him. And that's what we're always seeking to return to. So anyway, it's a very, if you will, pastoral point that I think the New Perspective can ultimately help us with.

**MH:** Yeah, in my own... Nobody's going to know who I'm thinking of here. But I've run into believers that have just really done some terrible things. "I'm going to divorce my wife and go run off with this woman I'm having an affair with. But you know, I prayed a prayer XYZ number of years ago, and I meant it. God knows I meant it. So we're good." Well, maybe we should think a little more carefully about that. [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah, yeah.

**MH:** You know? And it's not that you're arguing with that person to convince them that they have to go back and *earn* salvation, or they have to go back and make God happy with them. Because you know, "while you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you." We all get that. But it does call into question really where your heart's at, which is what God's really interested in. So the fact that you mouthed a prayer but now your heart seems to be really far from showing me, as your friend, that you actually love the Lord. Since you seem to be really disinterested in that, it makes me wonder. And you have a testimony here. Do you realize what you're doing here? And maybe your heart isn't what you think it

is. Maybe you've deluded yourself. It does tend to minimize the role of our conduct. And again, I just seen this play out in a couple of different people that I've known over the years. And again, I'm not trying to convince them that they need to do works so that God's happy with them. I'm trying to get them to examine their own heart and really their own commitment—their own faith commitment and their own life (because these are two sides of the same coin). And it has nothing to do with merit, but it has everything to do with believing loyalty—this allegiance idea. So yeah, I agree with you. I know what you're tracking on there, just having run into this. And I wasn't even a pastor. I mean, you've served in pastoral roles, so I'm sure you've seen a lot more of this than I have. But I know what you're talking about there, as far as making that a little more meaningful, or at the very least, maybe provoking more of an introspective conversation between you and God than you think you need to have.

**KY:** Yeah, you know, and I think the way you opened our discussion today for me is important. You talked about how often these kinds of discussions come up (faith and works and so on). And for me this is the... I mean, that's a theological debate, if you will. But ultimately these theological debates have a very practical impact for most of us. And we all wrestle with "how do I relate my faith in Christ to the way I live?" And in many ways, for me the New Perspective is what proves to be most helpful in sorting this out in my own head and heart.

**MH:** Yeah, I mean, it's one thing to have the person who's just... They've veered off into something really damaging to themselves and the people around them. You know, it's one thing... We don't want them to ask, "Well, what must I do to make God like me so that now he's going to owe me salvation or I'll be okay?" Rather, it's, "How in the world could I do this to the Lord?"

**KY:** Mm hmm.

50:00

**MH:** I mean, that's the question I want them to ask. And I think the New Perspective does, if you will, elevate the conduct question sufficiently enough, rightfully, to where maybe that question will get asked. [laughs]

**KY:** Yeah. That's right.

**MH:** Maybe there's a better chance that somebody will ask that question, rather than just go off on their merry way and say it doesn't matter. You know, "The Lord will forgive me anyway. So, so what?" It's tragic.

But anyway, thank you for coming back on and for talking about this. And again, I just want people to know, even though this is a short book and this is a short discussion of the book, there's a lot packed into this book about the relationship of faith and works, and Paul and Judaism, and Judaism and Christianity, and Jew and Gentile—all these things that we've tried to interject into the conversation. If

you are at all interested in those subjects, or if you're curious about what this New Perspective thing is and why it gets talked about, trust me, this is *the* book to introduce you to that whole arena. And again, Kent is very irenic in the book. He's not picking sides. He's not hammering people for taking this or that position. He just lays it out. "Here's the lay of the land for this particular topic. If you want to be able to jump into a conversation and understand what's going on or read a book or a journal article and sort of pick up what they're laying down here, this is the place to start. So I am quite happy to recommend the book to everybody in this audience. So Kent, thank you again for being with us and for spending some of your time.

**KY:** Well, thank you, Mike. And thanks to your listeners for their interest in the subject as well.

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**TS:** Alright, Mike, another great discussion with Dr. Yinger on the New Perspective on Paul. Are there any other books out there... One, can you repeat his book. And two, are there any other books out there that you would recommend about this topic?

**MH:** Yeah, his book for this particular episode was very simply called *The New Perspective on Paul: And Introduction*. It came out in 2011 by Cascade Books. You know, for me personally, I think some of N.T. Wright's shorter stuff that... Some of his shorter books on Paul would be helpful here. But honestly, for me, if someone has the *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, there's actually an entry in that dictionary. This is the InterVarsity series that I recommend all the time. There's an entry in there on the Law by Frank Thielman that's really, really good for this (understanding the whole "works of the Law" thing). So I would say, something that N.T. Wright produces for the lay audience on this, and then that particular essay. And I can make sure that we include the title of that essay in that source on the episode page as well. But I personally have found that stuff really helpful. But Yinger's book is just great for, "What is this thing that I keep hearing about?" It's really well done. So that's why I wanted to have him back, specifically to talk about that book.

**TS:** Perfect. Sounds good. Well, we'll have the link to his book on the webpage at NakedBiblePodcast.com. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.

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