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Justification

GOD'S PLAN & PAUL'S VISION

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ONE

What's All This About, and Why Does It Matter?

I

IMAGINE A FRIEND COMING to stay who, through some accident of education, had never been told that the earth goes round the sun. As part of a happy evening's conversation, you take it upon yourself to explain how the planetary system works. Yes, from where we stand it does of course seem that the sun circles around us. But this is merely the effect of our perspective. All that we now know of astronomy confirms that the earth on which we live, in company with a few other similar planets, is in fact revolving around the sun. You get out books, charts and diagrams, and even rearrange objects on the coffee table to make the point. Your friend alternates between incredulity, fascination, momentary alarm and puzzlement. Eventually you smile, have another drink and head for bed.

Very early in the morning, while it is still dark, there is a tap at the bedroom door. He is up and dressed and invites you to come for an early walk. He takes you up the hill to a point where the whole countryside is spread out before you, and, as the sky begins to lighten, you can just see, far off to the east, the glistening ocean. He returns to the subject of the previous night. So many wise people of old have spoken of the earth as the solid-fixed point on which we stand. Didn't one of the psalms say something about the sun celebrating as it goes round and round, like a strong giant running a race? Yes, of course modern scientists are always coming up with fancy theories. They may have their place, but equally

they may just be fads. Wouldn't we do better to stick with the tried and tested wisdom of the ages?

As he warms to his theme, so at last, out of the sea, there emerges the huge, dazzling, shining ball. You stand in silence, watching its majestic rise, filling the countryside with golden light. As its lower edge clears the ocean, you wait with a sense of frustrated inevitability for the punch line. Here it comes.

"Now, you see"—a gentle hand on the arm, he doesn't want to make this too harsh—"we have the evidence of our own eyes. It really *does* go round the earth. All those wonderful theories and clever new ideas—they may have a lot to teach us, but ultimately they take us away from the truth. Better to stay with tried and tested truth, with the ground firm beneath our feet. Aren't you happy we came on this walk?"

Now I can well imagine that, as with the Pharisees listening to Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants, there may be some readers who will at once be angry, realizing that I have told this story against them. And it may be a dangerous move to start a book by alienating still further those with whom, it appears, I am engaged in dialogue. But I use this story for one reason in particular: to make it clear that, at the present moment in the debate about St. Paul and the meaning of justification, *this is how it appears*, to me at least. We are not in dialogue. I have been writing about St. Paul now, on and off, for thirty-five years. I have prayed, preached and lectured my way through his letters. I have written popular-level commentaries on all of them, a full-length commentary on his most important one, and several other books and articles, at various levels, on particular Pauline topics. And the problem is not that people disagree with me. That is what one expects and wants. Let's have the discussion! The point of discourse is to learn with and from one another. I used to tell my students that at least 20 percent of what I was telling them was wrong, but I didn't know which 20 percent it was: I make many mistakes in life, in relationships and in work, and I don't expect to be free of them in my thinking. But whereas in much of life one's mistakes are often fairly obvious—the shortcut path that ended in a bed of nettles, the experimental recipe that gave us all queasy stomachs, the golf shot that landed in the lake—in the life of the mind

things are often not so straightforward. We need other minds on the job, to challenge us, to come back at us, to engage with our arguments and analyses. That is how the world goes round.

Well, some might reply, is that not what's happening? What are you grumbling about? Here are all these writers taking you on. Might they not have spotted the 20 percent you were talking about? Shouldn't you be glad to be corrected?

Well, yes. But my problem is that that's not how things are working out. I have thought about writing this book for some time, but have finally been prodded into doing it because one of my critics—John Piper, of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota—has gone one better than the rest and devoted an entire book to explaining why I'm wrong about Paul, and why we should stick with the tried and trusted theology of the Reformers and their successors. (Or at least some of them; actually, the Reformers disagreed amongst themselves, and so do their successors.¹) And the problem is not that he, like many others, is disagreeing with me. The problem is that he hasn't really listened to what I'm saying. He has watched with growing alarm as I moved the pieces around the coffee table. It has given him a sleepless night. And now he has led me up the hill to show me the glorious sight of another sunrise. *Yes, I want to say. I know about the sunrise. I know it looks to us as if the sun goes round the earth. I'm not denying that. But why couldn't you hear what I was trying to tell you?*

The answer may well be, of course, "Because you didn't explain it properly." Or, perhaps, "Because what you were saying was so muddled and confused that it's better to stick with a straightforward, plain account which makes sense." And, on the chance that one of these is true, I am writing this book to try, once more, to explain what I have been talking about—which is to explain what I think St. Paul was talking about. But there is a more worrying possible answer. My friend—and most of the people with whom I shall here be in debate are people I would like to count as friends—has simply not allowed the main things I have been trying to say to get anywhere near his conscious mind. He has picked off bits of my analysis and argument, worried away at them, shaken his head, and gone back to the all-powerful story he already

knew. (As I was drafting this, the new issue of the *Christian Century* landed on my desk, with an article by a teacher to whom a student said, “I loved what I was learning, but I couldn’t make it stay in my head. It was too different from what I had already learned, so my brain just kept switching back to default.”²) And, partly because I am more than a little weary with this happening again and again, on websites, in questions after lectures, in journalistic interviews, and increasingly in academic and quasi- or pseudo-academic articles and books, I am determined to have one more go at setting things out.

Actually, this book is not my intended “final account” of the matter. There remains the large task, toward which I have been working for most of my life, of the book on Paul which is now planned as the fourth volume of my series about Christian origins.³ But I do not want to spend two hundred pages of that book in detailed discussions with Piper and other similar writers. There are many other issues to be dealt with, in quite different directions, and to concentrate in the larger book on the fierce little battles that are raging in the circles I must now address would pull that project out of shape.

There are two other reasons why I have begun with the story of the friend who thinks the sun goes round the earth. The first is that, within the allegorical meaning of the story, the arguments I have been mounting—the diagrams, the pictures, the objects on the coffee table—stand for fresh readings of Scripture. *They are not the superimposition upon Scripture of theories culled from elsewhere.* But the response, which puts itself about as “the evidence of our eyes,” “the most obvious meaning” and so on, is deeply conditioned by, and at critical points appeals to, tradition. Yes, human tradition—albeit from some extremely fine, devout and learned human beings. Ever since I first read Luther and Calvin, particularly the latter, I determined that whether or not I agreed with them in everything they said, their stated and practiced method would be mine too: to soak myself in the Bible, in the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, to get it into my bloodstream by every means possible, in the prayer and hope that I would be able to teach Scripture afresh to the church and the world. The greatest honor we can pay the Reformers is not to treat them

as infallible—they would be horrified at that—but to do as they did. There is a considerable irony, at the level of method, when John Piper suggests that, according to me, the church has been “on the wrong foot for fifteen hundred years.” It isn’t so much that I don’t actually claim that. It is that that is exactly what people said to his heroes, to Luther, Calvin and the rest. Luther and Calvin answered from Scripture; the Council of Trent responded by insisting on tradition.⁴

The second reason I have begun with the parable of the friend, the earth and the sun is deeper again. It is serious for theological and pastoral reasons, and is near the heart of what is at stake in this debate and many others. The theological equivalent of supposing that the sun goes round the earth is the belief that the whole of Christian truth *is all about me and my salvation*. I have read dozens of books and articles in the last few weeks on the topic of justification. Again and again the writers, from a variety of backgrounds, have assumed, taken it for granted, that the central question of all is, “What must I do to be saved?” or (Luther’s way of putting it), “How can I find a gracious God?” or, “How can I enter a right relationship with God?”

Now do not misunderstand me. Hold the angry or fearful reaction. Salvation is hugely important. Of course it is! Knowing God for oneself, as opposed to merely knowing or thinking *about* him, is at the heart of Christian living. Discovering that God is gracious, rather than a distant bureaucrat or a dangerous tyrant, is the good news that constantly surprises and refreshes us. *But we are not the center of the universe*. God is not circling around us. We are circling around him. It may look, from our point of view, as though “me and my salvation” are the be-all and end-all of Christianity. Sadly, many people—many devout Christians!—have preached that way and lived that way. This problem is not peculiar to the churches of the Reformation. It goes back to the high Middle Ages in the Western church, and infects and affects Catholic and Protestant, liberal and conservative, high and low church alike. But a full reading of Scripture itself tells a different story.

God made humans for a purpose: not simply for themselves, not simply so that they could be in relationship with him, but so that *through* them, as his image-bearers, he could bring his wise, glad, fruitful or-

der to the world. And the closing scenes of Scripture, in the book of Revelation, are not about human beings going off to heaven to be in a close and intimate relationship with God, but about heaven coming to earth. The intimate relationship with God which is indeed promised and celebrated in that great scene of the New Jerusalem issues at once in an outflowing, a further healing creativity, the river of the water of life flowing out from the city and the tree of life springing up, with leaves that are for the healing of the nations.

What is at stake in the present debate is not simply the fine-tuning of theories about what precisely happens in justification. That quickly turns, as one reviewer of Piper's book noted somewhat tartly, into a kind of evangelical arm wrestling, a text-trading contest in which verses from Paul, Greek roots, arcane references to sources both ancient and modern, and sometimes (alas) unkind words fly around the room. Many people will look on with distaste, like neighbors overhearing an unpleasant family row. Yes, there will be some text-trading in this book. That is inevitable, given the subject matter, and the central importance of Scripture itself. But the real point is, I believe, that the salvation of human beings, though of course extremely important for those human beings, is part of a larger purpose. God is rescuing us from the shipwreck of the world, not so that we can sit back and put our feet up in his company, but so that we can be part of his plan to remake the world. *We* are in orbit around *God and his purposes*, not the other way around. If the Reformation tradition had treated the Gospels as equally important to the Epistles, this mistake might never have happened. But it has, and we must deal with it. The earth, and we with it, go round the sun of God and his cosmic purposes.

Ironically, perhaps, this statement can be heard as the radical application of justification by faith itself. "Nothing in my hand I bring," sings the poet, "simply to thy cross I cling." Of course: we look away from ourselves to Jesus Christ and him crucified, to the God whose gracious love and mercy sent him to die for us. But the sigh of relief which is the characteristic Christian reaction to learning about justification by faith ("You mean I don't have to do anything? God loves me and accepts me as I am, just because Jesus died for me?") ought to give

birth at once to a deeper realization down exactly the same line: "You mean it isn't all about *me* after all? I'm not the center of the universe? It's all about God and his purposes?" The problem is that, throughout the history of the Western church, even where the first point has been enthusiastically embraced—sometimes particularly where that has happened—the second has been ignored. And with that sometimes willful ignorance there has crept back into theology, even into good, no-nonsense, copper-bottomed Reformation theology, the snake's whisper that actually it is all about us, that "my relationship with God" and "my salvation" is the still point at the center of the universe. I am the hero in this play. Even Jesus comes on stage to help me out of the mess I'm in. And, way back behind all talk of "new perspectives," "old perspectives," "fresh perspectives" and any other perspectives you care to name, what I am contending for, and the reason I am writing this book, is not just to clarify a few technical details, or justify myself—the crowning irony in a book on this topic!—against my critics. ("It's a very small matter," wrote Paul himself, "that I should be judged by you or by any human court; I don't even judge myself. . . . it is the Lord who judges me."⁵) The reason I am writing this book is because the present battles are symptoms of some much larger issues that face the church at the start of the twenty-first century, and because the danger signs, particularly the failure to read Scripture for all it's worth, and the geocentric theology and piety I've mentioned, are all around us. I am not, in other words, simply appealing to my critics to allow my peculiar interpretations of St. Paul some room in the house, or at least permission to inhabit a kennel in the backyard where my barks and yaps may not be such a nuisance. I am suggesting that the theology of St. Paul, the whole theology of St. Paul rather than the truncated and self-centered readings which have become endemic in Western thought, the towering and majestic theology of St. Paul which, when you even glimpse it, dazzles you like the morning sun rising over the sea, is urgently needed as the church faces the tasks of mission in tomorrow's dangerous world, and is not well served by the inward-looking soteriologies that tangle themselves up in a web of detached texts and secondary theories . . .

It is, after all, an interesting question as to why certain doctrinal and

exegetical questions suddenly explode at particular points. I sat down to lunch last November with a man I had not met until that day. We were in company, in a very nice restaurant. As we took our places, he turned to me and said energetically, “How do you translate *genōmetha* in 2 Corinthians 5:21?” I stared around the table. Everyone was waiting for my answer. I’ll get to that later in the book, but my point here is to ask: what is going on in our culture, our times, our churches, our world, that suddenly makes us itch at this point, itch so badly that we have to scratch like mad even in public? Answering that question would take several other books, but the answer cannot *simply* be “because the gospel is at stake” or “because souls need to be saved.” We live in a highly complex world, and the sudden volcanic eruption of angry, baffled concern at the so-called new perspective on Paul can be located interestingly in a sociocultural, and even political, milieu where an entire way of life, a whole way of understanding the Christian faith and trying to live it out, a whole way of being human, is suddenly perceived to be at risk. It is cognate (for instance) with a large and difficult problem in Western Christianity, the problem characterized by the implicit clash between those who get their faith from the four Gospels, topped up with a few bits of Paul, and those who base it on Paul, topped up with a few illustrations from the Gospels. These issues in turn need to be mapped onto broader questions within parts of the Western church, as is done (for instance) by Roger Olson in a recent book, where he distinguishes “conservatives” (people like Don Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) from “post-conservatives” (people like me).⁶ It’s always intriguing to discover that you belong to a group you didn’t know existed. That particular cultural divide is a fairly solidly American one, and as they say there, I don’t think I have a dog in that fight. Behind Olson’s divide there are, of course, much larger cultural and social tectonic plates shifting this way and that. We should not imagine that we can discuss the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:21, or Romans or Galatians, in a vacuum. Everything is interconnected, and when people feel the floor shaking and the furniture wobbling, they get scared.

Test this out. Go to the blogsites, if you dare. It really is high time we developed a Christian ethic of blogging. Bad temper is bad tem-

per even in the apparent privacy of your own hard drive, and harsh and unjust words, when released into the wild, rampage around and do real damage. And as for the practice of saying mean and untrue things while hiding behind a pseudonym—well, if I get a letter like that it goes straight in the bin. But the cyberspace equivalents of road rage don't happen by accident. People who type vicious, angry, slanderous and inaccurate accusations do so because they feel their worldview to be under attack. Yes, I have a pastoral concern for such people. (And, for that matter, a pastoral concern for anyone who spends more than a few minutes a day taking part in blogsite discussions, especially when they all use code names: was it for this that the creator God made human beings?) But sometimes worldviews have to be shaken. They may become idolatrous and self-serving. And I fear that that has happened, and continues to happen, even in well-regulated, shiny Christian contexts—including, of course, my own. John Piper writes, he tells us, as a pastor. So do I.

In fact, he writes as one who, when it all comes down to it, shares my own concern. When his book came out, he sent me a copy, and in it he wrote kindly, in his own hand: "For Tom, with love and admiration and concern and the desire and prayer that Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, who holds our lives in his hands, will bring us to one mind for the sake of the fullness of his glory and for the good of this groaning world." That is my desire and prayer as well. The earth goes round the sun. Jesus is the hero of the play, and we are the bit-part players, the Fifth Servant and Seventh Footman who come on for a moment, say one word, and disappear again, proud to have shared his stage and, for a moment, been a tiny part of his action. It is because I sense that picture in John Piper's work and because, unlike some of my critics (including some of those whose words are quoted on the back cover of his book!), he has been scrupulously fair, courteous and generous in all our exchanges that I write not with a heavy heart ("Oh, what's the use? He'll never get it. Let him think the sun goes round the earth if it makes him happy!") but with the hope that maybe, just maybe, if we take some time, get out some more books and perhaps telescopes, the penny will drop, the "aha" moment will happen, the new worldview will click

into place, and all will become clear. And, critics please note, I do not expect to remain unchanged through that process. I am not defending against all comers a fortress called the new perspective. I hope not just to make things clearer than I have done before, but to see things clearer than I have done before as a result of having had to articulate it all once more. Perhaps if I succeed in seeing things more clearly I may succeed in saying them more clearly as well.

At this point, in fact, questions about the new perspective and its various rivals become less important. There are times when I wish that the phrase had never been invented; indeed, perhaps for Freudian reasons, I had quite forgotten that I had invented it myself (though even then it was borrowed from Krister Stendahl) until J. D. G. Dunn, who is normally credited with it, graciously pointed out that I had used it in my 1978 Tyndale Lecture, in which, as I well remember, he was sitting in the front row.⁷ My relationship with Jimmy Dunn, sometimes stormy, sometimes puzzling, now happy (he astonished and humbled me by dedicating his recent big book, *The New Perspective on Paul*, to me, and my returning of the compliment herewith is a small thank-offering for a long and properly tangled collegial friendship) should inform onlookers of the most important thing about the new perspective, namely that there is no such thing as *the* new perspective (despite the title of his recent book!). There is only a disparate family of perspectives, some with more, some with less family likeness, and with fierce squabbles and sibling rivalries going on inside. There is no united front (like Schumann's famous "League of David Against the Philistines," fighting against Rossini on the one hand and Wagner on the other) pushing back the recalcitrant Westminster-Confession hordes with the ox-horns of liberal biblical scholarship. It doesn't work like that.

Indeed, anyone giving close attention to the work of Ed Sanders, Jimmy Dunn and myself (for some reason we are often mentioned as the chief culprits:⁸ why not Richard Hays or why not Douglas Campbell or Terry Donaldson or Bruce Longenecker?⁹) will see that we have at least as much disagreement between ourselves as we do with those outside this (very small, and hardly charmed) circle. Jimmy Dunn and I have disagreed for the last thirty years on Paul's Christology, on the mean-

ing of Romans 7, on *pistis Christou* and, more recently, perhaps importantly, on the question of Israel's continuing exile. Ed Sanders has had no particular reason to disagree with me—I am not aware that he has taken an enormous interest in anything I've written—but my gratitude for the stimulus of his work has been cheerfully matched by my major disagreements with him on point after point not only of detail but of method, structure and meaning. I well remember one Oxford term when I was lecturing on Romans at 11 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and Ed Sanders was lecturing on Paul's theology on the same days at 10 a.m. Students would come straight from his lecture to mine, and on more than one occasion I said something which provoked a ripple of laughter: I had exactly but unintentionally contradicted what Sanders had said in the previous hour.

All of which, anecdotal but perhaps significant, is to say: critics of the new perspective who began by being afraid of Sanders should not assume that Dunn and I are flying under the same flag. In fact, as another old friend, Francis Watson, is now making clear, it is time to move beyond the new perspective, to develop quite different ways of reading Paul which will do more justice to him historically, exegetically, theologically, and (it is hoped) pastorally and evangelistically.¹⁰ This may involve retrieving some elements of the so-called old perspective, but Piper and others like him should not cheer too soon. The stray lambs are not returning to the Reformation fold—except in the sense that, for me at least, they remain absolutely committed to the Reformers' method of questioning all traditions in the light of Scripture. It is time to move on. Actually, I had hoped to have indicated this in the title of my last book on Paul, though the American publisher muted this somewhat (the English title was *Paul: Fresh Perspectives*, which when translated into American came out as *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*). Anyway, what follows is an attempt not to defend something monolithic called the new perspective, certainly not to rescue some of the stranger things that Ed Sanders has said, but to launch one more time into Paul, his letters and his theology, in implicit and sometimes explicit debate with some at least of those who have expressed their very considerable alarm when I have tried to do this before.

Some at least. There are now quite a lot of people writing about all these issues. Michael Bird's recent mostly helpful book has an eighteen-page bibliography, mainly of English and American works (there are a lot more: the Germans, to look no further, are not inactive), and the "Paul Page" website now updates this bibliography.¹¹ Even if I were able to devote all my time to the ever-increasing flood of literature, let alone to the wider studies on first-century Judaism, paganism and Christianity which would set it all in its proper context, and the new commentaries on particular books, it would be difficult to keep up. I have, as we say, a "day job" which is quite demanding, and which includes, but goes a long way beyond, my responsibilities to expound and defend the teaching of the Bible. (The fact that I am finishing work on this book during the 2008 Lambeth Conference speaks for itself.) It is clearly impossible for me to engage explicitly, in the way one might like, with more than a fraction of the relevant recent writing. However, I think we can make a virtue out of this necessity. Many of the books and articles in question have got to the point, in engagement with secondary literature, that up to half of each page is taken up with small-print footnotes. I have written a fair number of footnotes in my time, and they have their own potential for elegance and even humor. (When my parents proofread my doctoral thesis, they nicknamed it "The Oxford Book of Footnotes"; when they did the same for my brother Stephen, some years later, his was called "The Durham Book of Footnotes.") But for most readers, even most scholarly readers, such a way of writing can become turgid and scholastic, with the text and the main questions buried under a heap of dusty rubble. I recall the late and much-missed Ben Meyer speaking of those who ask for the bread of insight and are given instead the stone of research. One might extend this: instead of the fish of the gospel, one is presented with the scorpion of scholarly in-fighting. In trying to avoid this danger, I am well aware of the opposite one: key points made in debate may go unanswered. That can't be helped. I shall try to address what seem to be the central issues, and the curious details where they are relevant, in the main text.

To use a dangerous metaphor: there are two ways of winning a battle. You can do your best to kill as many enemies as you can until few if any

are left to oppose you. Or you can simply outflank your opponents so that they realize their position is unsustainable. Much recent literature has been trying the first method. This book is aiming for the second. I know there will be plenty of foot soldiers out there who will continue to hide in the jungle, believing their side is still winning. But I hope that the next generation, without preexisting reputations to lose and positions to maintain, will get the message.

II

ANOTHER IMAGE COMES TO MIND. Sometimes, faced with a jigsaw puzzle, one is tempted to make it apparently easier by ignoring half the pieces. Put them back into the box! I can't cope with that many! The result is of course that the puzzle is harder, not easier. However, one can imagine someone, having made this initial disastrous move, trying to remedy the situation by brute force, joining together pieces that don't quite fit in order to create some sort of picture anyway. (I am reminded of the old joke about the former officers of the Stasi, the East German secret police. In order to find out what jobs they might be suited for in the new Germany, they were required to take an intelligence test. They were given a wooden frame with several holes of different shapes, and a set of wooden blocks shaped to fit the holes. When the test was complete, all the blocks were slotted into the frames; but it turned out that, while some of the ex-Stasi officers were indeed quite intelligent, most of them were simply very, very strong.)

The application of this jigsaw image should be obvious. In preparing to write this book, I read quickly through not only the key texts I wanted to deal with but the articles on justification in the theological and biblical dictionaries that came to hand. Again and again, even where the authors appeared to be paying close attention to the biblical texts, several of the key elements in Paul's doctrine were simply missing: Abraham and the promises God made to him, incorporation into Christ, resurrection and new creation, the coming together of Jews and Gentiles, eschatology in the sense of God's purpose-driven plan through history, and, not least, the Holy Spirit and the formation of

Christian character. Where were they? When reading texts like Romans and Galatians it is hard to imagine how one could write three sentences about justification without bringing in most of those elements, but those articles managed it. (I should cite an honorable exception. The great conservative scholar J. I. Packer, in his article in the *New Bible Dictionary*, includes virtually all of the above, so that even though I question some aspects of his synthesis he offers a much more fully rounded picture than most of his rivals.¹²)

Nor is it only themes that go missing. You can tell a lot about a book on Paul by seeing which passages don't appear in the index. John Piper, astonishingly, has no discussion of Romans 2:25-29 or Romans 10:6-9, absolutely crucial passages in Paul and certainly in my exposition of him. Nor does he deal at any point with what is central for me, the question of Paul's understanding of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15. His only reference to the latter passage is to say that Paul "picks up the language of imputing" from Genesis; at this point, Piper is exactly on all fours with Ed Sanders, regarding Paul's use of Genesis as merely an incidental convenience, without reference to the wider context, let alone the place of Genesis 15 within one of Paul's greatest controlling stories. Even Jimmy Dunn, discussing whether Paul is a "covenant theologian," manages not even to address the question of why Paul chooses Genesis 15, not just for a proof-text but for the underlying theme of two of his most crucial chapters.¹³

A further example is provided by the characteristically engaging, substantial and scholarly review of the subject by Stephen Westerholm.¹⁴ Despite the wonderful acclaim from leading scholars printed on the back of the book, Westerholm has managed to leave two-thirds of the jigsaw pieces in the box. One would not know, after over four hundred pages, that justification, for Paul, was closely intertwined with the notion of "being in Christ"—even though the stand-off between "juristic" and "participationist" categories has dominated major discussion of Paul's theology for a hundred years, with the work of Sanders as simply another high point (following Schweitzer and many others) in the elevation of "participation" to primary position. Westerholm has screened out an entire theme, despite the fact that many, the Reformed

as opposed to the Lutheran tradition, have suggested that it is in fact the appropriate context for understanding justification itself. Perhaps this is cognate with the fact that Westerholm, one of the greatest anti-new-perspective champions in current writing, does not seem to notice the existence, let alone the importance, of “the imputed righteousness of Christ” which, for Piper and others, is *the* central issue; and with the fact that he places C. E. B. Cranfield within his account of “Lutheran” scholarship, despite acknowledging that Cranfield belongs emphatically in the “Reformed” camp—and has spent much of his scholarly career trying to pry the reading of Paul out of the hands of a perceived antinomian Lutheranism. Far too many pieces of the jigsaw are swept off the table by this kind of treatment.

Two bits of the jigsaw in particular, neither of them particularly characteristic of either old perspective or new, seem to me to be forced on our attention by Paul himself. Actually, they go together quite closely. First, there is Paul’s rich and subtle use of the Old Testament. Here I follow, and then go beyond, the seminal work of Richard Hays.¹⁵ When Paul quotes Scripture, he regularly intends to refer, not simply to the actual words quoted, but to the whole passage. Again and again, when you look up the chapter from which the quotation is taken, a flood of light streams back onto Paul’s actual argument. Among many favorite examples, I mention 2 Corinthians 4:13. “We have the same spirit of faith,” declares Paul, “in accordance with scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak.” What does the quotation of Psalm 116:10¹⁶ add to his argument? Surely believing-and-so-speaking is rather obvious? Isn’t that what one normally does? Yes, but look at the whole psalm—the one we know as 116 in the Hebrew and English, divided into two in the Septuagint. It is a prayer of one who is suffering terribly, but who trusts in God and is delivered. In other words, it is exactly the prayer of someone in the situation of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4. Paul has the whole Psalm in mind, and wants his readers to catch the “echoes” of it as well. This principle of interpretation is now widely established as at least one way among others in understanding Paul’s use of Scripture. It is not peculiar to, or indeed particularly characteristic of, the new perspective—though it is

characteristic of various strands in second-temple Judaism, the study of which is of course important, if controversial, as one element in the new perspective.

Second, and as far as I am concerned absolutely central for Paul, there is the apostle's understanding of the story of Israel, and of the whole world, as a single continuous narrative which, having reached its climax in Jesus the Messiah, was now developing in the fresh ways which God the Creator, the Lord of history, had always intended. This, too, is a characteristic second-temple Jewish idea, though again it has not at all been prominent in the new perspective.

This is so important for everything that follows in the present book that I need to spell it out a bit more. Highlighting Paul's reading of "the story of Israel" isn't a matter simply of "narrative theology" in the reductive sense that, while some people like to do theology in abstract propositions, others prefer, as a matter of cultural taste, to think in story mode. It is an attempt to understand how Paul's references to Adam and Abraham, to Moses and the prophets, to Deuteronomy and Isaiah and even the Psalms, mean what they mean because he has in his head and heart, as a great many second-temple Jews did, a grand story of creation and covenant, of God and his world and his people, *which had been moving forward in a single narrative and which was continuing to do so*. This time the howls of protest come not so much from the anti-new-perspective brigade—so far as I can see, they have mostly not even noticed the point, try as I may to get it across—but from the older writers like Ernst Käsemann, whose debate with Krister Stendahl on this and related matters formed the subject of my Tyndale Lecture in 1978, to which I referred above, and from Käsemann's successors such as J. Louis Martyn. As burnt children, declared Käsemann with a reference back to the Nazi "salvation-history" of the 1930s ("God has raised up the German nation to carry forward his purposes, and all we have to do is get on board"), we are unwilling to put our hands into the fire again. Point taken; but Stendahl was on to something, even though he did not, in my view, explore it fully in its Pauline dimensions.¹⁷ Paul does indeed think of history as a continuous line, and of God's purpose in history sweeping forward unbroken from Abraham to Jesus

and on, through himself and his work, into the mission of the church. But within this continuous line there is an almighty crash, like the great chord in the Surprise symphony which wakes everyone up with a start even though it belongs exactly within the harmony and rhythm of the movement: an apocalyptic moment *within* the covenant story, the moment—to change the musical image—when the soloist bursts into the music with a torrent of violent chords, which yet reveal themselves on reflection as the point toward which the orchestral introduction had been heading all along. Paul's view of the cataclysmic irruption of God into the history of Israel and the world in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah was that this heart-stopping, show-stopping, chart-topping moment was, despite initial appearances, and certainly despite Paul's own earlier expectations and initial understanding, the very thing for which the entire history of Israel from Abraham onward, the entire history of Israel under Torah from Moses onward and indeed the entire history of humanity from Adam onward, had been waiting. It is central to Paul, but almost entirely ignored in perspectives old, new and otherwise, that *God had a single plan all along through which he intended to rescue the world and the human race, and that this single plan was centered upon the call of Israel, a call which Paul saw coming to fruition in Israel's representative, the Messiah.* Read Paul like this, and you can keep all the jigsaw pieces on the table. Ignore this great narrative, and you will either have to sweep half of them out of sight or try the Stasi trick.

Where all this is ignored—as it routinely is, both in the new perspective and the old, as well as in the 999 righteous readers of Paul who are unaware that they need any “perspective” at all—we are back to the question of the jigsaw. Take away the single story, and Romans 9–11 becomes a detached musing on predestination, or “the future of Israel” as a different topic from the rest of the letter. Take away the single story, and the thrust of Paul's climactic statements in Galatians 3 is not only blunted, it is ignored. In Galatians 3:29, after heaping up almost all his great theological themes into a single pile—law, faith, children of God, “in Christ,” baptism, “putting on Christ,” “neither Jew nor Greek,” “all one in Christ”—the conclusion is not “You are therefore children of

God” or “You are therefore saved by grace through faith,” but “*You are Abraham’s offspring.*” Why does that matter to Paul, and at that point? Most new perspective writers have no answer for that. Virtually no old perspective ones even see that there is a question to be asked. But until we have found the answer we have not been reading Paul, but only a fictitious character of our own invention, cobbled together from such Pauline jigsaw-pieces as we already know and like, forced together with the power of self-assured dogma, and stuck in place with the glue of piety and pastoral concern.

Later dogma and piety will themselves, of course, set up a whole new train of thought. A further musical illustration. Hold down the loud pedal on a piano, and strike a low A. If the piano is in tune, you will soon hear the next A vibrating in sympathy. Then the E above that. Then the next A. Then C sharp. Then another E. Things then get a little confused—the next note in the true harmonic sequence ought to be a slightly flat G natural—but this is enough for my present point. All those notes—several As, reinforcing the basic one, with Es and at least one C sharp—are actually *part of* the original note. Few humans can hear them without the aid of a piano or near equivalent, but they are there. But supposing someone, alert perhaps to one of the Es, were to strike that instead (“Listen! This is the note we’ve been hearing!”). It would indeed belong with the original A. But now, having itself been struck, it would set up *a different set of resonances* to the earlier ones: another E, then a B, a further E, then G sharp, another B, and so on.

This is what has happened, I suggest, in the uses to which Paul has been put in the centuries following the Reformation. Let us grant for the moment that Luther and Calvin (for all their major differences—another point often glossed over in the hasty and sometimes angry anti-new-perspective movement) really did hear a true overtone from what Paul was saying—say, the E which forms the fifth of the chord based on the pedal A. What has then happened? Things have not stood still within Protestantism. All kinds of movements have come and gone. The eighteenth-century Continental Enlightenment was, in some respects, a thoroughly Protestant movement, getting rid of authoritarian religion and asking demystifying, rational, historical questions. The

Romantic movement, in reaction against dry Enlightenment rationalism, carried a further strain of Protestant sentiment, this time insisting that what mattered was the inward feeling, not the outward action. Different kinds of pietism have sprung up, flourished, mutated and left their legacy within all of this. Finally (this, of course, cuts several long stories exceedingly short) there has been existentialism, looking to authentic human experience as both the key to, and the yardstick for, genuine faith. There is no such thing as a pure return to the Reformers. They themselves have been heard and reheard repeatedly in echo chambers that they would not have recognized. And their own readings of Paul have been passed on through those echo chambers to the point where the voice of the apostle has become all but unrecognizable. All the notes on the piano are jangling away merrily, and any attempt to discern which pedal note was struck first appears hopeless.

Unless, of course, we return to history. History was where Paul looked to see the roots of the story whose climax he believed was Jesus Christ. History is where we have to go if, as we say, we want to listen to Scripture itself rather than either the venerable traditions of later church leaders or the less venerable footnotes of more recent scholars. For too long we have read Scripture with nineteenth-century eyes and sixteenth-century questions. It's time to get back to reading with first-century eyes and twenty-first-century questions.