



Judgment and Justification in Early Judaism and the Apostle Paul

Chris VanLandingham

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Is salvation a gift of God's grace or something God's followers must earn by good works? How do we reconcile the two emphases that salvation is a bestowal of God's mercy and that the final judgment will involve an assessment of the way people have lived during their time on earth?

In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), E. P. Sanders defined the terms and laid the groundwork for this crucial debate. Sanders's "New Perspective" sought to resolve the tension between grace and good deeds by arguing that for the Jews of Paul's day as well as for Paul himself, entrance into God's saving covenant was a gift of God's grace while remaining in the covenant required good works done in obedience to God.

Sanders's most vigorous opponents have disputed the works side of his formulation, taking issue with his contention that obedience is required to retain right standing in God's covenant. In *Judgment and Justification*, Chris VanLandingham challenges the grace side of the Sanders thesis, arguing that Paul's teaching on salvation, following the prevailing Jewish thinking of his time, establishes good works as the criterion for salvation at the final judgment.

In making his case, VanLandingham does a careful, text-by-text survey of early Jewish literature, interacting with a wide range of biblical scholars who deal with the themes of salvation and judgment found in these texts and in the Pauline writings. VanLandingham wraps up this survey with a challenging reassessment of Paul's teaching in the light of the Jewish thinking of his time.

Judgment and Justification offers an incisive new look at the Jewish context for our understanding of Paul's teaching. Scholars on all sides of the ongoing debate will benefit by interacting with the texts presented and the provocative arguments the author draws from them.

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