

Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2003. xii + 311 pp. n.p.

Critical responses to the view of Judaism and Paul propounded by E. P. Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) continue to be published. The recent volume on *Variegated Nomism* has suggested an adjustment of Sanders's view, though some of the contributors continue to endorse the view proposed by Sanders. Friedrich Avemarie has recently maintained that rabbinic literature contains an uneasy tension between the emphasis on covenant and obeying the Torah. In some instances covenant and election are prominent for obtaining life, but in others the focus is on obeying the Torah to gain life. Hence, Sanders overemphasizes the covenant in his own analysis of Judaism. Mark Elliott argues that Judaism during the Second Temple period did not envision salvation for all Israel but only for the faithful remnant that observed the Torah. Sharp criticisms of the new perspective on Paul, which, of course, represents a diversity of perspectives and cannot be confined to Sanders's view, have recently been written by Andrew Das and Seyoon Kim. This new work by Simon Gathercole continues this trend. The book represents a revision of a thesis written under James Dunn, which is interesting in itself since Dunn is famous as an advocate of the new perspective. In the first section of the book Gathercole re-examines Jewish literature that can be dated before A.D. 70, and introduces later literature as confirming evidence. The thesis Gathercole advances supports the work of Avemarie but establishes it from earlier Jewish evidence. He maintains that Jewish soteriology before A.D. 70 maintained that final salvation depended on divine election (the covenant) and obedience to Torah. Paul, on the other hand, in Romans 2-4 insists that justification cannot be gained by obeying Torah.

Part one of the book, which is really the bulk of the book, examines the role of obedience in final vindication in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Qumran literature, Jewish soteriology in the New Testament, and writings composed after A.D. 70, including 4 Ezra, 2 *Baruch*, Josephus, the Rabbis, and the Targums. Gathercole acknowledges that not all of the literature yields the same conclusion. Sirach, Tobit, 1 Maccabees, and *Jubilees*, for instance, do not betray any great interest in the life to come and yet they often draw a connection between obedience and reward in this life. Most of the writings, on the other hand, from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha teach that life in the age to come is based on obedience and election, even though such themes are presented in a diversity of ways in the literature. Obedience appears to be the basis for final justification in a number of texts, indicating that Sanders overstates the role of the covenant in Judaism. In considering the Qumran literature Gathercole argues in some detail, and rightly that "works of Torah" cannot be confined to the boundary markers of the law. "Works of law" at Qumran refers to the law in its totality, so that final judgment and vindication based on obedience to the law are taught.

Gathercole then investigates the role of works at the final judgment for Jewish soteriology in the NT. Gathercole maintains that the NT should also be used to shed light on Second Temple Judaism's view of the law. The importance of works for final vindication is apparent in Matthew, Luke, John, James, Revelation, and even Paul. Gathercole argues that Lutheran theology has wrongly denied the role that works play in final justification in the NT. For instance, he maintains that works function as the *means* of eschatological justification in James. Paul's discussion of works in Romans 2 cannot

be treated as merely hypothetical. The doing of the law here does not merely represent covenant status as Wright insists, nor faith and the presence of the Spirit as Moo contends. Paul genuinely thinks of keeping the law here, and believes here and elsewhere that obedience is necessary for final vindication before God. According to Gathercole, Paul's view of obedience is Christ-centered rather than Torah centered. He contrasts Paul's view with that of Jewish contemporaries because obedience is the work of the Spirit and the result of his power. Obedience is necessary for final vindication in Paul, and here Paul stands in contrast especially to Lutheran theology. Gathercole criticizes scholars like Yinger who see Paul's theology of works as similar to what we find in Judaism, for then the role of the Spirit is diminished. Paul views the Spirit as empowering and animating Christian obedience, and this theme is lacking in Jewish literature. Even at Qumran the Spirit is given to illumine but not to empower.

Gathercole helpfully emphasizes the importance of works at the final judgment for believers in Christ. Protestant theology has sometimes over-reacted to Roman Catholicism and diminished the necessity of works when the NT clearly teaches that those who practice lawlessness will be excluded from the kingdom (Matt 7:21-23). We can even accept Gathercole's claim that James teaches that we are justified *by means of works*, if we define carefully in what sense this is true. Believers are not justified by means of works as if such works are sufficient to merit favor with God. God demands perfect obedience and all fall short of his glory. James clarifies that all good works are *the fruit of faith*, and hence the consequence of trusting in the cross alone for salvation. So, the works that are the means of salvation never stand alone, but are always the evidence of genuine faith—the result of God's work in his people. Hence, good works are never the ultimate basis of salvation, for the work of Christ alone is the basis of justification. Further, all good works flow from faith and are inseparable from such faith in Christ. Therefore, those who lack such works demonstrate their lack of genuine faith, for the faith that saves always produces good works.

In chapter four Gathercole maintains that the necessity of works at the final vindication is clear also in works composed after A.D. 70, whether we look at 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, Josephus, Rabbinic literature, or the Targums. In discussing the Rabbinic literature Gathercole depends especially on the work of Avemarie who argues that some texts emphasize obedience and others God's covenant, and there is not attempt to harmonize such. Gathercole concludes that what we find after A.D. 70 in Tannaitic literature is already clearly present before A.D. 70.

In chapter 5 Gathercole considers boasting in Second Temple Judaism. Here he maintains that Jews, both individually and corporately, were confident of their final vindication, not solely because of their election but also because of their obedience. The problem with Jews was not that they lacked assurance of confidence about their final salvation nor was it that they trusted solely in their election (Sanders). Rather, they believed their works were adequate for vindication at the final judgment. Gathercole convincingly supplies evidence from the *Assumption of Moses*, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, 2 and 4 Maccabees, *Contra Apionem* and *Life* by Josephus, the *Sibylline Oracles*, *Jubilees*, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Pseudo-Philo, Tobit, and Saul the Pharisee demonstrating that obedience to the law, along with election, was viewed as a basis for vindication in the final judgment. It is not enough, against Sanders to intend to keep the law, but human beings must actually keep it to receive

God's blessing. It seems to me that Gathercole makes his case quite convincingly in his analysis of these texts, demonstrating that Sanders overstated his case in his own analysis of Palestinian Judaism.

Part two of the work consists of an exegesis of Romans 1-5. The person addressed in Rom 2:1 is not just the moral person, but Paul engages a Jewish interlocutor. Paul's charges the Jews with sin in Romans 2, but he does not level his accusations merely against Jewish teachers, nor are the sins listed in Rom 2:21-22 directed necessarily against Jews individually. Paul refers to the sins that defiled the nation and led it into exile. Israel's boasting in Rom 2:17 and 23 refers to its confidence of vindication at the final judgment, so that there is no basis for the view that Jews suffered from lack of assurance or uncertainty about their salvation in Romans 2. The problem with the Jews does not consist in their judgment of others but in their failure to repent. Paul's thinking before his conversion is representative of the spiritual condition of other Jews. He thought he was a good, law-observant person, but after his conversion he recognized that he was an unrepentant sinner since he persecuted the church.

Contrary to some proponents of the new perspective, Paul does not charge Jews merely with bad attitudes against Gentiles but with apostasy because they have turned away from the God of Israel—even if they failed to admit such is the case. Hence, Paul assiduously attempts to persuade Jews that they have indeed sinned and wandered from the one true God. The catena of citations in Rom 3:10-18, Gathercole affirms, is intended to indict Jews not Gentiles since Gentiles were not judged on the basis of the law (Rom 2:12). The Jews believed their obedience to the law along with their election would save them on the day of judgment, and hence it is too simple to say that Paul only indicts Jews for restricting the covenant to themselves, as if national privilege is the only target of Paul's attack. Indeed, the Jews believed that their obedience to the law was the basis of their salvation on the last day. Gathercole's exegesis is insightful and mainly convincing, though I question whether the catena in Rom 3:10-18 is directed only against the Jews given the connection between Rom 3:9 and 3:10.

Romans 3:20 indicates that Paul engages in a polemic against Jews who saw their works as fundamental for their avoidance of judgment on the last day, indicating that they did not perceive themselves as needing repentance. Paul believes that the Spirit grants ability to observe Torah, but what he opposes here is any conception that the flesh provides strength to keep the law. Some Jews may have seen God as granting strength to please God in obeying his commands, but Gathercole maintains that this is fundamentally different from the gift of the Spirit granted by God through Christ. Romans 3:21 means that God's saving righteousness belongs to those who believe instead of those who attempt to observe the Torah. Gathercole maintains that "righteousness" in 3:21 is not an attribute of God, nor is the term exhausted by covenantal faithfulness, or the imputation of righteousness. It seems that he is saying that it is the gift of righteousness God grants to believers. Israel's boast in Rom 3:27-28 cannot be confined to their election and the gift of Torah, though it includes both of these (cf. Rom 3:29-30). Israel also boasted because it believed in final vindication on the basis of works as well. In Rom 9:30-10:5 Israel is not faulted for exclusiveness and focusing on boundary markers but because it fixed its attention on God's commands and omitted faith.

In Romans 4 Paul counters the view that Abraham was justified on the basis of his works, and does not only address the issue whether adherence to Jewish customs was

required for entrance into the people of God. Works here refers to the entire law and the demand that the law be obeyed comprehensively for justification. Gathercole maintains that in Jewish tradition (Sirach, *Jubilees*, the Damascus Document, 1 Maccabees, and the *Mishnah Nedarim*) Abraham's faith is commended *after* his trials instead of *before* them as in Genesis 15. Hence, justification is limited to the period after his trials in Jewish tradition. The Jewish tradition, therefore, *describes* Abraham's condition as a righteous person, whereas Paul in Romans 4 argues that Abraham was ungodly. Hence, in Jewish tradition justification *follows* Abraham's good works, but in Paul justification *precedes* his good works. Once Abraham was justified according to Paul, he receives the Spirit and new obedience is the result. Abraham's trials before his justification would only confirm his slavery to sin and the righteousness of God's judgment upon him.

Gathercole interprets the contentious Romans 4:2 to mean that Abraham appeared to be vindicated by his works before human beings, but he was not righteous in God's sight. Paul goes on to say that Abraham was justified by believing (Rom 4:3)—before he obeyed any commands. Jewish tradition read Gen 15:6 in light of Genesis 17 and 22, but Paul moved in a dramatically different direction, reading Genesis 15 with Genesis 12, so that he establishes the sequence: faith, justification, and then obedience. Abraham was an idolater at his conversion. In Jewish literature God declares Abraham in the right because such a judgment *fits* his character, but according to Paul, God's word creates a whole new reality by declaring Abraham to be in the right before him even though he was ungodly. God's creative word does not mean that "justify" means make righteous, for texts like Gal 5:17 show that believers still remain sinners. He concludes from Rom 4:4-5 that Paul specifically rejects the Jewish exegetical tradition that grounded Abraham's righteousness on his works. By way of contrast, Abraham is righteous because he believed in God.

David in Rom 4:6-8 functions as one within the covenant who is righteous by faith instead of works. David's sin does not focus on boundary markers since David was circumcised, kept the sabbath, and observed food laws. David is considered to be a sinner because of his failure to do what God required. Again Paul's view stands in contrast with Jewish exegetical tradition. Like Abraham David is justified and forgiven as a sinner. Righteousness in Romans 4 is both positive in that it is an act of creation but also forgiveness in which sin is not covered.

Gathercole maintains that Rom 5:1ff does not clearly introduce a new section as many interpreters have claimed. Perhaps 5:11 should even be considered the climax of 3:21-5:11. The boast of believers is in hope (Rom 5:2) and this hope is in God himself (Rom 5:11). The boasting in God here is not the same as boasting in Torah, for in 2:17 Paul refers to Jews who are unrepentant. They based their confidence both on their election and their obedience to Torah.

Gathercole's interpretation of Paul and Judaism is largely convincing, and poses a challenge to the new perspective on Paul. He demonstrates that Paul's view of justification stood in opposition to the Judaism of his day, so that the view of faith and works in Paul and Judaism were significantly different. We eagerly anticipate the future work of this fine young scholar.