

# Foreword

“Judgment according to works” and Pauline theology don’t belong in the same universe for many scholars. Some, simply explaining the troublesome verses away, argue that Paul couldn’t have believed in a judgment according to works, since he believed in justification by faith alone. Others see the theme in Paul’s writings and conclude that Paul’s theology doesn’t cohere logically. Paul ends up contradicting himself since in one place he affirms justification by works and in another place justification by faith. Such a reading at least affirms the presence of both themes; but it is difficult to believe that Paul wasn’t aware of both themes in his writings, for both are pervasive in his letters. It is not as if he teaches judgment according to works and justification by faith just here and there. Instead, both themes are a staple of his writings, and hence it seems quite likely that Paul didn’t see a contradiction between the two.

In critical scholarship, the problem has long been recognized, with scholars proposing a variety of solutions over the years. It is tempting to think that we have an intractable problem, so that any and every attempt to solve the conundrum testifies more to the creativity of the scholar than to the credibility of the answer. I would suggest that we have to start with a patient and thorough exegesis of the text. Such a view is out of fashion in many circles today, for some have abandoned the notion that we can discover Paul’s theology in his writings. Obviously, I can’t respond here to those who don’t think a return to exegesis is the answer. They lament that it has all been done before and that we inevitably read our own conceptions into the text. I sympathize with both claims, and yet I don’t think we should give into exegetical despair or embrace theological pluralism or authorial nihilism.

One way forward, in other words, is to start over. Kevin McFadden helps us do this in his careful and patient examination of judgment according to works in Romans. He investigates Paul’s fullest letter to discern what he teaches about judgment according to works and asks how it relates to justification by faith. McFadden gives a place to stand, or at least a place to start, in the whole discussion. Perhaps the most radical thing of all is to read Paul again and to suggest what he means in the words he uses. McFadden leads us in an intense and clear reading of Romans, and he offers a theological reading that I believe fits with the Pauline intention.

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