

Romans: Scholarly Deep Dive - Debate Cheat Sheet

New Perspective on Paul (Sanders, Dunn, Wright) | Bates on Pistis | Early Church Fathers

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Year	Event
30s-40s	Jewish-Christian house churches in Rome
49 AD	Claudius expels Jews (Suetonius: "Chrestus")
49-54	Gentile Christians take over leadership
54	Claudius dies; Jews return
55-57	Paul writes Romans to address tensions

Romans is NOT systematic theology. It's a pastoral letter addressing Jewish-Gentile conflict after Claudius's edict.

Paul's Purposes:

- **Spain mission** - Needed Rome as sending church
- **Jerusalem collection** - Gentile money for Jewish Christians
- **Address tensions** - Jewish/Gentile leadership conflict

2. NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

The Old View (Luther)

Paul fighting Jews who tried to *earn* salvation. Projects 16th-c. concerns onto 1st-c. Judaism.

E.P. Sanders (1977): Covenantal Nomism

Jews weren't earning salvation—they already had it by birth into Israel. They kept law to **stay in** the covenant, not to **enter** it. Grace → obedience.

"Works of Law" = Identity Markers

James Dunn + Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT):
"Works of law" = circumcision, food laws, Sabbath
Only use outside Paul is 4QMMT—refers to boundary markers, NOT general good works.

Key Scholars

Scholar	Contribution
E.P. Sanders	Covenantal nomism (Methodist)
James Dunn	Works = identity markers (Methodist)
N.T. Wright	Corporate election (Anglican)

Evangelical Opponents

Thomas Schreiner (Reformed Baptist, SBTS) - Defends traditional reading
John Piper (Reformed Baptist) - Schreiner dedicates commentary to him
D.A. Carson (TGC founder) - Opposes New Perspective

3. FAITH (PISTIS) AS ALLEGIANCE

Matthew Bates (2017)

Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Pistis should be translated "allegiance" to Jesus the king, not mere mental assent.

Rom 1:16-17: "...everyone who **gives allegiance** to Jesus as Christ..."

Pistis Christou Debate

Translation	Meaning
Faith IN Christ	Our faith toward Christ (traditional)
Faith OF Christ	Christ's own faithfulness (Richard Hays)

If "faith OF Christ," emphasis shifts from our mental state to Christ's obedient life/death.

4. BAPTISM IN ROMANS 6

"Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom 6:3)

NOT "in remembrance of" but "INTO his death" — genuine participation, not symbol.

H.T. Andrews (Congregationalist NT Scholar)

"It seems very hard to resist the conclusion... that if the Epistles do not enunciate baptismal regeneration, they at any rate **approximate very closely to it.**"

5. EARLY CHURCH FATHERS ON BAPTISM

Justin Martyr (~165 AD): "They are brought... where there is water, and are **regenerated**... they then receive the washing with water." (*First Apology* 61)

Irenaeus (120-205): "Baptism which is **regeneration to God**... the seal of eternal life and the **new birth unto God.**" (*Against Heresies*)

Tertullian (155-220): "Without baptism, **salvation is attainable by none**... Baptism itself is a corporal act... its effect is spiritual, in that **we are freed from our sins.**" (*On Baptism*)

Gavin Ortlund (evangelical) claims fathers' language is "complex." Catholic apologist **Trent Horn** responded his arguments are "not supported by most scholars."

6. HOLY SPIRIT & LAYING ON OF HANDS

Acts 8:14-17 (Samaritans)

1. Philip preached → they believed → were baptized
2. BUT "the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them"
3. Peter & John laid hands → "they received the Holy Spirit"
4. Simon could **SEE** Spirit was given through hands (v.18)

Romans 1:11

*"I long to see you, that I may **impart to you some spiritual gift** to strengthen you."*

Even established churches needed something only apostolic ministry could provide.

Protestant Contradiction:

1. Spirit given to all who believe (no hands needed)
 2. Total depravity = can't believe without Spirit first
- Problem:** How does anyone come to faith?

7. ROMANS 9-11: ELECTION

N.T. Wright:

"Chapter 9 has long been seen as the central NT passage on 'predestination,' though... the theological tradition from **Augustine to Calvin did not grasp what Paul was actually talking about here.**"

"This was **never** an abstract 'doctrine of predestination'... Paul **never** encourages speculation of that sort."

Corporate vs Individual Election

Calvinist	Scholarly
Individual predestination to hell	Corporate election of Israel
"Jacob/Esau" = individual souls	Quote from Malachi about NATIONS
God chooses some for damnation	God's faithfulness to His people

Rom 9:13 "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated"

Quote from **Malachi 1:2-3** about the NATION of Edom (Esau's descendants), not a pre-birth decree about an individual.

8. "ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED" REFUTED

Romans 11:19-22

*"God's kindness to you, **provided you continue** in his kindness; **otherwise you too will be cut off.**"*

Romans 8:13

*"For if you live according to the flesh **you will die**, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."*

Scholarly view: "Paul believes God can predestine an elect people to final perseverance even though **individual members can fall away**. Some elect may fall away, perhaps even most, but never all."

9. TOTAL DEPRAVITY CRITIQUE

Romans 8:7-8

Calvinists: Humans can't choose God

Context: Paul describes two categories—"in flesh" vs "in Spirit." Not saying unregenerate can't *choose*; saying those *living by* flesh can't please God.

"Dead in Sin" Argument

Calvinists: "Dead" = corpse, can't respond

Counter: Believers are "dead to sin" (Rom 6:2, 11) but CAN respond to sin. If "dead to sin" ≠ inability, why does "dead in sin" = inability?

10. PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

NOT FROM ROMANS. Primary text is **1 Peter 2:9**. Romans 12:1 speaks of "living sacrifices" but never uses "priest."

Luther's Misuse

Timothy Wengert: "The democratic, American misconstrual of the priesthood of all believers means in actuality **the priesthood of no believers.**"

Luther didn't mean "anyone can be a pastor" but "all serve in respective offices."

11. LUTHER ADDED "ALONE"

Romans 3:28 Greek: No word "alone"
Luther's German: "allein durch den Glauben"
He admitted adding it for emphasis, 500 years of Protestant interpretation based on Luther's addition, not Paul's text.

12. PROOF-TEXT TABLE

Passage	Protestant	Scholarly
3:28	Faith alone	No ethnic markers needed
6:3-4	Symbolic baptism	Real participation
8:7-8	Total inability	Flesh vs Spirit lifestyle
9:18	Individual predest.	Corporate Israel
10:9	Sinner's prayer	Costly allegiance
11:22	(Ignored)	Can be "cut off"
2:6-10	(Ignored)	Judgment by works

13. LDS ALIGNMENT

Baptism: Rom 6 = participatory → AoF 4, 2 Ne 31:17
Spirit: Acts 8 = laying on hands → AoF 4
Works: Rom 2:6 = judgment by deeds → Alma 41:3
Faith: Ongoing allegiance → "Endure to end" 2 Ne 31:20
Israel: Rom 9-11 = restoration → AoF 10, 1 Ne 15
Agency: Not total inability → Moroni 7:16, 2 Ne 2:27

Bottom Line: Strip away Luther's 16th-c. concerns, and Paul sounds more like the **Book of Mormon** than Protestant reformers.

14. SOURCES

New Perspective: E.P. Sanders, James Dunn, N.T. Wright

Allegiance: Matthew Bates, Richard Hays

Dead Sea Scrolls: 4QMMT (works of law)

Fathers: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian

LDS: BYU RSC, FAIR

Evangelical critics: Schreiner, Piper, Carson