



**Daniel Wayne Roberts**

***The Pastoral Epistles and the New Perspective on Paul***

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In this revised version of his dissertation, submitted at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2020, Daniel Wayne Roberts examines the compatibility of the so-called New Perspective on Paul (NPP) with the Pastoral Epistles. He observes that major proponents of the NPP, such as James Dunn and N. T. Wright, generally exclude the Pastoral Epistles from their reconstructions of Paul's relationship to Judaism—partly due to doubts about the Pastoral Epistles' authorship. Roberts seeks to determine whether the NPP remains a plausible framework for Pauline theology if these texts are incorporated into the discussion. Through a careful analysis of selected passages from each of the three epistles—without presuming uniformity in their opponents or concerns—he concludes that 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy align well with the NPP, while Titus's understanding of grace and works extends beyond this perspective. According to Roberts, "the NPP and the traditional perspective represent two aspects of Paul's theology, and ... the theology of Paul is robust enough to incorporate both" (176).

The monograph's origins as a dissertation are evident in its structure. Chapter 1 defines the problem, states the thesis, and outlines the methodology. Roberts aims to "test the NPP by the theology of the Pastoral Epistles using four major characteristics of the NPP as a guide for choosing the passages to be studied" (4). He argues that a canonical approach to the Pauline letters necessitates the inclusion of the Pastoral Epistles and asserts that, for the NPP to be

persuasive, it must address the theology of the Pastoral Epistles alongside that of the undisputed letters. Roberts's stance on the Pastoral Epistles' authorship is ambiguous: while he claims to "set aside the authorial issues of the Pastoral Epistles" (14), he also advocates for Pauline authorship (21). Regardless, his rationale for including the Pastoral Epistles in Pauline theology is based on their canonical status rather than a historical-critical assessment of authorship. To identify the passages for analysis, Roberts focuses on four themes central to the NPP: justification and salvation, law and works, Paul's view of Judaism, and Paul's opponents. Roberts finds that these topics are present in the following passages, which are therefore defined as the primary material of the study: 1 Tim 1:6–16; 2:3–7; 2 Tim 1:3, 8–12; Titus 3:3–7.

Chapter 2 is an overview of previous research in the two fields that Roberts brings together: the NPP and the Pastoral Epistles. The detailed history of the NPP spans twenty-seven pages, tracing its development from precursors such as William Wrede and Albert Schweitzer to its leading proponents, E. P. Sanders, Dunn, and Wright. Other contributors who refined the NPP, as well as critics defending the so-called traditional (Protestant) perspective, are also discussed. In contrast, the review of Pastoral Epistles research is brief, covering only five pages and offering a cursory overview of the authorship debate. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the few prior works addressing the Pastoral Epistles in relation to the NPP.

The core of the monograph, chapters 3–5, provides textual analyses of the selected passages in canonical order. In chapter 3, Roberts examines 1 Tim 1:6–16 and 2:3–7. The former contains the Pastoral Epistles' sole explicit mention of "the law" as well as a retrospective description of Paul as a blasphemer and persecutor, while the latter highlights Paul's identity as herald, apostle, and teacher of the gentiles. Roberts finds that these passages fit remarkably well within the NPP framework, as they do not target the kind of opposition seen in Galatians and affirm the Decalogue's ethical validity. Similarly, chapter 4 analyzes 2 Tim 1:3, 8–12, concluding that it aligns with the NPP. The passage portrays Paul's Jewish ancestry positively, and, although the claim that God's salvation is "not according to our works" uses the latter term in a different sense than "works of law," it does not attack any presumed Jewish works righteousness either. Just as in 1 Timothy, there is no reason to think that 2 Timothy reflects a conflict with Judaizing opponents. The situation is somewhat different in Titus, to which Roberts turns in chapter 5. In this epistle, at least some of the opponents belong to "those of the circumcision," and the myths to be avoided are labeled "Jewish" (Titus 1:10, 14). The passage under scrutiny, Titus 3:3–7, "is not a polemic at all," according to Roberts (153), and its insistence on the irrelevance of "works that we did that were from righteousness" to salvation does not insinuate that Jews would have believed righteous deeds to be salvific. Thus, although the passage does seem to warn against a kind of works righteousness, it is not attributing this tendency to Judaism but rather to some Cretan Christ believers. Again, there is not an outright clash with the NPP, although the data indicate that the NPP as modeled only on the undisputed letters of Paul does not tell the full story of his theology of grace and works.

In chapter 6, Roberts synthesizes his findings, observing that the Pastoral Epistles' key terms sometimes differ in nuance from their usage in the undisputed letters. For example, "justified" does not primarily address Jew-gentile relations, and "works" are rarely equated with "works of the law." He concludes that the NPP, if overly dependent on Romans and Galatians, cannot fully incorporate the theology of the Pastoral Epistles. As a solution, he advocates a fusion of the NPP and the "traditional" perspective rather than excluding the Pastoral Epistles from Pauline theology or rejecting the NPP outright.

This book addresses an important question. Even for readers who, like me, consider the Pastoral Epistles second-century compositions, their portrayal of Paul's relationship to Judaism remains highly relevant. However, Roberts's comparison of the NPP with the "traditional" perspective overlooks the more radical "Paul within Judaism" approach championed by scholars such as Paula Fredriksen, Mark Nanos, and Magnus Zetterholm. This perspective rejects the NPP for remaining too aligned with classic Protestant interpretations of Paul. Whether right or wrong, this has arguably been the most vital stream of Pauline studies in the past decade, and leaving it out of consideration without any argument seems a bit odd.

The monograph's strength lies in its careful exegesis, particularly its attention to the distinctive concerns of each epistle. For instance, Roberts notes that the "myths" criticized in 1 Tim 1:4 are not explicitly Jewish, and there is no clear evidence of (real or imagined) Judaizing opponents in 1 Timothy. While acknowledging that "there is more evidence in Titus than 1 Timothy of ethnic Jewish influence and obedience to some nationalistic elements of the law," Roberts "does not get the impression from the overall argumentation of the letter [to Titus] that Paul is combating those concerned with Jewish privilege" (152). The latter point is debatable. As Titus 2:14 asserts that Jesus "gave himself for us that he might redeem (*ἵνα λυτρώσῃται*) us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own (*λαὸν περιούσιον*)," the text appropriates specific characteristics of biblical Israel (e.g., Deut 7:6, 8) for the predominantly gentile Christ-believing community. This may well be taken to indicate the author's concern with ethnic identities throughout the epistle.

While Roberts's use of a "canonical perspective" seeks to bridge divides, it ultimately undermines the broader conclusions. The NPP addresses historical questions that require historical-critical methods rather than normative theological assumptions. The brief engagement with the Pastoral Epistles authorship debate, for example, fails to grapple with significant contributions. For example, whereas Roberts elsewhere in the book does reference two articles authored by Jens Herzer, he shows no awareness of the fact that Herzer has argued extensively for a return to Friedrich Schleiermacher's position that 1 Timothy is pseudonymous but 2 Timothy and Titus authentic.

In sum, this book raises a vital question and offers solid exegesis of relevant parts of the Pastoral Epistles. However, its methodological reliance on theological positions rather than historical-critical methods limits its persuasive power for a scholarly audience.