Introduction

The controversy over Paul’s theology on the law shows no sign of abating, and it will probably continue since his view on the law cannot be assigned to the periphery of his thought and is fundamental for understanding his gospel. Another reason for the ongoing debate is the complexity and difficulty of explicating Paul’s stance on the law. The controversy and complexity of the issue are exemplified in Romans 2.

Does Paul seriously believe that some will be justified by their works (Rom 2:6-7, 10, 13, 26-27)? If he does, how does this square with his assertion that no one can be justified by “works of law” (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; cf. Gal 3:2, 5, 10)? I shall defend the thesis that Paul believes works are necessary for justification, that these works can only be done by Christians, and that such a position does not contradict Paul’s claim elsewhere that no one can be justified by “works of law.”

Survey Of Interpretation

Before I attempt to sustain my interpretation from the text, a brief survey and critique of some contemporary interpretations of Romans 2 will be conducted.¹

Paul’s View As Contradictory

Some scholars argue that Paul’s belief in Romans 2 that Gentiles can be justified by obeying the law contradicts his assertion elsewhere that no one can keep the law.² E. P. Sanders thinks that in Romans 2 Paul utilizes a synagogue sermon from diaspora Judaism, which does not harmonize with his statements about the law elsewhere, and the natural conclusion from Romans 2 alone is that one should practice the law in order to be a true Jew.³ Both Sanders and Heikki Räisänänen argue that Paul is guilty of making some statements about the Jews in Rom...