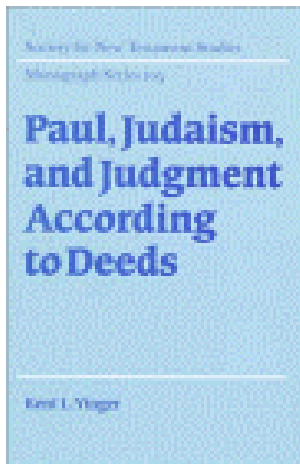


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**Yinger, Kent L.**

***Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds***

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Yinger examines the theme of recompense or judgment according to deeds in the Hebrew Scriptures, the pseudepigrapha, and the Qumran writings in comparison with Paul's letters. The topos serves various functions in the antecedent literature, including motivation to obedience, comfort for the godly, and theodicy. In Yinger's view, the idea of judgment according to deeds functions in early Judaism within the framework of "covenantal nomism." One does not become righteous at the judgment, rather one's fundamental loyalty to God is there revealed. Paul's conception of judgment is much the same, only that the "Christ-event" replaces the giving of the Torah as the expression of electing grace. As in early Judaism, there is no tension in Paul's thought between justification by grace through faith and judgment according to deeds. The justified live in a "consistent and wholehearted conformity to God's will," even as God makes provision for "unintentional sins" and "temporary backsliding" (p. 290).

The investigation is delimited, leaving aside the rabbinic materials, and focusing on the brief passages where divine judgment meets human deeds, and this only where the people of God are said to face judgment. One cannot fault the author for the criterion he uses to select texts. Nevertheless, one cannot escape the impression that only a very small portion of the materials relevant to Yinger's conclusions receive treatment. If one simply expanded the scope to include passages in which *either* the theme of divine judgment *or* that of recompense of deeds appears, the study undoubtedly would be enlarged, but it might also carry more weight. It is easy to think of various passages from the biblical literature (e.g. Ps 143:1-2; Isa 64:6), the pseudepigrapha (4 Ezra 3:20-26; 7:9-25), and the

Qumran writings (4QMMT) that speak directly to the topic but are not considered here. In itself, the limited scope of the study is not a problem, as may be seen in Yinger's restrained observations concerning word usage and rhetorical function. Often, however, particularly in theological analysis, his conclusions exceed the boundaries that he has set for himself. To take an example, Yinger claims that Jewish literature displays an "easy exchange between the singular and plural 'work(s)' in motif contexts" (p. 159). The operative expression here is "motif contexts," where human deeds are said to meet with divine judgment. If one checks Yinger's references in the pseudepigrapha one finds only four texts, which upon examination do not seem to support his claim (*Ps.Sol.* 2:35; *Jub.* 5:11,15; *2 Bar.* 54:21). Presumably, he makes his point by appeal to English translation, and by allowing his definition of "work(s)" to be quite broad. In any case, it is not clear that his conclusion is valid, nor that it is useful in assessing Paul's characterization of obedience (embodied in a plurality of works) as the "patience of a good work" (Rom 2:6-7). Furthermore, if "work(s)" may be defined as broadly as Yinger does, why should not one treat "judgment" in equally generous terms? Why should not one include passages such as Gal 3:10 ("as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse") or Gal 6:7-10 ("what one sows, that shall one reap")? Or for that matter, why should not one take into account Rom 8:18-39, a passage that does not speak of the judgment of believers at all, but of the vindication of the servants of God against their adversaries? One wishes for a more consistent definition of "motif contexts" or greater circumspection in the conclusions, or both.

This desideratum is all the more pressing in that Yinger adopts the "working hypothesis" that Palestinian Judaism was characterized by a "covenantal nomism" in which salvation is given by grace and kept by works (p. 3). Although this paradigm is commonly accepted, it has now received a substantial challenge in Friedrich Avemarie's work on the rabbinic materials (for a summary, see his "Erwählung und Vergeltung: Zur Optionalen Struktur Rabbinischer Soteriologie," *NTS* 45 [1999] 108-26). If early Judaism was characterized by "covenantalism" standing independently alongside "nomism" and not by Sanders's synthetic "covenantal nomism," a different and more complex understanding of final judgment emerges from the texts. Yinger's own work tends to support the more complicated view, since in various contexts the deeds of wicked Jews are said to reveal their rebellion against God and to bring retribution (see his discussion of *1 Enoch*, the *Psalms of Solomon*, and *2 Baruch*, pp. 69-78, 84-86). Yinger would undoubtedly argue that "covenantal nomism" is still operative in such passages, that sinful Israelites have merely failed "to remain" in the electing grace given to them. But the texts do not speak this way, and it is hard to see why one should opt for Yinger's hypothesis over against the one suggested by Avemarie's work.

Yinger is right to insist that Paul stood in continuity with his Jewish contemporaries in anticipating a final judgment on the basis of works of all persons, including believers. His succinct history of research serves as an admirable analysis of the flawed solutions that have been offered to the exegetical problem. Paul's expectation of final judgment

according to deeds cannot be regarded as an inconsistent relic of his Jewish past (H. Braun), a matter applicable solely to the community and not the individual (C. Roetzel), a mere rhetorical device (E. Synofzik), or a matter of rewards alone and not salvation (L. Mattern). Yinger also shows that in both early Judaism and Paul's letters the final judgment is not a matter of an "atomistic" weighing of works, but the manifestation of persons by their works. Precisely at this point, however, he fails to appreciate Paul's distinct appeal to biblical tradition, according to which immediate and absolute obedience is necessary for salvation, an obedience that consists in unconditioned love for God and one's neighbor (e.g. Gal 3:10; 5:3; 5:14). Paul, moreover, understands human beings as fallen and under the power of sin in such a way that they are incapable of this demand (Rom 3:9-20). His expectation that believers shall be saved at the final judgment where their works shall be examined is not without paradox, which is to say that it is not without Christ crucified and risen for them.