

Annual Moore College Lectures
2011

Paul and the Law

Keeping the Commandments of God



Five-Lecture Series

Wednesday 17th August 2011

Lecture Three



Paul's Replacement of the Law

“Under the law of Christ”

I. The Motif of Substitution

“Christ is given lordship over mankind *in place of the Law*”
(Adolf Schlatter)

“In a real sense conformity to Christ, His teaching and His life has *taken the place for* Paul of conformity to the Jewish Torah. ... We should accept on a priori grounds that attributes ascribed to the Torah revealed on Sinai would by the Apostle be transferred to Christ.” (W.D. Davies)

“This is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.”
(E.P. Sanders)

In New Testament theology the theme of replacement as a way of relating the Old and New Testament is regularly associated with the Fourth Gospel. In the Gospel of John Jesus is the new Moses, enacts a new exodus, eclipses the great Jewish feasts and institutions which marked God's saving work in the past, replaces the Jerusalem temple, and by dying during Passover week, is the ultimate Jewish Passover sacrifice. Hebrews stands out among the New Testament letters as developing similar ideas, especially in relation to Jesus vis-à-vis sacrifice and priesthood.

How prevalent is the motif of replacement in Paul's thought with respect to the law?

Commentators on Paul's letters familiar with his Jewish roots sometimes make passing comments that point to his subtle replacement of the law:

- With reference to Romans 15:16 James Dunn notes that whereas in 4 Maccabees 7:8 “priestly service” (ἱερουργέω) is offered to the law, Paul offers “priestly service” to his gospel.
- In connection with Ephesians 6:4, where fathers are to instruct their children “in the Lord,” Harold Hoehner notes that “the father's training and admonition is not ... centered around the law as in the rabbinics, but, rather, [is] Christocentric.”
- N.T. Wright argues that the underlying view of Christ in Colossians (esp. in 1:15-20) is that “he has taken the position which Judaism assigned to the Jewish Law.”
- Roy Ciampa, *et al*, note that in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 Paul explains that he prefers singleness because marriage makes life more complicated and can be a distraction from devotion to Christ, whereas in several rabbinic texts, worldly preoccupations, such as a wife, are seen as a potential distraction from the study of Torah.

II. The Christ-Torah Antithesis

“Both before and after his conversion Paul saw Christ and Torah as being in some way mutually exclusive categories.”
(Terrence Donaldson)

The two most commonly-cited texts in connection with Paul’s so-called Christ-Torah antithesis are Galatians 2 and Philippians 3. In both texts, if once the law held a central place for Paul the Jew, for Paul the Christian that place is firmly and exclusively occupied by Christ.

“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:19-20)

“If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:4b-8).

III. Law of Moses Substitutes

Doesn’t not being under the law mean that you’ll be lawless?
Doesn’t living without the rules of the law make you unruly?
Doesn’t living without the law make you an outlaw?
Haven’t you gone too far Paul in repudiating / abolishing the law?

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill *the law of Christ* (τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Gal. 6:2).”

“Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law?
By that of works? No, but by *the law of faith* (νόμου πίστεως).
For we hold that a person is justified by faith
apart from works prescribed by the law.”
(Rom. 3:27-28)

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
For *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* (νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”
(Rom. 8:1)

IV. Fulfilling the Law

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For **the entire law** is fulfilled (πεπλήρωται) in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal. 5:13-14; TNIV)

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that **the just requirement of the law** might be fulfilled (πληρωθῆ) in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3-4; NRSV)

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled (πεπλήρωκεν) the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and **whatever other command there may be**, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Rom 13:8-9; TNIV)

Notice that it is not laws, but the entire law that is fulfilled.

Is the perfect tense significant?

Is the passive voice critical?

“whenever your obedience is fulfilled (πληρωθῆ) ...” (2 Cor 10:6)

“For the commandments of the law (αἱ ἐντολαὶ τοῦ νόμου) are twofold, and through prudence they must be fulfilled (πληροῦνται). For there is a time for a man to embrace his wife, and a time to abstain from that for his prayer. So there are two commandments (δύο ἐντολαί); and, unless they be done in their order, they cause sin. So it is likewise with the remaining commandments. Therefore, be wise and sensible in God, understanding the order of His commandments, and the rules of every deed, so that the Lord will love you.” (Test. Naph. 8:7-10)

V. Walk in Newness of Life

“How to walk and please God” (1 Thess. 4:1) was a question asked and debated in every quarter of Judaism in the first century. The standard Jewish answer, based firmly on Scripture, was to walk “according to the law.”

The Old Testament regularly calls Israel to “walk in God’s law / statutes / ordinances” (Exod. 16:4; Lev. 18:4; 26:3; 1 Kings 6:12; 2 Kings 10:31; 2 Chron. 6:16; Neh. 10:29-30; Jer. 44:23; Ezek. 5:6-7; 11:12; Pss. 77:10; 89:30; 119:1). Leviticus 26:3 is typical: “*Walk* in my statutes, and keep my commandments and do them.”

A wide range of Second Temple Jewish texts stand in the same tradition of commending walking in a manner pleasing to God, which is taken to mean conduct according to the law:

- CD 7:1 and 9:1: “walk according to the law” (cf. T Jos 4:5; T Jud 23:5).
- 1QS 1:8; 2:2; 3:9; 8:18; 9:6,8,9,19: “walk perfectly in all his ways” (a reference to conduct according to the community’s interpretation of the Law of Moses).
- T. Judah. 24:3: “walk according to the commandments of the Lord.”
- Philo, Cong. Erud. Gr. 87: “walk in the judgments and ordinances of the Lord.”
- 1 Maccabees 10:37: “let them live walk by their own laws.”
- Baruch 1:18: “We have disobeyed him, and have not heeded the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in the statutes of the Lord that he set before us.”

In this light, it is striking that Paul never says that believers in Christ are to walk according to the law. Instead, he recommends walking according to different norms: not as the Gentiles do (1 Cor 3:3; 2 Cor 10:2; Eph 4:17), nor in idleness (1 Thess 4:12), or as enemies of the gospel (Phil 3:18); according to or by the Spirit (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16), apostolic example (Phil 3:17), apostolic teaching (2 Thess 3:6) and the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14); in Christ (Col 2:6), in love (Rom 14:15; Eph 5:2), in newness of resurrection life (Rom 6:4) and in good works (Eph 2:10); as in the day (Rom 13:13), as children of light (Eph 5:15); by faith (2 Cor 5:7); wisely (Eph 5:15; Col 4:5).

The language of walking in “newness,” “light” and the “Spirit” associate the Christian walk with the new age of the Spirit, a time when the Mosaic dispensation has come to an end.

“[T]he characteristic Jewish use [of walking for conduct] was in commendation of a walk in the law/statutes/ordinances/ways of God (hence ‘halakah’). In no doubt deliberate contrast, Paul speaks of a walk toward the truth of the gospel. Evidently, he was implying with polemical intent that ‘the truth of the gospel’ provided a different and superior beacon for conduct.”
(James Dunn)

VI. The Language of Newness

Paul uses the four words regularly translated “new” or “newness”: νέος (x2), ἀνανεώω (x1), καινός (x6), καινότης (x2). Apart from one “new moon” (Col. 2:16), the rest of the occurrences appear as ways of characterizing the new age and new covenant that has been inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that eight of the eleven are in contrast to the old law covenant.

The most obvious is the contrast with the old covenant in Paul’s two references to the new covenant in 1 Corinthians 11:25 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. The same notion of the new situation in Christ replacing the old under the Law of Moses can be found in the following when read in context: “newness of life” (Rom 6:4); “the new life of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6); “one new humanity” (Eph 2:15); and “a new creation” (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17 [x2]). The other three occurrences appear in descriptions of the new life without drawing any contrast to the old covenant: believers as a “new batch” of dough (1 Cor 5:7); and “the new self” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

That the new covenant replaced the old covenant is explicit in Jeremiah 31:32: “it will not be like the old covenant that they broke.” However, a possible objection to reading the language of newness in Paul’s letters as underscoring a replacement of the old covenant is the appearance in new covenant prophetic texts of intimations of the continued role of the law. Two texts bear mentioning:

“I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes
and be careful to observe my ordinances.” (Ezekiel 36:27)

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says
the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be
their God, and they shall be my people.”
(Jeremiah 31:33)

In both passages the accent is on the fundamental change in the human beings that the new covenant brings, the transformation of people’s hearts. Parallel to Jeremiah 31:33 is Jeremiah 32:39: “I will give them singleness of heart and action.” And the same is implied in Ezekiel’s promise of God’s Spirit within God’s people. While the new covenant prophetic texts indicate both continuity and discontinuity with the past, Williamson is surely right that: “the newness of the new covenant must not be underestimated.” As it turns out, Ezekiel’s language of obedience to the law in the LXX is not used by Paul to characterize how believer’s in Christ relate to the law (viz. φυλάσσω and ποιέω); “keeping the law” is evidently not a part of the prophecy that Paul felt the need to emphasize.

“As children of the promise who have been born of the Spirit we are free from the letter
of the Mosaic covenant, which was vastly inferior to the light of the transforming glory
we now have in the face of Jesus Christ.”
(Williamson, commenting on the new covenant in Paul)

VII. “Circumcision in nothing” Complements

“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing,
but *keeping the commandments of God*” (1 Cor 7:19)

“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.
The only thing that counts is *faith expressing itself through love*” (Gal 5:6);

“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything;
what counts is *a new creation*” (Gal 6:15).

VIII. In Paul’s Own Words

Believers in Christ are not under the Law of Moses, but under the law of Christ / faith / the Spirit. Having died to the law, Christ lives in us and we live by faith in the Son of God. We value knowing Christ Jesus our Lord above everything else, including righteousness under the law. We don’t keep / do / obey/ observe or transgress the law, but fulfill the law in Christ and through love. We don’t seek to walk according to the law, but according to the truth of the gospel, in Christ, in newness of resurrection life, by faith, and in step with the Spirit. Instead of the oldness of the letter, we participate in newness of life, the new life of the Spirit, and the one new humanity. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love and the new creation.

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Moore College
1 King Street Newtown NSW 2042
Phone: (02) 9577 9999 Fax: (02) 9577 9988
registrar@moore.edu.au
www.moore.edu.au

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