

Annual Moore College Lectures
2011

Paul and the Law

Keeping the Commandments of God



Five-Lecture Series
Thursday 18th August 2011
Lecture Four



[Type text]

Paul's Re-appropriation of the Law

“Witness to the gospel”

I. The Law as Prophecy

“The *typological reading* of the external elements of the older regime [the Mosaic law and covenant] is a basic feature of Pauline theology, and this tends not to receive enough attention.”
(Henri Blocher)

“The death and resurrection of Jesus was an apocalyptic event that had brought the old world order to an end. ... [Paul] moved to an entirely new hermeneutical perspective, within which the Law functioned primarily as *promise and narrative prefiguration of the gospel*.” (Richard B. Hays)

“The law functions on both sides of the great divide between letter and Spirit. When ... the veil covering the reading of Scripture is removed the law becomes *the goal reaching out through Christ toward the eschatological redemption of God's entire cosmos*.” (Brevard Childs)

“The coming of Christ means for Paul that the law has lost its defining covenantal function and instead exercises *a primarily prophetic role*.” (Markus Bockmuehl)

For Paul “the law is upheld [Rom. 3:31] precisely because *the redemptive-historical purposes and anticipations* of the law are upheld.” (D.A. Carson)

For Paul, Scripture [including the law] is a *witness to the gospel* (*Zeuge des Evangelium*, 1986; Dietrich Alex-Koch)

II. The (Selective) Quotation of Deuteronomy 9:4 and 30:11-14 in Romans 10:6-9

In Romans 10:5-13 Paul explores the connection between righteousness and faith introduced in v. 4, which announced a “righteousness for everyone who believes.” His exposition includes several quotations of Scripture. The first quotation, of Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5, points to the law as a failed path to life and righteousness. The second, a composite quotation of Deuteronomy 9:4 and 30:11-14 in Romans 10:6-9, is “somewhat unusual” (Ciampa) to say the least.

The subject of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 is the commandment that God gave to Moses for Israel. Paul omits this and attributes the quotation instead to a personified “righteousness that comes from faith.” As Hays explains, in “an apparently capricious act of interpretation,” Paul takes two admonitions from Deuteronomy to obey the law and “turns them into a cryptic prophecy of the Christian gospel.” Paul deliberately leaves out the positive references to the law in the Deuteronomy 30 citation. The following quotations italicize these elements:

Deut. 9:4 LXX

Do not say in your heart, when the Lord your God casts out these nations from before you, ‘it is because of my righteousness (δικαιοσύνας μου) the Lord has brought me in to inherit this good land.’

Deut. 30:11-14 LXX

For this commandment that I am commanding you today (ὅτι ἡ ἐντολὴ αὕτη ἦν ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι σοι σήμερον) is not excessive nor is it far from you. It is not in heaven above, that you might say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us and take it for us that we might *hear and do it* (καὶ ἀκούσαντες αὐτήν ποιήσομεν)?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you might say, ‘Who will go over to the other side of the sea for us *so that we might hear and do it* (καὶ ἀκουστήν ἡμῖν ποιήσει αὐτήν)?’ The word is very near to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart and in your hands *to do it* (αὐτὸ ποιεῖν).

Rom. 10:6-10a (NRSV)

But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart (cf. Deut. 9:4), ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

III. The ‘Prophetic’ Character of the Law

“For all the prophets and *the law prophesied* (προφητεύω) until John came”
(Matt. 11:13)

“From morning until evening Paul explained the matter to them, *testifying* (διαμαρτύρομαι) *to the kingdom of God* and trying to convince them about Jesus both from *the law of Moses* and from the prophets.”
(Acts 28:23)

“Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, *foreseeing* (προοράω) that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, *declared the gospel beforehand* (προεναγγελίζομαι) to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’”
(Gal. 3:6-8)

When Blocher, *et al*, talk about the typology, promise and narrative prefiguration, goal, prophetic role, and redemptive-historical purposes and anticipations of the Law of Moses, what are they referring to? Does the proposal of Paul reading the law as prophecy have any basis in the character of the Law of Moses itself? Does the Pentateuch have a prophetic character? Five recent(-ish) studies of the Pentateuch suggest that it does.

1. *Walter Moberly and a Canonical Approach to the Patriarchal Narratives*

J.W.L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (2009)

Moberly contrasts the rabbinic difficulties with the patriarchal non-observance of the law (which they tended to resolve by arguing that Abraham kept the Mosaic law) with Paul’s use of Abraham to ‘relativize’ the torah. Commenting on Paul’s discussion of Genesis 12:3 and 15:6 in Galatians 3 and Romans 4:

“If Abraham can be righteous in a context that specifies faith but not torah observance, and if this same Abraham can be a channel for a promise of blessing to the nations of the earth, then this correlates with and *anticipates* what God has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus and fundamentally relativizes the significance of torah – which is not thereby deprived of all significance, but no longer has its classic Jewish significance” (p. 125; italics added).

2. *John Sailhamer and the Way of Abraham*

J. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (1995).

The Pentateuch as a whole presents the way of Abraham, who lived by faith before the law, as better than that of Moses, who failed to keep the law once it was given. With this in mind, the central message of the Pentateuch is that human beings are made righteous before God by faith and not by works of the law. According to Sailhamer, a close reading of the text reveals a complex literary strategy that was used to convey an eschatological hope in a future king from

the line of David who would someday bless the world. In short, he understands the Pentateuch as underscoring the failure of the Sinai project of law and the importance of faith.

We don't have to buy into Sailhamer's theories about the composition of the Pentateuch and its updating by prophetic editors at the end of the OT period to appreciate his insights about the final form of the text; at the end of the day he is reading the final form of the text. When enquiring about the meaning of the Pentateuch Sailhamer asks the following pertinent questions:

If the Pentateuch is supposed to be about the law, why is there no mention of it for sixty or so chapters?

Why does Moses, whose name is virtually synonymous with the Law, never enter the land of promise, while Abraham, whose name is synonymous with faith, walks freely throughout the same land?

Why is a whole generation excluded from the land except two individuals who demonstrate faith in God's promise?

Why do major sections of the law appear after major transgressions of the people?

Why is there such a coincidence of law and sin and faith and righteousness?

If faith is the big idea, in what particular promise were the Israelites to place their faith? Key poems placed in strategic locations in the text indicate that the Israelites expected a king from the line of Judah who would defeat the powers of chaos and restore creation. Later editors confirmed this understanding and inserted the eschatological term "in the latter days" before these poems to indicate that this was the eschatological hope of the prophets (E.g., Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 31:29; cf. Deut 4:30.). Thus, this would happen when a new covenant would be made, a covenant that is expected in the book of Deuteronomy (chs. 29–30).

3. *Francis Watson and the God of Promise*

Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (2004).

Watson's strategy is to study the relationship between Torah, Paul as a Jewish reader of Torah, and contemporary non-Christian Jewish readings of Torah. The purpose of Genesis, for example, according to Paul, is to identify the God of promise as the primary agent in the Abraham narrative, rather than Abraham himself, who simply believed God. This may be contrasted with the narrative of the heroic Abraham found in many Jewish readings (e.g., 1 Macc. 2:50-54; also Jubilees, Philo, Josephus and Eupolemus), where Abraham was found faithful when he was tested. In the latter, Abraham's faithfulness is detached from Genesis 12 and connected to Abraham's heroic obedience at the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. Paul emphasizes instead the promise of universal blessing in Genesis 12:3, and, in the light of Genesis 15:6, the primacy of faith. According to Watson, "at stake here is not simply the question of the Gentile membership of the people of God, but the priority and unconditionality of divine action in its universal scope" (p. 186).

"Apart from Paul, Jewish interpreters regard the promise motif as secondary to a story whose primary aim is to celebrate Abraham's outstanding piety and virtue. . . . In contrast, Paul consistently focuses on the promise motif whenever he speaks of Abraham" (Watson, pp. 268-69)

In connection specifically with the law, Watson observes that the post-Sinai history of Israel in the wilderness is a history of catastrophe. Israel's journey from Sinai to the promised land is framed by two censuses, one in the wilderness of Sinai, the other on the plains of Moab by Jordan at Jericho. At the conclusion of the second census it is clear that the entire generation of those numbered at Sinai has perished: "The first census turns out to be an enumeration not for military service but for slaughter" (p. 355). Watson's conclusion is that "in moving from Leviticus to Numbers, then, we find that the law's conditional promise of life [cf. Lev. 18:5] is overtaken by the reality of death." Paul's treatment of Israel's experience in the wilderness (in 1 Cor. 10) tallies with this reading. For Paul, the wilderness generation died because they transgressed the law.

For Watson, the Torah contains an internal conflict by providing two opposing accounts of God's plan of redemption. This leads him to adopt an antithetical hermeneutic that rejects the teaching of some texts, such as Leviticus 18:5, and affirms that of others, such as Genesis 15:6 (and Hab. 2:4). If Deuteronomy 30 anticipates a return to God as "a matter of appropriate human action," the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 sees it as "a matter of definitive, unsurpassable divine saving action, which reorients human action towards itself and so represents a breach with the law" (p. 464).

While I think such tensions can be explained in other ways, Watson does mount a strong case for Paul's reading of the priority of grace and faith over works and law in the Torah itself.

"For Paul [the Torah] is most fundamentally the divine promise, in which God announces an unconditional saving action, universal in its scope, that lies beyond the horizon of the scriptural writers themselves" (Watson; p. 357).

4. Gary Millar and Deuteronomy

J.G. Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy* (1998);
See also Millar, "Deuteronomy", *NDBT* 159-65.

In the context of the Pentateuch the book of Deuteronomy is Moses' attempt to spell out for God's people the theological and ethical consequences of the exodus deliverance. Put another way, Deuteronomy explains the nature of an obedient response to God's grace.

Curiously, various elements strike a pessimistic note and point beyond the book to the need for the future decisive action of God. That little can be expected from God's people is signaled in chapter 2 where they are unfavourably compared to the Moabites and Ammonites. It is also expressed throughout chapters 5-11 where repeated calls to obey or remember (e.g., 5:1,31-33; 6:1-14; 7:12-15) suggest a negative expectation. Israel's spiritual incapacity is repeatedly underscored (e.g., 29:4). Nothing less than a circumcision of the heart is required which only God can perform (30:6; cf. 10:16). Moses predicts Israel's apostasy (31:16-18; 32:19-21,26) and he himself dies outside the land (ch. 34), suggesting that there is little hope for the nation. Moses' song ends with the one reference to atonement in the entire book (32:43). The new covenant teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in which the problem of the human heart is resolved, is thus anticipated in Deuteronomy.

In connection with Paul, the "later days", to which Deut. 4:30 refers, "when you will return to the Lord your God and obey him," of which the Hebrew Prophets also speak (Cf. Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14; Hos. 3:5), is the time in which Paul locates his ministry; believers are those "on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Paul writes as a minister of the new covenant, a covenant that Deuteronomy does not name but ultimately points forward to.

5. *William Horbury and Messianism in the Greek Pentateuch*

William Horbury, 'Monarchy and Messianism in the Greek Pentateuch.'
In *The Septuagint and Messianism*. Edited by Michael A. Nibb (2006), pp. 79-128.

William Horbury's study of views of monarchy and messianism in the Greek Pentateuch focuses on future-oriented passages. By messianism he means the expectation of a Davidic king in the last times. In particular he notices that in spite of the prestige of the priesthood in the Greek age, non-priestly monarchy is to the fore in the LXX of the Pentateuch:

"In the Septuagintal treatment of this subject its future dimension is underlined, for example in Deut 17, 14-20, ... in connection with Deut 28,36. The last days in particular have begun to form a topic (Gen 49,1; Deut 32,35 LXX), and a number of passages speak of the advent of a great individual Israelite ruler in the last days (Gen 49,10c, Num 24,7.17; Deut 33,5)."

The expected ruler is portrayed variously in the LXX Pentateuch, including that of a prophetic ruler, in connection with Deuteronomy 18:15-22, and that of a conquering human sovereign-king in the line of Judah.

Such studies underscore the way in which prophetic elements of the law were amplified in early Jewish interpretation. Evidently Paul was not the first Jew to read the law as bearing testimony to the Messiah.

IV. Romans as a Test Case

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand (*προεπαγγέλλω*) through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ..." (Rom. 1:1-2)

"But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested (*μαρτυρέω*) by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (Rom. 3:21-22)

"Do we then overthrow (*καταργέω*) the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold (*ἱστημι*) the law." (Rom. 3:31)

Moo suggests that, for Paul, when the law testifies it does so in tandem with the prophets. We can test this assertion by considering the way in which the law is used in Romans to testify to “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” As it turns out, in Romans the law regularly prophesies in partnership with the prophets, recalling both Romans 1:2 and 3:21.

- In Romans 4 the law and the prophets testify to righteousness by faith apart from the law: in connection with Abraham’s faith (Gen 15:6, 22; see Rom. 4:1-4); and David’s forgiveness (Ps 32:1-2; Rom. 4:6-8).
- In Romans 9 the law and prophets testify to the partial hardening of Israel that has accompanied the gospel: in Genesis 21:12; 18:10, 14; 25:23 and Exodus 33:19; 9:16 (Rom. 9:6-18); and in Malachi 1:2-3, Isaiah 29:16; 45:9, 10:22-23; 1:9 and Hosea 2:23; 1:10 (Rom. 9:25-29).
- In Romans 10 the law and the prophets testify to righteousness by faith: in Deuteronomy 30:12-14 (Rom. 10:5-8); and in Isaiah 28:16; 53:1 and Joel 2:32 (Rom. 10:11-15).
- In Romans 10 the law and the prophets testify to not all Israelites accepting the gospel: in Deuteronomy 32:21 (Rom. 10:19); and in Psalm 19:4 and Isaiah 65:1-2 (Rom. 10:18, 20-21).
- In Romans 11 the law and prophets testify to the hardening of Israel; *As it is written* in Deuteronomy 29:4/Isaiah 29:10; *And David says* in Ps 69:22-23 (Rom. 11:8-10).
- In Romans 15 the law and the prophets testify to Gentiles glorifying God; in Deuteronomy 32:43; and in 2 Samuel 22:50/Psalm 18:49, Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11:10.

V. In Paul’s Own Words

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(The lectures will be uploaded soon after delivery).

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