

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

THE LAW IN GALATIANS: A COMPARISON
OF BRUCE AND PAUL

A MASTER'S THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF RELIGION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

BY

GREG A. COUSER

LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA

OCTOBER 1988

ABSTRACT

The recent advances in pauline studies have pointed to and underscored the need for a reexamination of what has been called its most intricate theological issue, Paul's theology of law. In an attempt to contribute to this debate, this thesis is an examination of the views of one of the most prominent pauline scholars of our day, Dr. F. F. Bruce, in order to assess the value of his recent commentary on Galatians [I. H. Marshall and W. Ward Gasque gen. eds., New International Greek Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmanns, 1982), The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text] for the furthering of our understanding of Paul's theology of law--a, if not the, prominent issue within the letter to the Galatians.

Through a reexamination of Paul's Judaistic background in light of recent advances in our understanding of first century Judaism, a consideration of important preliminary issues to the study of this epistle, and an exegesis of key pauline statements concerning the law (2:21, 3:21), it is demonstrated that Bruce's understanding of the law in Galatians is excessively negative, viz. he fails to see any place for the law in the life of the post-Christ believer. Paul, on the other hand, maintains that the law remains valid, as limited by the life and teaching of Christ and the teaching of the apostles, for the life of the present-day believer. Law is not antithetical to faith, law is complementary to faith. The conclusion with which one is left is that Bruce fails to grasp this important element of Paul's theology of law and thus, to that extent, distorts Paul.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO

MY WIFE, RONNA

in gratitude for your love and
persistent encouragement

TO

DR R. YARBROUGH

in admiration and gratitude

INTRODUCTION

The book of Galatians is one of the pivotal books of the NT.¹ It has been recognized as central to the study of New Testament history and Protestant dogmatics.² Its importance to the thought of Martin Luther and thus to the Reformation is a well established and attested historical fact.³ Even in recent times, as Moises Silva points out, "the amount of research that modern scholarship has devoted to these six chapters seems out of proportion to the size of the epistle."⁴

All of these statements point to the importance of the message of this small but extremely significant epistle. The task of grappling with the message of Galatians remains a perennial challenge to each generation. And, in order to accomplish the task of unraveling the message that the Apostle

¹ Homer A. Kent, review of The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, by F. F. Bruce, in Grace Theological Journal 2 (Fall 1984): 299.

² R. B. Hays, "Recent Books on Galatians," Quarterly Review 5 (3, 1985): 95.

³ M. Silva, "Betz and Bruce on Galatians," Westminster Theological Journal 45 (2, 1983): 371.

⁴ Ibid.

Paul has left for the present day, one must struggle predominately with his attitude on the law. Indeed, this is essential if its message is to mold us as it should.

One of the many in the preceding generation who has made a significant contribution to Paul's theology of law was C. E. B. Cranfield. In his important essay "St. Paul and the Law,"⁵ he called for a reexamination of Paul's perspective on the law due to what he perceived to be "muddled thinking" or "careless and imprecise statement" concerning Paul's attitude toward the law in contemporary theology and exegesis.⁶

In the present generation one is still confronted with a situation having much in common with that of Cranfield's day. It is a time when "a decisively new direction" is being taken in pauline studies.⁷ Recent advances have suggested that the prevailing understanding of the nature of Paul's theology of law is in need of a thorough reexamination and consequent revision.⁸ Changes are taking place which will impact the opinions of the

⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," Scottish Journal of Theology 17 (March 1964): 43-68.

⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

⁷ D. Moo, "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years," Scottish Journal of Theology 40 (1987): 287.

⁸ T. R. Schreiner, "Paul and Perfect Obedience to the Law: an Evaluation of the View of E. P. Sanders," Westminster Theological Journal 47 (2, 1985): 245. In speaking of Sanders' book, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, Schreiner understands Sanders to be proposing that "the conventional understanding of Paul's theology of the law is seriously mistaken."

future generations of ministers and teachers. Already, this new direction is having a profound impact on the present understanding of Paul's perspective on the law.⁷ This current upheaval in what has been called "the most intricate doctrinal issue in his [Paul's] theology"¹⁰ warrants a careful and thorough examination.

The purpose of this paper is to make a contribution to the current debate concerning Paul's theology of law. This will be accomplished through an examination of the views of F. F. Bruce as expressed in his recent commentary on Galatians. The investigation will consist of an assessment of Bruce's views in light of an exegesis of key pauline texts in order to determine the adequacy of his understanding of Paul's attitude to the law.

Bruce is a leading pauline scholar by any reckoning. Few have such a worldwide reputation as an authority on the writings of Paul. His contribution to the contemporary understanding of Paul has been recognized by scholars from numerous theological perspectives. One conservative scholar states that he has established himself in the minds of many as the "outstanding

⁷ E.g. J. D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on the Law," Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library 65 (1983): 95-122.

¹⁰ H. J. Schoeps, Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religion (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. 168.

evangelical scholar of our generation."¹¹ One need only make a cursory review of his many publications to see that he has read and written widely in the area of pauline studies.¹² That this has been recognized on an international scale is evidenced by the the publications in which his writings have appeared.¹³

It may well be, then, given the combination of one of the pivotal books of the NT, a renowned authority on the writings of Paul, and an unsettled climate concerning Paul's attitude on the law, that all the ingredients exist for and underline the necessity of a work which could shed some light on the current debate surrounding one of the most intricate issues in pauline studies. This thesis seeks to participate in and, in however small a way, contribute to the productivity of this debate.

As previously stated, the method of approach will be a comparison of Bruce's views as expressed in his Galatian commentary with an exegesis of key relevant pauline texts, especially those found in Galatians. Accordingly, in chapter one, an examination of Bruce's comments will be undertaken so that a clear and fair description of his view of the law's function may be set forth. It will be seen that such an

¹¹ Homer A. Kent, review of Commentary, by F. F. Bruce, p. 298.

¹² See the bibliography of Bruce's works in Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris, gen. eds., Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1980), pp. xxiii-xxxvi.

¹³ Ibid.

examination brings one to a position on the law which can best be characterized as excessively negative. This is to say that Bruce understands Paul to be stating that the law has been abrogated by a salvation-historical transition. The law has no positive role in the present age 1) as a means of grace, 2) as a necessity for the maintenance of one's relationship with God or 3) as an expression of that relationship. To maintain that the law is valid in any aspect for this present age is, according to Bruce, to pervert the law, to return to bondage from freedom and, ultimately, to deny the efficacy of the death of Christ.

Chapter two is a description of Paul's viewpoint regarding the law's function. This will comprise an exploration of its possible historical moorings as well as an examination of his statements primarily in Galatians but also, to a lesser degree, in related writings. This will reveal that Paul understood the law to remain as a valid principle for the believing community as it was instructed and guided by the life and teaching of Christ along with the teaching of the apostles. The law has not been abrogated in all of its aspects, as it is not contrary to the promise, and remains a valid mode of expressing the relationship established with God on the basis of faith. Law is not necessarily antithetical to faith. Law can function in a supplemental or complementary relationship with faith.

Chapter three will take up the conclusions of chapters one and two in order to compare the views of Paul and Bruce and set forth certain implications in light of this comparison for the

present day believer. We will suggest that in a comparison of the views of Paul and Bruce, Bruce's negative view on the function of the law is excessive and, to a degree, opposed to the views of Paul. Thus, Bruce does obscure Paul's viewpoint even though he unquestionably makes many worthwhile contributions to our understanding of how law functions in Paul's theology.

The implications for the present day believer are significant in light of the present ethical climate of the twentieth century. At a time when ethics has largely abandoned all absolutes, Paul's perspective on law demonstrates that the life of the believer has reached its fullest potential when it is lived within the precepts of Scripture as given to him and as he is enabled to obey them by the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in Paul do we find an irreconcilable tension between the external command and the internal prompting of the Spirit. These seem rather to form two aspects of Christ's lordship in the life of the believer which go hand in hand. Law as it is delimited and defined by the life and teaching of Jesus along with the teaching of the apostles retains a nuanced but highly relevant validity for the present day believer. Law serves, in a significant sense, as a complement or supplement to faith.

CHAPTER I

BRUCE'S CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE LAW AS SEEN IN HIS COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS

Introduction

As a necessary aspect of a comparison/contrast of the views of Bruce and Paul, the following chapter will summarize and describe Bruce's view of the law's nature and function as set forth in his comments on Paul's letter to the Galatians. This chapter will form the basis for a determination of the congruity or incongruity of the views of Paul with those of Bruce. The primary source from which his view will be taken is his monograph entitled The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text in the New International Greek Commentary series.¹⁴

Following an examination of Bruce's view, it has seemed most

¹⁴ I.H. Marshall and W. Ward Gasque gen. eds., New International Greek Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmanns, 1982), The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, by F.F. Bruce. The author's other pertinent writings will be utilized in a limited fashion to complete or clarify his views where necessary.

appropriate to preliminarily describe his position regarding the function of the law in this present age of salvation history as "excessively negative." The law, Bruce maintains, is a divine instrument which is soteriologically, in a three-fold sense, valueless and irrelevant to the Galatian and present-day believer. This is to say that 1) the law is not a means of grace, i.e. by keeping the law, one will not be given a righteous status before God; 2) the law is not a means, when one appropriates it through obeying its demands, by which one maintains a righteous standing before God; and 3) the law cannot serve in a sanctifying capacity. The believer is not bound to obey any aspect of the law as an expression of his submission to Christ nor does obedience to its stipulations enhance or promote one's growth in Christ.

For Bruce, this soteriological irrelevance is a logical outgrowth of Paul's contention that the law in its entirety (i.e. with respect to all of the aforementioned functions) has been set aside due to a dispensational transition in the divine ordering of salvation-history. As a result, Bruce maintains that, if the law were to be in force at this present time, the one who adhered to the stipulations of the law would be perverting the use of the law and reverting to bondage from liberty.

With this preliminary description in mind, the following will be a presentation of a wide range of statements which in their contexts demonstrate the nature of Bruce's position. It is in his comments on the centrality of Paul's conversion, on Paul's

radical break from his Judaistic background, and on Paul's approach to the Galatian problem that his position becomes visible.

In brief, Bruce maintains that the foundation of Paul's negative view lies in those concepts implicit in the conversion experience on the road to Damascus where Christ revealed Himself to Paul. These were concepts which logically compelled Paul to a position on the law which Bruce sees as parallel to the teaching of Jesus. This new position demanded a radical break from Paul's strong Judaistic background since, from the perspective of the Damascus road experience, he now viewed it as soteriologically useless and invalid in this present age.¹⁵ Finally, the outworking of Paul's view in application to the situation at Galatia, beginning at his "general exposition of the principle at stake" in 2:15-21¹⁶ through the application of this "universal principle" to his readers situation in 3:1ff,¹⁷ is deemed by Bruce to be an expansion of the basic understanding "imparted in a moment" at his conversion experience.¹⁸

¹⁵ Also, in this connection, Bruce mentions that Paul's Judaistic background may have contained teaching which encouraged his rejection of the law as he had previously viewed it in respect to its function. This prior teaching may have compelled Paul to take a stance which was in opposition to his background and allied with his former opponents.

¹⁶ Bruce, Commentary, p. 136.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.147.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

The Foundation and Character of the Pauline View

Logically Developed from His Conversion

Bruce believes Paul's "revolutionary conversion" to have taken place probably in his thirties and agrees with Johannes Weiss in stating that Paul's hidden years following his conversion were the most formative in the development of his theology.¹⁷ It was during these years that Paul became acquainted with Peter and James at the visit recorded in Gal. 2:18-20. While they were not responsible for giving him the gospel (i.e. "Jesus Christ is the Son of God; Jesus Christ is the risen Lord"), they did supply him with the details of the life and teaching of Jesus, his death, his burial and the post-resurrection appearances.²⁰ Bruce also concurs with J. D. G. Dunn in seeing Paul's visit with Peter and James as a time which served to confirm

his own convictions about Jesus which stemmed immediately from his conversion and commissioning on the Damascus road, and also as providing an invaluable way of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 46. Cf. Johannes Weiss, Earliest Christianity: A History of the Period A.D. 30-150, 2 vols., trans. Frederick C. Grant (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959). Weiss states that "it cannot be too much insisted upon that the real development of Paul both as a Christian and as a theologian was completed in the period which is so obscure to us" (I:206). This "obscure" period is identified as the period of fourteen years immediately following the conversion of Paul (I: 203).

²⁰ Bruce, Commentary, p. 88; cf. I Cor. 15ff.

expressing what was his gospel anyway, because it was a widely accepted formulation [i.e. the kerygmatic tradition] and not just his own idiosyncratic mode of expression.²¹

However, the single most important factor was the Damascus road experience, for it was on the Damascus road where he himself had been liberated when he received the true gospel in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The importance of this point is evident throughout Bruce's comments on Galatians as substantiated by his abundant references to it and by the nature of his accompanying comments.²²

Paul now looked back over his life under law from the vantage point of the Damascus road coupled with the details of the life and work of Christ relayed to him by Peter and James. The law appeared as a totally different instrument than he had formerly thought it to be by virtue of his new relationship to Christ.²³

²¹ Ibid., pp. 88-89. Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977). Dunn argues that Paul received what amounted to the broad and accepted outline, the kerygmatic tradition, for the expression of the gospel. Paul came into conflict at Galatia because of his interpretation of this tradition in light of the revelation of Christ and not in light of the 'tradition of the elders' (pp. 66f.).

²² E.g. see his comments in Commentary, pp. 38, 46, 50f., 55f., 72f., 82, 87-90, 92-98, 103, 105, 107, 109f., 119-121, 143f., 147, 160, 163, 176, 185, 230, 236, 276. See also the comments in Bruce, Paul: The Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 80. Bruce's student Seyoon Kim has attempted to show how comprehensively Paul's conversion informs his theology; see Kim, The Origin of Paul's Gospel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

²³ Bruce, Commentary, p. 174.

In the autobiographical section of Gal. 1:11-2:14, Bruce points to the importance of this conversion experience for Paul's view on the law. Bruce maintains that the thrust of this section is Paul's rebuttal of the charge that he is dependent on those who were disciples before him for his gospel. Paul refutes their charges by asserting that he received his gospel and commissioning "directly from the risen Christ, without any intermediary."²⁴ Thus, for Bruce, Paul's understanding is deeply rooted in and logically developed from his conversion; he had not received it from the other disciples. "Paul grasped the logic implicit in the Damascus road experience there and then, although the fuller implications of the experience became plain to him more gradually."²⁵

His confrontation with the risen Christ "completely controlled" Paul's interpretation of the gospel and of its related issues.²⁶ Bruce states that the "logic of his conversion experience" taught Paul that the law could not save, only faith in Christ.²⁷ Paul gained a "new understanding of salvation-history" from his "confrontation with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road" which showed him that the "legal path of

²⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

salvation" was now closed.²² Paul came to realize that "if life is assured to those who are justified by faith, then it is not assured to those who seek justification by law-keeping, whether they succeed in keeping the law or not."²⁷

In the revelation of Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, the moral bankruptcy of the law was disclosed: for Paul, therefore, this involved the end of his old life 'under law' and the beginning of his new life 'in Christ'.³⁰

As an example of Paul's initial reappraisal of the law and its functions which resulted from the impact of his conversion, Bruce cites the argument of Gal. 3:10-13. Here Paul gives his answer as to how and why Jesus had died under the divine curse, if he was indeed the Messiah and Son of God as Paul had recognized him to be. In his reply, Paul asserts that "Christ had endured the curse on his people's behalf (by being 'hanged on a tree') in order to redeem them from the curse pronounced on those who failed to keep the law." Bruce concludes that "this argument would have been all of a piece with his swift and radical reappraisal of the place of the law in God's ways with mankind."³¹

Thus, in summary, Bruce sees Paul making a radical reappraisal of the function of the law as a result of the logical

²² Ibid., p. 160.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

³¹ Ibid., p. 166.

implications of his conversion experience. This reappraisal understood the law in many, if not all, of its aspects to be irrelevant and valueless, viz. an aspect of an age in salvation-history which has now come to a close by virtue of the work of Christ.

Integrally Related to Jesus' Teaching

This new position at which Paul arrives subsequent to his conversion, Bruce states, was in the "spirit of Jesus' teaching."³² The two emphases of Paul's gospel--"that salvation was provided by God's grace and that faith was the means by which men appropriated it--are repeatedly emphasized by Jesus, and especially in his parables."³³ Paul, like Jesus, now saw the law as a means to an end, and he "saw more clearly than most of his Christian contemporaries into the inwardness of Jesus' teaching."³⁴ Not only was the essence of Paul's gospel in accord with the teachings of Jesus, but also "Paul's ethical teaching is based in the tradition of Jesus' teaching."³⁵ This close relationship with the message of Jesus can be accounted for in

³² Ibid., p. 38.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

that this message was "implicit in the revelation of Jesus which, according to him [Paul], was the essence of his conversion experience."³⁶

Radically Different from His Judaistic Background

While the logic of the Damascus road experience compelled Paul to adopt a new position in line with Jesus' teaching, this change set him at odds with his Judaistic background regarding the importance, place, and function of the law.³⁷ It was a position so radically different from the sayings of the great rabbis of Israel that it is almost too incredible to believe for many students of first-century Judaism that Paul could have been brought up in the mainstream of orthodox Judaism.³⁸

Paul's own statements leave no doubt as to the depth of his past commitment to Judaism. He argues that his zeal for Judaistic values and causes is unsurpassed in comparison to his contemporaries (cf. Gal. 1:14). In Phil. 3:5f. Paul describes himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law, a Pharisee; ...

³⁶ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 140: "There is indeed a contradiction between the Pauline and the rabbinic understanding; Paul denied any saving significance to the law."

³⁸ F.F. Bruce, "The Grace of God and the Law of Christ: A Study in Pauline Ethics," in God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob, gen. eds. Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 22f.

as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (cf. Acts 23:6; 26:5, NASB). He had been brought up in his father's house and at the feet of Gamaliel I in Jerusalem "where he was trained according to the exactitude of the ancestral law."³⁹

However, when Paul viewed the law from the perspective of his own personal experience, he became disillusioned with it in that his avid pursuit of it had led him into a position opposed to the Messiah.⁴⁰ Paul had in all probability lived under the law as the Hasid of Psalm 119. The law had been the center around which every aspect of his life had revolved; he had appropriated for himself the words of the Psalmist, "O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).⁴¹

For Bruce, Paul's backward look in light of his conversion brought about a change of perspective on that element which, as a Jew, had dominated his life.

The law to which he had been so utterly dedicated had proved incapable of showing him the sinfulness of his course or preventing him from pursuing it. Rather, in this respect, the law had led him into sin.⁴²

³⁹ Bruce, Commentary, p. 91.

⁴⁰ F.F. Bruce, "Paul and the Law of Moses," Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 57 (Spring, 1975): 261.

⁴¹ F. F. Bruce, "Called to Freedom, a Study in Galatians," Festschrift for Bo Reicke: NovTestSup, gen. eds. D.A. Brownell and W.C. Weinrich (Leiden: E.J. Brill, n.d.), p. 64. Also, Bruce discusses this issue in his commentary on Galatians, p.176.

⁴² Bruce, Commentary, p. 143.

The law had not guarded him against the "sin of sins" (persecuting Christians) or shown him the real character of his actions.⁴³

As a possible aspect of his Judaistic background, Bruce mentions that Paul may have been brought up in a school of thought "which expected the age of the law to be set aside when the Messiah inaugurated his new age."⁴⁴ This was

an early Jewish doctrine of three epochs in world-history--the age of chaos, the age of law, and the messianic age--each lasting for 2,000 years, after which the eternal sabbath rest would be enjoyed (b. Sanh. 97a; m. Tamid 7:4).⁴⁵

In the context of the Galatian controversy, it would then follow that, if the Galatian agitators were correct, the age of the Messiah had not come since, according to them, the law had not been set aside and thus Jesus was not the Messiah. This has been offered as an explanation for Paul's vitriolic denunciation of those who contended that the law was still in force as an essential element of the believer's salvation and life.⁴⁶ However, although Bruce's conception of Paul's final position is practically identical to the position resulting from the Jewish teaching on 'epochs,' Bruce believes this to be a very doubtful explanation for Paul's view on law. It is the conversion

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Bruce, "Call to Freedom," pp. 62f.

⁴⁵ Bruce, Commentary, p.176.

⁴⁶ L. Baeck, "The Faith of Paul," Journal of Jewish Studies 3 [1952]: 106; H.J. Schoeps, Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in Light of Jewish Religious History (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), pp. 171ff.

experience which most plausibly explains Paul's radical reappraisal of the function of the law.⁴⁷

Thus, regardless of all that Paul's Judaistic foundation and background may have contained, Bruce consistently maintains that it was this foundation from which Paul was torn by the logic of his conversion experience. It is a foundation which, as it appears from Bruce's statements,⁴⁸ was a correct understanding of the law's function, but one which failed to accept that the law was no longer valid in its former saving, condemning and confining purposes. Paul is now saying, in contradistinction to his Judaistic heritage, that in this "new age," the law is no longer valid now that the Messiah has come.⁴⁹ The law has been superseded by Christ and is soteriologically invalid, "lacking any direct or effective relevance to the saving work of God,"⁵⁰ and is completely set aside in regards to any of its functions.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Bruce, Commentary, p. 176.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 30, 83. Bruce appears over and over again to imply that Judaism's understanding of the law as a means of gaining a righteous status before God was true to the originally intended purpose as the law was divinely instituted in the Old Testament. Bruce states that the law was a divinely intentioned means of salvation in the time previous to the coming of the Messiah. See e.g. pp. 160 ("legal path to salvation"), 163 ("Paul sets out the way of justification by the law in terms of Lv. 18:5.").

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 176.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.154.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 176.

However, Bruce does not wish to imply that Paul's adversative position meant that the Jewish system of worship was contrary to God's purposes. For, as Bruce states, "Jewish worship in the pre-Christian stage of God's dealings with men was far from being culpable--it was divinely instituted."⁵² Paul's conflict with his Jewish contemporaries was simply a result of his recognition of the transition in salvation-history brought about by the life and work of Christ at his Damascus road conversion. When he had acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, Paul was logically driven to the conclusion that the law had been displaced in the ordering of salvation-history.⁵³ This is a key concept which will more thoroughly discussed below.

The Function and Nature of the Law as Seen in Paul's
Argumentation in Galatians 2:15-6:10

As previously stated, Bruce sees Paul developing his view in

⁵² Ibid., p. 30 (cf. p.137).

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 142f. Here, in dealing with the interpretation of dying "through the law to the law" in Gal. 2:19, Bruce states that this particular statement gives both a universal principle for all believers as well as a note on the personal experience of Paul who had been such an ardent advocate of the primacy and necessity of the law.

"Christ bore the curse of the law and exhausted its penalty on his people's behalf: in this sense Christ died 'through law', and the believer's death to the law is also 'through law' because he died in Christ's death - as Paul goes on to affirm: 'I have been crucified with Christ'" (p. 143). Thus Paul and, by extrapolation, all those placing their faith in Christ are free from any claim of the law upon their lives.

contradistinction to his Judaistic background and as a logical progression from the foundation laid at the Damascus road conversion. How Paul consequently understood the law and how he expanded this new understanding in response to the problems at Galatia will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter. The selected sections of Galatians found within Paul's statement of the universal principle in 2:15-21 and the statements on the application of that principle in 3:1-6:10 will be the focal passages.⁵⁴

The Law Understood as Elemental Forces

Within these passages, Bruce maintains that Paul understands that to be obligated to the law is to be enslaved by the "elements (or elemental forces) of the world."⁵⁵ This is to say that Paul understood the observance of the law, "as though this were of the essence of gospel faith and church membership," to be a "retrograde step, back from liberty to bondage."⁵⁶ For the believer to lapse back into an observance of the law would be "little short of apostasy and scarcely to be distinguished from

⁵⁴ See above p. 9, nn. 16,17.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 29. Cf. p. 180, where Bruce states that for one to return to the use of the law as a means of justification is to return to a state of enslavement to the "elemental forces," since it would actually be a perversion of the law itself.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

relapsing into pagan worship."⁵⁷ While the law was divinely intended for the pre-Christian period of God's dealing with men, to revert back to its observance would be to return to that which had the character of infancy. It would be "tantamount to a declaration that the death of Jesus had no redemptive power."⁵⁸

In truth, the death of Christ had liberated the Galatian believers from "legalism as a principle of life."⁵⁹ If one were to revert to a nomistic lifestyle, one would be "exposed to the power of sin, for 'the power of sin is the law.'"⁶⁰ For Bruce then, if someone uses the law as a means of justification, it serves only to expose that one to the power of sin, because this use of the law provides sin with a "vantage-point from which to invade Mansoul (cf. Rom. 7:7-11)."⁶¹ The observance of the law, when obeyed in an attempt to gain favor with God, leads one down a path of sin and death as one is actually perverting its intended use.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 30, 202.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 202.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 143. It is significant to note that Bruce further states that "it is fundamental to Paul's understanding of the law that he can define one and the same experience as death to law (cf. Rom. 7:4-6) and death to sin (Rom. 6:2)" (p. 143). This implies that Bruce's answer to Paul's question, "Is the law sin?" (Rom. 7:7), would be yes!

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 143. For Bruce, "mansoul" appears to refer to the individual in both his physical and spiritual spheres of existence

As with each aspect of Paul's view, this new view of the law as equivalent to the elemental forces, was vitally connected with the revelation of the risen Christ on the Damascus road. Paul had personally experienced a change of lordship from the law to Christ (cf. 2:19).

Henceforth, as Paul looked back on his early life, he viewed it not only as a life under law but as a life under the power of sin, life after the flesh--the flesh being, in Paul's distinctive usage, the old unregenerate, unliberated self."⁶²

The law had not only been incapable of giving him the life it had promised, but it had actually served as a vantage point from which sin had waged its attack upon his soul and had served to incite him to sin all the more.⁶³

The Law Understood as a Past Age of Salvation-History

The above arguments are but a few particular issues which Paul addressed as he reconstructed his overall understanding of salvation-history which arose from his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. His fundamental understanding of the place and function of the law in this present age had now been shaken right down to its foundation. His overall schema of the nature of God's dealing with men concerning salvation had been affected. Christ was now seen as the anticipated Messiah who had displaced the law in the ordering of salvation-history.⁶⁴

⁶² Bruce, "Call to Freedom," p. 63.

⁶³ Bruce, Commentary, pp. 143, 175.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

This new understanding has the following features: it stands in sharp contrast to his pre-conversion understanding; it is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham; it applies to each aspect of the law; it is necessitated by the Gentile mission; and it redefines the concept of law for the believer. We now examine each of these features in turn.

In Contrast to his Pre-conversion Understanding

Bruce believes that in his past salvation-historical conception, Paul had understood the law to be a means of gaining a righteous standing before God, i.e. of being justified. He cites Paul's use of Lev. 18:5 and Rom. 10:5 as examples of that previous understanding.⁶⁵ The life in Lev.18:5 is equivalent to the life one is given by virtue of his faith in Christ.⁶⁶ This life was promised on the basis of obedience to the commands of the law, for any blessing associated with the law "lies in obedience to its precepts."⁶⁷ Therefore, in the words of Paul,

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 162. Bruce does state that "it is doubtful" that Paul would even concede that the way of life through law-keeping had ever been open since his "Damascus road experience had shown him the incompetence of the way of law-keeping and the power of the way of faith" (p. 163). However, one is forced to conclude that Paul must not have been at all doubtful as to whether the law was formerly a means of life (justification) if Bruce's interpretation of the use of Lev. 18:5 in Gal. 3:12 is accepted as a valid presentation of Paul's pre-conversion understanding of the law's function. It clearly appears that Bruce sees salvation "by works of the law" as a proper

salvation in the age preceding Christ was secured on the basis of obedience to the law (ex ergōn nomou), not on the basis of faith (ek pisteōs).

However, one is immediately faced with what appears to be a contradiction in Bruce's statements concerning the place of the law. His interpretation of Gal. 3:12-13, where he states that the promise of "life" in Leviticus 18:5 is a "genuine promise" of justification to those who keep the law,⁶⁸ is difficult to reconcile with his statement that the law lacked "any direct or effective relevance to the saving work of God."⁶⁹ How can the law lack "any direct or effective relevance to the saving work of God" when the law served as a means of justification in the age before Christ?

This apparent contradiction is resolved through a demonstration of the change that took place in Paul's salvation-historical perspective at his conversion.

Paul's confrontation with the risen Christ on the Damascus road after his grounding in Judaism, and the new

understanding of the function of the law in the "old age", i.e. the age preceding "the accomplishment of Christ's redemptive work." In Bruce, Paul, pp. 188f., Bruce argues that from Paul's standpoint, "[t]o keep the whole law ... was not impossible." (Cf. pp. 40, 54, 124, 181, 245. In these passages one finds that the age of the law has been superseded by a new age inaugurated by the redemptive work of Christ and described by various titles, e.g. "the age of faith," "the age of the Spirit", and "the age of Christ.")

⁶⁸ Bruce, Commentary, p. 163.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

understanding of salvation-history which sprang from that confrontation, compelled him to see the legal path to salvation closed by a barrier (which he would not have refused to identify with the cross) which carried the notice reading: 'No road this way'.⁷⁰

Paul now understood that the law was to remain in force only until the coming of Christ. Again, in this connection, Bruce maintains that "the logic which compelled him to the conviction that Christ had displaced the Torah was the logic of the Damascus-road conversion."⁷¹

The Fulfillment of the Promise to Abraham

It is in Gal. 3:7, with Paul's reference to Abraham, where Bruce sees Paul introducing his distinctive understanding of salvation-history which resulted from his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road.⁷² Bruce states:

The history of salvation for Paul begins with Abraham, to whom the gospel was preached in advance (3:8), and reaches its climax in Christ. The promise made to Abraham finds its fulfillment in Christ, to whom indeed it primarily referred. But between the promise and the fulfillment there intervened the age of law, introduced parenthetically for the purpose which is stated below in 3:19, but lacking any direct or effective relevance to the saving work of God.⁷³

This understanding reflects the post-conversion salvation-

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 176.

⁷² Ibid., p. 153.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 153,154.

historical position of Paul on the place of the law. In regards to the function of the law, from Bruce's perspective, Paul did not change his fundamental understanding of the function of the law. He only differs with his Jewish contemporaries on its present validity.

Bruce implies that Paul's pre-conversion assessment of the function of the law is an accurate perception of the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures embodied in the life of Abraham, as previously mentioned.⁷⁴ It must be emphasized that Bruce does not once state that Paul's position was in opposition to the teaching of the Old Testament, only that Paul had placed this pre-conversion understanding in the proper perspective in light of the work of Christ revealed at his conversion.⁷⁵ He argues only that Paul, prior to the Damascus road experience, had failed to recognize the supersession⁷⁶ of the place of the law in the divine ordering of salvation-history. This new understanding of salvation-history resulting from his conversion showed him that the old path to a righteous status before God had been replaced by a new and better one, i.e. "the age of the Spirit," in fulfillment of the divine plan.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See above p. 18, n. 48.

⁷⁵ Commentary, p. 138.

⁷⁶ Supersession is used in the sense that the new age inaugurated by the work of Christ forced the law aside as inferior.

⁷⁷ Bruce, Commentary, p. 245.

Applicable to Each Aspect of the Law

As aspects of a previous age, Bruce also maintains that each aspect of the law has been abrogated. In this connection, Bruce mentions two non-soteriological purposes of the law which have now been set aside by virtue of the work of Christ. The law was given "1) to multiply (and even stimulate) transgressions; and 2) to confine all in the prisonhouse of sin, from which there is no exit but the way of faith."⁷⁸ These functions of the law cannot be added as some kind of supplement or codicil to the promise. "[H]e [Paul] means that it was added to the human situation for a special purpose--a purpose totally different from that of the promise."⁷⁹ The law had come onto the main highway of salvation-history by a side road, it had "intruded."⁸⁰ Now that that purpose has been served, the law in its totality has been set aside.

Commenting on the text of Galatians, Bruce further demonstrates this understanding in his statements on Lev.18:5 and Hab.2:4 which have been referred to above.⁸¹ Bruce argues concerning Gal.3:10-14, the passage which quotes these two Old

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 176.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

⁸¹ See n. 67 above.

Testament texts, that Paul maintains the universality of the "curse," since no one can keep the law perfectly, and that even if one could do so, he would still be under the curse because, in the light of the work of Christ, the way of justification by law-keeping is no longer a viable alternative.⁸²

Bruce therefore understands Paul to be citing the principle in Lev.18:5 of "life" (i.e. justification through law-keeping) solely for the purpose of setting it aside "in favor of the principle of faith (as contrasted with works) laid down in Hab.2:4b, 'it is the one who is righteous by faith [not the one who perseveres in doing the whole law] that will find life'."⁸³

The work of Christ has abrogated or displaced the law in the ordering of salvation-history.⁸⁴ Christ has now occupied the place that is rightfully his.⁸⁵ He is the fulfillment of the promise which had been made to Abraham and thus the climax of salvation-history.⁸⁶ Paul no longer holds a view of salvation-history which he may have held in his pre-Christian days; his view is now "true salvation-history" (i.e. "Christian salvation-history") in which the principle of faith is of paramount

⁸² Commentary, p. 160.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 136-137.

importance.⁸⁷

The law's positive function in its use by God in his dealings with mankind was limited to the time before the work of Christ was accomplished.⁸⁸ The view of salvation-history which Bruce understands Paul to be espousing demands the complete abrogation of the law in any of its functions in light of the work of Christ.⁸⁹ This indeed remains as the central theme of Bruce's understanding of Paul's application of this universal principle to the situation of the Galatians in 3:1 - 6:10.

In the application of this "universal principle," Bruce understands Paul's use of the analogies, allegory, and the discussion of the nature of the transmission of the law as elements used by Paul to show the preparatory, secondary, and parenthetical nature of the law. Therefore, the use of the tutor and "elemental forces" analogies in 4:1-11,⁹⁰ the allegory of the handmaid and the free woman in 4:21-31,⁹¹ and the transmission of the law by angels in 3:19⁹² all serve to show the Galatian

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 154.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 176.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 196, 204-206.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 215.

⁹² Ibid., p. 179.

converts that the law had a purpose in the past, which he further elaborates on in 3:19. However, the law no longer serves that purpose, for the completed work of Christ has abrogated the law in its entirety. The law in its entirety is determined to be "intrusive, temporary, secondary, and preparatory"⁷³ in this present age.

Necessitated by the Gentile Mission

"In Paul's exposition of salvation-history the Gentiles occupy a special place, as they did in God's promise to Abraham."⁷⁴ God had promised Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through his descendent (cf. Gal. 3:16). Thus, the Gentiles were to share in the blessing which had been promised to Abraham based on his faith-response to the promise of God concerning Isaac.⁷⁵ The gospel which called for justification by faith in Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.⁷⁶ Now there is no difference between Jew or Gentile "either in respect of sin (Rom. 3:22) or in respect of access to God's justifying grace (Rom. 10:2)."⁷⁷ This is due to the fact that

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 154.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 173, 219.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

there is now only one way of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike-justification by faith.⁹⁸

The law had been a divisive factor which had deprived the Gentiles of the privileges of the people of God and set the Jews apart from the rest of mankind. However, the law has now been overcome as a divisive factor by the "unifying effect of Christ's redemptive act."⁹⁹

Thus, the Gentile cannot be forced to obey any aspect of the law as a requirement for, an expression of, or a factor necessary in the maintenance of, his salvation, which was an understanding opposed to the message of the Judaizers.¹⁰⁰ In effect, if the Gentiles were required to obey the law, this would only serve to bring the Gentile under that bondage to the law which had been abrogated by the completed work of Christ;¹⁰¹ it would be a failure to recognize the supersession of the age of the law by the age of the Spirit.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 124, 137.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 112, 115. Bruce states that Paul was in conflict with the Judaizers who were requiring circumcision as a necessity for salvation or entrance into the community of believers. For Paul, this was a denial of the law-free character of the gospel and an attempt "to put an end to freedom, to make those who enjoyed it exchange it for bondage." In effect, one was required to become a Jew in order to become a Christian.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 111-113.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 124.

The Concept of Law is Redefined

Finally, the law is relegated to the past because, as it was previously defined, it has no place in the life of the believer. Bruce therefore understands the use of the concept of "law," when referring to the life of the believer, to be a totally different concept than that of law previous to Christ.

What does this mean for Bruce's understanding of Paul's admonition to "fulfill the law of Christ" in 6:2? In this context, according to Bruce, "the 'law of Christ' is for Paul the whole tradition of Jesus' ethical teaching, confirmed by his character and conduct and reproduced in his people by the power of the Spirit."¹⁰³ It is a law which cannot be enforced by legal sanctions and is concerned with the "quality of the act and the direction in which it is moving."¹⁰⁴ This law has only the term 'law' as the one common factor with the OT law, for this new law is simply the natural fruit of the life controlled by the Spirit.¹⁰⁵

The Spirit becomes the antidote for nomism of any kind.¹⁰⁶ "The freedom of the Spirit" is completely opposed to the OT

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 42. See Bruce, Paul, p. 187, for a succinct presentation of his view of "the law of Christ."

¹⁰⁶ Bruce, Commentary, p. 246.

principle of the law, just as being under the law was the same as being "under the dominion of sin" or as living "according to the flesh."¹⁰⁷ One is now enslaved to the Spirit as opposed to the law and controlled by the Spirit within and not by an external authority, i.e. the OT law.¹⁰⁸ "Henceforth, the obligations of moral conduct are fostered not by the dictates of the law but by the operation of the free Spirit."¹⁰⁹ There is thus a radical transformation of the law which has taken place for Paul as he now interprets the law in terms of love, a plane on which the old law does not belong,¹¹⁰ "and legal bondage gives way to the freedom of the Spirit."¹¹¹

Summary of Galatian Arguments

Thus with this understanding of salvation-history which flowed from his conversion experience, Paul set forth the resultant "universal principle" in Gal. 2:15-21 that Jew and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 255.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 41. For Bruce, then, Paul can and should be described as "essentially charismatic" (p. 152), in that he asserts the primacy of the Spirit over the law, which is to say that the OT principle of law in any form has been excluded (p.240).

Gentile alike are now justified by faith in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and as the climax of salvation-history.¹¹² In this new age, the law is no longer in force with respect to any soteriological function. This encompasses the functioning of the law as a means of grace (justification), as a means of maintaining one's righteous status with God, and as a set of ethical principles to which a believer adheres as an expression of his relationship established with God on the basis of faith.¹¹³ The impotency of the law in this present age actually extends even to the purposes which Paul assigns to the law, mentioned above in comments on Gal. 3:19.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 136-137.

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 138, 151f., 244-246. The verb dikaioō can have both a behavioral and relational sense. Bruce maintains that the law cannot make one righteous in either sense of the word. It cannot establish a relationship with God nor is obedience to the law a requirement to maintain the relationship established by faith or a fruit of that relationship. The Spirit is now the sole guide for ethical conduct in the life of one who has believed in Jesus Christ. Obedience to the Spirit is the path to "behavioral righteousness" while faith in Christ is the path to "relational righteousness." The law is left without any function that is necessary in the life of the believer. In fact, to obey the law as a requirement for acceptance by God or as an expression of an acceptance on the basis of faith would be to do that which is completely antithetical to this new life in Christ.

¹¹⁴ See above p. 27.

Conclusion

"Why then the law?" What is the resultant position at which Bruce arrives in his interpretation of Paul's understanding of the place of the law in the life of the post-resurrection believer? The law came in by a side road breaking into the divine plan of God set into motion by God's promise to Abraham and fulfilled in the completed work of Christ. The law served as a means of justification in the praeparatio evangelium and for the purpose of "1) multiplying (and even stimulating) transgressions and 2) of confining all in the prison house of sin."¹¹⁵

However, with the completion of the work of Christ, the law was superseded and is now no longer in force in any capacity at all.¹¹⁶ Christ has abrogated the law in its entirety, bringing in the "new age" and marking the close of the old. The various requirements of the law served as a tutor until spiritual maturity had been attained in Christ.¹¹⁷

The law, which was given later, was a parenthetical dispensation introduced by God for a limited purpose; its validity continued only until the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ, and even while it was valid it did not modify the terms of the promise (cf. 3:17-26).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 240.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 219.

Thus, for one to attempt to use it as a means of justification is to misuse it and to attempt to appropriate a system of relating to God which has been set aside through the work of Christ. The law will actually serve as a vantage-point from which sin can attack the believer and lead him down a sinful path. It is tantamount to being under the bondage of sin and the elemental forces.

All who come to Christ by faith are those who are the true heirs of Abraham. It is in this vein that Paul employed the allegory concerning the offspring of the "bond woman" and the "free woman" (cf. 4:21-31). Paul is most likely, according to Bruce, in agreement with the solution proposed by C.K. Barrett,¹¹⁹ refuting an argument set forth by his opponents through inverting it and showing that the incident of Sarah and Hagar, rightly understood, supports his gospel which is not only law-free but also antithetical to the law.¹²⁰ The people of the law are those represented by the offspring of the bond woman (Hagar), while the offspring of the free woman (Sarah) are represented by those who embrace the gospel of justification by faith.¹²¹ The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise of a blessing made to, and which would come through, Abraham and his

¹¹⁹ Cf. C. K. Barrett, Essays on Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 152-168, especially pp. 167f.

¹²⁰ Bruce, Commentary, p. 218.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 220.

descendants--a blessing that would extend to all nations.¹²²

Both Jew and Gentile alike are now on equal ground before God as sinners in need of justification through faith in Christ. There is no basis for demanding that one continue in the various practices commanded by the law (i.e. circumcision, dietary restrictions, calendar observations, etc.) since these are irrelevant now that the law has been abrogated by Christ and replaced with a new operating principle of faith (as opposed to works). For anyone to view the law as essential to the establishment, maintenance, or expression of one's righteous status with God is to nullify the grace of God, to return under bondage, "to build again the things which you once destroyed," and to imply, finally, that the death of Christ was in vain.

The guide for the conduct of believers is now the "law" which has been written on their hearts by the Spirit of God. The believer is guided by the "law of Christ," "the law or standard embodied in the person of Christ,"¹²³ given by the Spirit (the one who also enables the believer to keep it), which has nothing in common with the old law except for its name, since this new "law" operates on the plane of love where the old law is not at home. This new "law" also provides the necessary restraints against a lapse into libertinism.

The antinomian nature of Paul's position is considered clear

¹²² Ibid., p. 219.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 262.

and completely unproblematic for Bruce in light of this overall salvation-historical understanding which he believes to be substantiated by an exegesis of Galatians. Thus, in light of the situation confronting Paul in Galatia, it is perfectly understandable that he so vigorously condemns the teaching of his opponents. To claim that any aspect of the law is essential to one's relationship to God would be to say the new age had not dawned and thus that Jesus was not the Messiah, the Son of God.

Therefore, for Bruce, when Paul approaches the problems that the believers at Galatia are facing, he hammers out the solution based on the conviction that no aspect of the previous concept of law (previous to Christ's redemptive work) remains valid for the those who have come to Christ by faith. In Paul's application of this position to the Galatian situation, Paul has used Old Testament passages, analogies and allegories to express the proper understanding the Galatian believers should have and the position they should take in the face of the Judaizers' false teaching. It is a position that Bruce contends is the one, in the light of his own research, which best accounts for the data in the Galatian epistle.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND OF PAUL AND HIS VIEW OF THE LAW AS EXPRESSED IN GALATIANS

Introduction

The last ten years of scholarship on Paul and the law have witnessed a "paradigm shift."¹²⁴ Recent discussion has shifted its focus from God and the individual to the two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, and has been marked by a severe criticism of the contention that "Paul's opponents were Jews or Judaizers who held that one was saved by performing a sufficient number of meritorious deeds."¹²⁵ Moo attributes this shift, which is largely a restatement of the position originally propounded by

¹²⁴ Douglas Moo, "Article Review: Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years," Scottish Journal of Theology 40 (1987): 287-307.

¹²⁵ Moo, "Review," p. 287.

G.F. Moore,¹²⁶ in the main to the monograph by E.P. Sanders entitled Paul and Palestinian Judaism.¹²⁷

Sanders, through an exhaustive study of early rabbinic sources, challenges the common legalistic perspective from which first century Judaism has been viewed.¹²⁸ In his later monograph, Paul, the Law and the Jewish People,¹²⁹ despite some revisions of his views expressed in Paul and Palestinian Judaism, Sanders continued to stress that the Judaism Paul had confronted was not the legalistic religion widely assumed by biblical scholars. As a result of this discovery, Sanders asserts that a reexamination of Paul's message is necessitated.

Indeed, Sanders' work reemphasizes the fact that one's understanding of Paul's background and the Jewish milieu in which he wrote must affect one's understanding of Paul's views. As Moo states,

once these presumptions [that Paul had a first hand experience with the "burdensome" law and that the law was now being forced on his Gentile converts as a means of

¹²⁶ G.F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, vol. II The Age of the Tannaim (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 93f; cf. G.B. Caird, review of Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion, by E.P. Sanders, in The Journal of Theological Studies 24 (Oct. 1978): 538.

¹²⁷ E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: a Comparison of Patterns of Religion (London: S.C.M. Press, 1977).

¹²⁸ Sanders, Palestinian, p. 57.

¹²⁹ E. P. Sanders, Paul, the Law and the Jewish People (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

seeking a righteous status before God] are questioned or rejected, and the background for the interpretation of Paul's theology of the law is reshaped, the nature of that teaching itself becomes subject to serious revision.¹³⁰

In his review of Sanders' Paul and Palestinian Judaism, G. B. Caird also stressed the importance of Paul's background for the study of pauline theology. He underscored the importance of Sanders' work for its reaffirmation of the fact that the Judaism of Paul's day was not "a wholly legalistic religion in which salvation depended on merit, on the balancing of the ledger so that instances of obedience to the Torah outweighed transgressions." However, he faulted Sanders for not allowing his views on first century Judaism to sufficiently impact his understanding of Paul.¹³¹

It becomes apparent, then, that the study of Paul's Judaistic background is a proper starting point for an examination of Paul's view of the function of the law in Galatians. Thus, the following section is an examination of

¹³⁰ Moo, "Review," p. 288.

¹³¹ Sanders subsequently attempted to do this very thing in his monograph, Paul, the Law and the Jewish People. Sanders expressed his views on critical issues in pauline interpretation such as his (Paul's) reason for rejecting the law. However, Sanders and Caird still differ, as this issue illustrates. While Caird, in a review of Paul and Palestinian Judaism (p.542), proposed that the results of Sanders' work pointed to Paul's recognition that the law, as he had understood it from his Judaistic background, had impugned the "impartiality of God" as the reason for his rejection of the law, Sanders in The Law (p. 47) concludes that Paul rejected the law on the basis that "it did not provide for God's ultimate purpose, that of saving the entire world through faith in Christ and without the privilege accorded to Jews through promises, covenants, and law."

those aspects of Judaism which are relevant to the discussion of the law's function in Galatians. The results of this examination will serve to inform our understanding of Paul's statements regarding law within the epistle.

Judaism, Paul and the Law

In his autobiographical vignettes, Paul portrays himself as a Jew who had been brought up "according to the strictest sect" of the Jewish religion, the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 26:4-5, NASB). His education took place in Tarsus as well as in Jerusalem (Acts 26:4), where he studied at the feet of Gamaliel I (Acts 22:3). Due to his zealous commitment and adherence to his ancestral traditions,¹³² he excelled in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries (Gal. 1:14, Acts 22:3). His ardor for Judaism found expression in the vitriolic persecution of the early church, a persecution intended to end its very existence (Gal. 1:14). Finally, Paul epitomizes his devotion to Judaism in Phil. 3:5-6, wherein he claims to have reached the very pinnacle of Judaism, blamelessness in respect to the observance of the law.

Paul's own statements corroborate Sanders' insistence upon the importance of understanding the contemporary Judaistic

¹³² These were traditions "enshrined in the oral law or Halakhah" and "handed down in the Pharisaic schools." See F.F. Bruce, Commentary, p. 91.

viewpoint on the function of the law.¹³³ It is at this very point, however, that there is a divergence of opinion as to the nature of this Judaism which was Paul's birthright and against which he contends in the letter to the Galatians. The differing viewpoints seem to have developed along two lines of thought. One understands the statements on the law from the extant documents as originating from, or reflecting, a first century Judaism lacking any legalistic elements.¹³⁴ The second contends for the existence of legalistic elements, whether in teaching or practice, as an aspect of the non-monolithic Judaism of Paul's day.¹³⁵

The previously mentioned contribution of Sanders represents the position of those who maintain that the Judaism of Paul's

¹³³ Sanders, The Law, p. 95ff. Sanders points to the importance of this endeavor when he states that Paul followed Jewish thinking and moral admonitions in his teachings.

¹³⁴ Cf. Heikki Raeisaenen, Paul and the Law (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 168 nn. 39, 40. Here Raeisaenen, while agreeing with Sanders' conception of Judaism as possessing a normative pattern best expressed by the "covenantal nomism" concept, also allows for, and faults Sanders for not adequately accounting for, the actual distortion of the religious ideals in the behavior of the first century Jews, "the difference between religious writings and lived religion." However, it must be stressed that Raeisaenen sees this distortion most typically taking the form of an "exaggerated trust in the covenant and the sonship of Abraham," not the form of legalism.

¹³⁵ This refers to the position which understands the law to be the means of gaining a righteous status before God by obedience to its precepts. Cf. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield, gen. eds., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Romans, 2 vols., by C. E. B. Cranfield, II: 847f.

time lacked any legalistic elements worthy of note.¹³⁶ In his initial work, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, Sanders proposed "covenantal nomism" as the prevalent pattern of religion which most accurately portrays ancient Palestinian Judaism. The covenant relationship with God was seen to be basic in that "one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression."¹³⁷

The Judaism of Paul's day, according to Sanders, understood that salvation had been provided for "all faithful members of Israel--all those who maintain their place in the covenant by obedience and by employing the means of atonement provided by the covenant, especially repentance, for transgression."¹³⁸ Sanders discerns this perspective in his interpretation of "their own righteousness" (ten idian dikaiosunen) in Rom. 10:3b. He states that this righteousness is to be understood in a collective sense to mean "our righteousness." It was understood by the Jews to be a status granted to them alone as a privileged people by virtue of the covenant God had established with them. This is in sharp contrast to the view that Paul is here condemning a "self-

¹³⁶ Cf. Raaisaenen, Paul, p. 168, and also his article "Galatians 2:16 and Paul's Break with Judaism," New Testament Studies 31 (1985): p. 544.

¹³⁷ Sanders, Palestinian, p. 75.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 236.

righteousness, which consists in individuals presenting their merits as a claim upon God."¹³⁹

Furthermore, in Sanders' Judaism, obedience to the precepts of the law is necessary to enjoy the gracious provisions of the covenant, "but it does not earn God's grace as such."¹⁴⁰ The observance of the law served as a type of litmus test to determine who had committed himself to the covenant; obedience to its demands was both the outward sign and the necessary corollary of commitment to the covenant.¹⁴¹

How this affects the argument of Paul in Galatians becomes immediately obvious. If Sanders' picture of first century Judaism is accurate, Paul cannot be viewed as attacking a legalistic Judaism which understood the law to be a means of gaining a righteous status with God. Rather, he was engaged in a conflict with a Judaism which taught that adherence to the law was a necessity for staying in the covenant relationship and not a means for getting in.¹⁴²

Why, then, does Paul oppose the Judaistic antagonists in Galatia? Sanders believes, in contrast with the legalistic

¹³⁹ Sanders, The Law, p. 38.

¹⁴⁰ Sanders, Palestinian, p. 420. See also pp. 92f., 107, 135, 141, 177, 180, 234, 236f., 544.

¹⁴¹ Sanders, The Law, p. 46. See also Sanders, Palestinian, p. 544.

¹⁴² Ibid., The Law, pp. 84, 91 n. 54.

perspective,¹⁴³ that Paul did not oppose Judaism and its understanding of the function of the law because it viewed the law as a means of gaining merit with God. Rather, Paul opposed the Jewish concept of covenantal nomism because it excluded Christology and the corresponding universality of God's offer of salvation.¹⁴⁴ This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the old, covenantal nomism, only that it is not the new.¹⁴⁵

According to Sanders, Paul's views are to be explained as a product of his 'solution to plight' reasoning. This is to say that, when faced with the dilemma such as that caused by the Judaizers in Galatia, two principal convictions formed the dogmatic givens which conditioned each of his solutions,¹⁴⁶ viz. "Christology" (that all are saved on the same basis) and "universality" (that he was called as an apostle to the Gentiles).¹⁴⁷ Although these convictions were not a logical outflow from his conversion experience, nor did they possess a

¹⁴³ Sanders, Palestinian, p. 33. Sanders attributes the development of this position to the efforts of F. Weber (1897) and many others.

¹⁴⁴ Sanders, The Law, p.47.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 102, 103, 154.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 102-103. Cf. R. H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul" Biblica 66 (1, 1985): 28. Gundry disagrees with Sanders, stating that "the problems suggest that Paul thought simultaneously rather than consecutively of plight and solution."

rational or theoretical basis, Paul, according to Sanders, can be seen as responding in a "coherent manner" since his replies spring from these central convictions. Furthermore, Sanders contends that Paul's positions on the law reflect a "development of thought which has a momentum toward more and more negative statements."¹⁴⁸ The resultant divergent positions concerning the law can neither be systematized or harmonized, although they do reflect a development of thought and a commitment to central convictions.¹⁴⁹

To summarize Sanders, the Judaism of Paul's day demonstrated a "pattern of religion" which he terms "covenantal nomism." He is convinced that extant documents relevant to first century Judaism relay a pattern of a religion which is not predominately or characteristically legalistic in nature. It was a religion which attributes salvation to God's gracious election of Israel to its covenant status and upholds obedience to the law as necessary, not to gain, but to maintain, covenant status. Therefore, the problematic issue at Galatia was not legalism. Rather, it revolved around the issues of Gentile exclusion and Christology, i.e. salvation by faith in Jesus Christ for all regardless of their ethnic origin.

W. D. Davies essentially concurs with Sanders' portrayal of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 85,86,95.

Paul's Jewish opponents in Galatia.¹⁵⁰ However, he differs from Sanders on how Paul's views regarding the salvation now found in Christ are impacted by the contemporary Judaistic perspective on the law. An example of how Davies and Sanders differ is brought out in their views on why Paul rejected the law. Instead of understanding Paul to have rejected the "old" because it was not the "new," Davies sees Paul reflecting what the Pharisees had taught concerning the role of the Torah in the Messianic age.¹⁵¹ This "new religion" was recognized by Paul as the "advent of the true and final form of Judaism."¹⁵² The Messiah was the new, more fully explained Torah whose life and teaching brought out what had always been the full intention of the law--that the Gentiles should share in the glories of the Messianic age.¹⁵³ "For him [Paul], the way of the Law gives place to the law or way of Christ. Torah became concentrated in the person of Jesus Christ and its demands informed by the agape and, indeed, the

¹⁵⁰ W. D. Davies, "Paul and the Law: Reflections on Pitfalls in Interpretation," in Paul and Paulism: Essays in Honour of C.K. Barrett, eds. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 5.

¹⁵¹ W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), p.72.

¹⁵² Ibid., Rabbinic, p. 324.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 73.

very presence of Christ."¹⁵⁴

However, regardless of what divergent positions may result from this conception of Judaism, there is a need for caution against a wholesale adoption of a picture of first century Judaism like those proposed by either Sanders or Davies.¹⁵⁵ Moo addresses this issue when he states that one must exercise caution before accepting a view that has a difficult time accounting for the "apparent 'legalistic' positions" that Paul assumes in opposition to his opponents.¹⁵⁶ In fact, Sanders is forced to disregard evidence¹⁵⁷ while Raeisaenen resorts to accusing Paul of misinterpreting his Jewish opponents.¹⁵⁸

John Fischer in his article, "Paul in His Jewish

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., "Paul and the Law", p. 10. Cf. also W. D. Davies, Rabbinic Judaism, p. 148.

¹⁵⁵ In fairness to Davies, he does allow for "some neglect" in Judaism concerning the "precedence of grace over Law" ("Paul and the Law," p.5). However, to suggest that it was in any way a prevalent or even significant element of first century Judaism would be, according to Davies, unwarranted by the evidence.

¹⁵⁶ Moo, "Review", p. 292.

¹⁵⁷ Although the extant Jewish documents appear to contain very few witnesses to a "legalistic" faction within first century Judaism, the integrity and relevancy of these witnesses is suspect. See above pp. 52-54.

¹⁵⁸ Sanders, Palestinian, pp. 409-418; Raeisaenen, Paul, p. 268.

Context",¹⁵⁹ though agreeing with the overall conception of Judaism set forth by Sanders, argues for the existence of a faction within first century Judaism which exhibited the "legalistic" tendencies or characteristics that Paul seems to be addressing in the letter to the Galatians. The views of this particular faction of Judaism are given expression in 4 Ezra and possibly in 2 Baruch.¹⁶⁰

Against this contention, Sanders insists that those statements which reflect what can be termed "hard legalism"¹⁶¹ are aberrations in an overall pattern of religion described by his concept of covenantal nomism. In 4 Ezra, Sanders observes that

the covenant as such does not bring the benefits of God's protection from torment and even destruction..., but... only the perfectly righteous, who are few, will be saved by God, and that only after suffering and pain. One has here the closest approach to legalistic works-righteousness which can be found in the Jewish literature of the period; for only [emphasis mine] here are the traditional characteristics of God--he freely forgives and restores sinners and maintains the covenant promises despite transgression--denied.¹⁶²

Certainly, if this was the "only" witness that is available for a "hard legalism" in Judaism, it would warrant the wholesale

¹⁵⁹ John Fischer, "Paul in His Jewish Context," The Evangelical Quarterly 57 (March, 1985): 211-236.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., "Context," p. 231.

¹⁶¹ Moo, "Review," p. 292.

¹⁶² Sanders, Palestinian, p. 418.

reconstruction of our understanding of Paul's opponents in the manner that Sanders has suggested. However, as Moo points out,¹⁴³ the testimony of the gospels and of Paul, when coupled with the fragmentary nature of our knowledge of 'lay' (as opposed to 'clerical') theology in first century Judaism, mitigates against the homogeneous Judaism portrayed by Sanders. Moo further suggests that one may in fact find a more accurate picture of Paul's opponents in his own letters than is possible to reconstruct from related Judaistic documents at this present time.¹⁴⁴

As previously mentioned concerning the views of Raeisaenan, Paul's arguments (which by their content reflect the apparent existence of legalistically oriented opponents) forced him to postulate that Paul had misunderstood his opponents.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the fact that Paul understood his opponents to be legalists has remained a relatively unshaken conclusion.¹⁴⁶ Many would concur

¹⁴³ Moo, "Review", p. 292.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Raeinsaenen, Paul, pp. 177-191, 268. "It thus seems that, as far as Palestinian Judaism is concerned, Paul either (implicitly, at least) gives an inaccurate picture, or else bases his view on insufficient and uncharacteristic evidence" (p.181).

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, "The Pedagogical Nature of the Law on Galatians 3:19-4:7," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 25/1 (March, 1982): p. 60; Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics in Paul (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), pp. 193-194; S.R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C.A. Briggs, gen. eds., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the

with Fischer that Paul understands his opponents to be Jews who "insisted that Gentile Christians must keep the Law or they could not enjoy salvation or belong to the community of the Messiah."¹⁴⁷

The question to be asked at this point is whether Paul did misunderstand his opponents and thus answer questions that no one was asking. It must be reiterated here that the fragmentary nature of our picture of first century Judaism calls for caution in contradicting Paul's testimony which apparently portrays a first century Judaism which was, at least in part, legalistic.¹⁴⁸

Mikeal Parsons in his article "The Critical Use of Rabbinic Literature in New Testament Studies" points to the difficulties

Galatians, by Ernest De Witt Burton, p. liv; C. Thomas Rhyne, Faith Establishes Law, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 55, gen. ed. Howard C. Kee (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 5; Hermann Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 123-124, 139-140; Donald Guthrie, gen. ed., Galatians, The Century Bible New Series (London: Oliphants, 1969), pp. 40-42.

Though this is by no means an exhaustive list of those who see Paul in a polemic against legalists, it does demonstrate the wide support of this viewpoint.

¹⁴⁷ Fischer, "Context," p. 233. Cf. Bruce, Commentary, p. 231.

¹⁴⁸ Rhyne, Establishes, pp. 5, 125 n. 2. Rhyne stresses that Paul is the earliest datable witness for the character of first century Judaism. He cannot agree with Sanders that Paul wrongly attacks Judaism over the issue of 'works of the law.' It appears to Rhyne that if Paul were not battling an element within Judaism that was legalistic in nature, Paul's letters were irrelevant to the needs of his people whose needs were a significant reason for the attack upon the Judaism of his day. Thus we would be left with a shadow-boxer who appears to be guilty of his opponents' error, being zealous without knowledge (Rom. 10:2). Cf. Gundry, "Grace," p. 36.

in and the relatively unsettled nature of the most recent trend in the study of rabbinic literature, which reflects an even more cautious approach to the relevant Jewish documents than that of the past.¹⁶⁹ Also, Jacob Neusner, in his review of Sanders' Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, insists that the homogeneous picture of first century Judaism proposed by Sanders' and representative of the recent "more cautious" approach to studies in Judaism must remain suspect.¹⁷⁰ This is of course not to suggest that the recent advances are valueless for the study of the New Testament and Paul in particular. This is only to suggest that one must exercise caution in refuting or interpreting the biblical testimony based on the results of a methodology which has not demonstrated a critical use of documents whose comprehensiveness, contemporaneity of content, and thus situational relevance are still in doubt.¹⁷¹

It is important to note here that scholars such as Neusner

¹⁶⁹ Mikeal Parsons, "The Critical Use of the Rabbinic Literature in New Testament Studies," Perspectives in Religious Studies 12 (Feb., 1985): 85-102, esp. pp. 90-92.

¹⁷⁰ Jacob Neusner, "Sanders' Paul and the Jewish People," The Jewish Quarterly Review 74 (Spring, 1985): 416-423, esp. pp. 416, 417, 420. Neusner offers a stinging critic of Sanders' work for its uncritical use of Jewish documents. He claims that the portrayal of first century Judaism as basically homogeneous results from a disregard of the many problems inherent in the use of early Jewish documents.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 421f. Neusner contends that Sanders gives only a partially accurate picture of Judaism for this reason.

do not discount the more positive¹⁷² portrayal of Judaism put forth by Sanders. The major objection concerns the portrayal of a Judaism that is homogeneous. It appears that Sanders has succumbed to this common malady of New Testament scholarship as evidenced by his inability to recognize and his attempts to diminish the diversity of early Judaism.¹⁷³

In summary, it has been seen that recent work by scholars such as Sanders has aided in gaining a more comprehensive and less legalistically imbalanced picture of first century Judaism. At the same time, caution must be exercised concerning the wholesale removal of those elements which contradict what he and others consider to be the overall pattern. The fragmentary nature of our knowledge of Judaism, first century Judaism in particular, leaves room for the assertions of Paul and the gospels which do verify the existence of a legalistic element within Judaism.

What then are the implications of these findings for the understanding of Paul's view of the function of the law as expressed in his letter to the Galatians? The implications are twofold. First, it is possible, even probable, if Paul's statements concerning his opponents are reliable, that he was attacking "legalists" in his letter to the Galatians. Second,

¹⁷² Positive in the sense that Judaism as a whole did contain elements which were not legalistic in nature and viewed the law as complementary to faith.

¹⁷³ Neusner, "Sanders'," p. 423.

Paul's Jewish background does not necessitate that one understand Paul to be espousing an exclusively negative view of the function of the law. If Paul predominately understood the law to be a system best described by a concept related to "covenantal nomism," this viewpoint could lend itself to a complementary/supplementary perspective on the relationship of the law to the gospel. In other words, the law as an expression of a relationship made possible through God's gracious offer could be one of its roles found in Paul's teaching.¹⁷⁴

Judaism can now no longer be characterized as exclusively legalistic in nature, as previously assumed. The non-salvific role given to the law, at least by some and at least to a considerable degree, lessens the likelihood that a sharp law/grace antithesis did dominate Paul's background and consequently, his writings. Paul's background could have influenced him to view the law understood in the light of Christ as a divine standard for the proper expression of that faith relationship, a relationship based on God's gracious offer of the covenant. The law had all along pointed to the promised seed of Abraham who had now arrived in the person of Christ. Therefore, although he attacks the legalists' perversion of the law, it is an historical possibility that Paul sees the law in a supplementary relationship to the gospel, i.e. something that informs and undergirds or adds a necessary element to it.

Now that the probable historical moorings have been

¹⁷⁴ Rhyne, Establishes, p. 70.

explored, we must examine what Paul says concerning his view on the law in the Galatian epistle. Does he not argue for an antithetical relationship of law to gospel? Suggestions concerning the relation between law and gospel in light of these recent developments vary greatly. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to an examination of Galatians to determine the nature of his statements: are they ultimately antithetical, supplemental, or a combination of both? And, by extension, it will also be an examination of the place of the law in the life of the believer based on our conclusions.

Galatians, Paul and the Law

The preceding section suggested that the Judaism of Paul's time could well have contained a legalistic element, at least enough to allow for an interpretation of his statements in Galatians as a polemic against legalists. At the same time, recent studies of first century Judaism reveal a milieu which contained, predominately so according to Sanders, a view of the law as an expression of commitment to the covenant and not as a means of entering that covenant relationship. The question remains as to whether one can see a retention of any positive function for the law within Paul's polemic against legalists at Galatia. Or could it be that Paul views the law from an exclusively and excessively negative perspective? Does the law remain valid for the NT believer in any sense as an expression of

the relationship based on faith?

Certain considerations must be operative in any discussion of Paul's views in order to avoid common pitfalls.¹⁷⁵ To begin with, a proper recognition of the polemical setting and tone of the letter is essential. In the words of J.B. Lightfoot "the Epistle to the Galatians is especially distinguished among St. Paul's letters by its unity of purpose."¹⁷⁶ From beginning to end, the apostle never loses sight of the Galatian apostasy; "... however tumultuous may be the workings of his soul, they are all forced into this one channel."¹⁷⁷

Many distort Paul by failing to recognize this fact. Paul's epistles to the Romans, Corinthians and Galatians demonstrate a variety in his approach to the law as a result of the different occasions which prompted their development. The letter to the Galatians reveals a Paul who, due to the Judaizers' insidious attack upon the gospel,¹⁷⁸ "views the law with the cold eyes of an antagonist."¹⁷⁹ His views are a product of "the white heat of

¹⁷⁵ W. D. Davies, "Paul and the Law," p. 4. Although all of Davies points will not be adopted, his discussion does underscore the need for a grasp of certain preliminary considerations as a necessary background for a proper interpretation of the epistle's theology.

¹⁷⁶ J.B. Lightfoot, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), p. 63.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Gal. 1:7, 2:4, 4:17.

¹⁷⁹ Davies, "Paul and the Law," p. 8.

controversy"¹⁸⁰ that characterized the Sitz im Leben of the Galatian letter. Any attempt to understand Paul by using his writings indiscriminately (i.e. "without a regard to their variety") is a path leading to a misinterpretation of his position on the law.¹⁸¹ On the other hand, a recognition of the intensely polemical nature of the epistle will guard against a lopsided construction of Paul's views, especially when informed by safeguards found in his other letters.¹⁸²

A second consideration springs from the distance that separates the modern reader from the Galatian letter. It goes without stating that this is a problem in the study of all biblical texts. The importance of the historical background is universally recognized as an integral part of any attempt to understand their message. In respect to the Galatian letter, C. E. B. Cranfield proposes a definition of one of its key concepts in recognition of this fact. Cranfield observes that an examination of the Greek language reveals that a "word-group to denote 'legalism', 'legalist', and 'legalistic' did not exist."¹⁸³ This linguistic observation leads Cranfield to suggest that since Paul had no

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 8, 10.

¹⁸² Bruce, Commentary, p. 42.

¹⁸³ C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," Scottish Journal of Theology 17 (March, 1964): 55.

definite, ready-made concept of legalism with which to work in his own mind, ...we should be ready to reckon with the possibility that sometimes, when he appears to be disparaging the law, what he really has in mind may be not the law itself but the misunderstanding and misuse of it for which we have a convenient term.¹²⁴

Therefore, when encountering Paul's statements concerning the law, especially in light of his arguments which reflect legalistic antagonists, one must make allowance for this possibility. It is reasonable to think that Paul is using the terms in a manner that would be immediately intelligible to his readers but which now has been obscured by the passage of time.¹²⁵

Context, in conjunction with a comprehensive perspective of Paul's statements on the law, serves as the key for interpreting

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Raeisaenen (Paul and the Law, p. 43) argues that it is a matter of "special pleading" to suggest that Paul did not have a more exact vocabulary to express the concept of legalism. He concedes that Paul did not have a term corresponding to the concept of 'legalism', "yet a Paul might have been able to form a few sentences through which to indicate that he wished to make such an important distinction between the law and its false interpretation." The obvious assumption made by Raeisaenen is that the phrases used by Paul did not clearly make such a distinction. In addition, he argues that Cranfield's view does not hold up when given "concrete form" in the passages where law appears. Although a detailed refutation of Raeisaenen's views is impossible here, his dogged determination to heighten what may appear to be conflicting views within Paul's understanding of the law has almost become a hermeneutical principle for his approach to Paul. This anti-harmonization bias renders him incapable of understanding the various pauline texts in a manner which would allow for their integration into a coherent whole. As Moo states ("Review," pp. 306-307), the exegete's task is not complete until he has found, from the clues in the material, a model that "fairly handles the diverse material of the pauline letters." Only then will the 'problem' of Paul and the law be solved.

his use of law.¹⁸⁶ A grasp of the context is necessitated by the diversity of the uses of law in the Pauline corpus. As Cosgrove states, "the only controlling factor [for determining the use of law], then, in any given Pauline passage, is context."¹⁸⁷

With these considerations in mind, the text of Galatians now stands before us. Within this letter, it will be seen that Paul argues for a supplementary relationship of the law to the gospel. The law is not antithetical to the promise, when properly viewed, nor was its function temporary in all aspects.

Law: Contrary to Promise?

The supplementary relationship of the law to the gospel can be maintained when Paul's statements in 3:21f are given due consideration. These verses, according to C.H. Cosgrove, represent the "very hinge" of the argument for the supplemental relationship of law to gospel.¹⁸⁸ It is these verses which form a foundational principle which prescribes the boundary for our

¹⁸⁶ C. H. Cosgrove, "The Law Preaches Faith: A Study in Galatians 3," Westminster Theological Journal 41 (Fall, 1978): 149-150. See also C.F.D. Moule, "Obligation in the Ethic of Paul," in Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox, ed. W.R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule, and R.R. Niebuhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.392.

¹⁸⁷ Cosgrove, "Preaches," p. 149.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 147, 159. This is a supplemental relationship which understands the Mosaic law to be a system which was designed to be kept as an expression of faith and not as an alternative to faith.

understanding of Paul's position on the law. Before examining these verses and their import for determining the function of the law in Galatians, it is important to see them as a part of Paul's overarching rationale for his stern warning against the pursuit of a gospel other than that which he had preached (1:6-10).

Initially, Paul argues that, because he is a true apostle, his gospel is of divine origin (1:11-12). Thus, he goes to great lengths to establish his apostolic credentials which had apparently been brought into doubt, impugning the divine origin of his message (1:11-2:14). Paul assures the Galatians that he did not receive his message from man (1:13-24) and that the other apostles endorse his message (2:1-14). In the closing verses of chapter 2, Paul explicates his gospel, viz. Jew and Gentile are justified by faith apart from works of the law, which the Galatians were in danger of abandoning for slavery (2:15-21).

In chapter three Paul gives a second reason for the necessity of his rebuke by asserting that to pursue this 'other gospel' is pure foolishness (v. 1). The personal experience of the Galatians (vv. 2-5) as well as the life of Abraham (vv. 6-29) demonstrate the utter absurdity of their present vacillation.

Throughout this chapter, Paul variously characterizes this 'other gospel' by the use of law, with or without ergon,¹⁸⁹ in combination with prepositions of means.¹⁹⁰ This 'other gospel'

¹⁸⁹ Paul supplies ergon in vv. 2, 4, 10, but not in vv. 11, 18, 21.

¹⁹⁰ He uses ek in vv. 2, 4, 10, 18, 21 and en in v. 11.

is contrasted to the true gospel which is predominately characterized by the phrase ek pisteōs.¹⁷¹ Though these phrases are ambiguous to the present day reader, they must have been immediately intelligible to his first century readers; otherwise, his rebuke for their failure to learn from their own experience (vv. 1-6) as well as from the life of Abraham (vv. 7-29) would have been unwarranted and unintelligible.

What is the nature of this 'other gospel'? Is Paul abrogating the law because it is a system which is in opposition to ek pisteōs? As to the term law itself, it is a well established fact that Paul makes use of it in a variegated fashion.¹⁷² It is at this point, in our search for the proper rendering of law, that the significance of the statements in vv. 21, 22 are realized. The importance of 3:21-22 is in their insistence that the law was never intended to be, or ever capable of being, a means of righteousness.¹⁷³ The essence of Paul's statements is that the law is not 'contrary' (kata) to the promises because the law does not give life which, rather, is the

¹⁷¹ So characterized in vv. 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 22, 24. Note also that this is equivalent to dia tes pisteōs in vv. 14, 26 as well as ek and di' epangelias in v. 18. 'Promise/faith' and 'law' often appear, then, as two opposing principles for Paul (cf. Lightfoot, Galatians, pp. 115, 144).

¹⁷² See e.g. R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, 2 vols (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1951), 1:259f.

¹⁷³ The unreality of the apodosis in 3:21 ("then righteous would indeed have been based on law" [NASB]) demonstrates that no law had been given which could give life, "hence that this was not the purpose of the law of Moses..." (Burton, Galatians, p. 194).

purpose of the promise (cf. v.18). The law cannot and could not justify by divine intention.¹⁹⁴

These verses are an echo of what is also negatively implied in the previous contrary-to-fact supposition of 2:21a with a small change in wording.¹⁹⁵ The forms of the protases, 'if a law had been given which was able to give life' (3:21) and 'if righteousness is by law-keeping' (2:21), imply that law-keeping in reality cannot justify.¹⁹⁶ In both passages, to maintain that one can be made righteous by keeping the law is to misunderstand the salvific capability of the law.¹⁹⁷ Also, as a result, one would be forced to concede that the death of Christ was a purposeless (dorean)¹⁹⁸ event.

¹⁹⁴ See Rom.3:20; 4:6, 13; 8:10; 9:31; 10:3-10; 14:17; Phil. 3:6, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Concerning the form of this condition see Burton, Galatians, p.141.

¹⁹⁶ Life is used here in a sense equivalent to justification. "Righteousness by faith is for Paul so closely bound up with true life that the two terms -- 'righteousness' and 'life' -- can in practice be used interchangeably" (Bruce, Commentary, pp. 162-163).

¹⁹⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, "Pedagogical Nature," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 25/1 (March, 1982): p. 60. "It need be insisted that Paul always was against any idea of soteriological legalism--i.e., that false understanding of the Law by which people think they can turn God's self-revelation to their own advantage, thereby gaining divine favor and acceptance."

¹⁹⁸ "The death of Christ would be deprived of its salvific character" (H. D. Betz, Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia, Hermeneia Series [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], p.126). See also Burton, Galatians, pp. 140-141.

If the law was never intended as a means of righteousness, what is one to make of Paul's contrast between righteousness by 'the works of the law' and 'by faith' which is foundational to his arguments in Galatians? Is Paul advocating a law/grace antithesis? From his statements in 2:21 and 3:21f, the law cannot be understood as antithetical to gospel. Yet, Paul is definitely positing an antithetical relationship between 'law,' in some sense, and 'faith.'

Cosgrove demonstrates that, in light of Paul's statement that the law is not contrary to the promise, we must conclude that the term law, when contrasted with faith in its various forms,¹⁹⁹ is the law as perverted by the Jews into a system of works-righteousness.²⁰⁰ The law can only be in opposition to the promises if it is perverted from its original intention.²⁰¹ As Moo states, "what is important is that Paul always polemicizes against 'works of the law' within the context of justification

¹⁹⁹ See above nn. 189, 190.

²⁰⁰ Cosgrove, "Preaches", p. 147. Cf. Cranfield, Romans, 2: 847; Moule, "Obligation", p. 392.

²⁰¹ Cf. Betz, Galatians, p. 174: "A contradiction between the Torah of Moses and the promise to Abraham can be perceived only if the Torah retains its traditional Jewish role." The Jews, according to Betz, had traditionally assigned a life-giving role to the law, and Paul's opponents showed their agreement with this view by "requiring the Galatians to accept circumcision and Torah."

texts: nowhere does he criticize them as such."²⁰² Paul only fought against them when they were used to justify. Thus, the contrast between justification ek nomou and justification ek pisteōs is a contrast between a legalistic perversion²⁰³ of the law and God's intended means of justification.²⁰⁴

This interpretation also must inform the texts within Galatians which at first glance seem to place the law and gospel in opposition to one another. A case in point is the assertion in 3:12 that, in speaking of the law, "the one who does these things shall live by them." Here Paul cannot be stating that the law which cannot give life by divine intention gives life. Certainly his readers would not be persuaded by such

²⁰² Moo, "'Law', 'Works of the Law', and Legalism in Paul" Westminster Theological Journal 45 (Jan., 1983): p. 97 n. 77.

²⁰³ Moo ("Legalism in Paul," pp. 73-100) argues that a careful study of all occurrences of the term law does support the contention that, under certain circumstances, when Paul polemicizes against the law, he is attacking the Jewish perversion of the law and not the law itself (p. 99). At the same time, Moo contends that this explanation does not adequately account for all of the negative statements of Paul concerning the law (pp. 92, 100). Whether this is true for the whole of pauline literature cannot be addressed here. However, in this particular context, Moo's latter conclusion cannot be substantiated. Moo rightly states that any definition of law must be based upon a "careful study of the contexts in which the terms occur" (p. 99). This is indeed a necessity as "the many shades of meaning attaching to nomos have to be deduced from the ways in which the word is used" (Moule, "Obligation", p.392). Due to the programmatic statements in 2:21 and 3:21, the former understanding is appropriate and adequately accounts for the totality of Paul's negative statements concerning the law in this context.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Moule, "Obligation," p. 397.

contradictory reasoning. It is more probable that Paul is echoing the erroneous assertion of his opponents who were maintaining that obedience to the law is necessary to salvation.²⁰⁵

This perspective on the law is important to the letter's whole argument. Paul is intent upon contrasting salvation by works of the law with salvation by faith. This is a contrast between an interpretation of the law as it had been perverted by the Judaizers and the gospel. The attempt of the Judaizers to make certain requirements of the law, understood in a legalistic fashion, an integral part of salvation in Christ is to miss the divine intention of the law altogether.

Thus far it has been determined that the law and gospel are not contrary in their originally intended purposes. However, it does not necessarily follow that the law remains valid for the believer. Did Paul maintain that the law, in all of its aspects, had been abrogated in light of the finished work of Christ? The remainder of this chapter will show that the law remains as a valid principle for the life of the believer as it was defined and limited by the life/teaching of Christ and the teaching of the apostles.

²⁰⁵ Daniel Fuller, "Paul and the Works of the Law (Gal. 2-3)," Westminster Theological Journal 38 (Fall, 1975):36f.

Law: Valid for Those of the Promise?

J. Christiaan Beker voices the thought of many when he states that "the death of Christ eradicates not only the curse of the law but also the law itself. Therefore, it does not restore the law in Christ as our new possibility for obedience."²⁰⁶ The views of Paul are seen to be antinomian, with law being a concept of his pre-Christian past. In stark contrast to Beker is the view of C.F.D. Moule who states,

It is legalism that Paul is forever attacking and renouncing, and that he sees finally and decisively exposed and rejected by Christ; but the Mosaic Law as a revelation of God's will and purpose, so far from being abrogated, is seen as finding its fulfillment and culmination in Christ.²⁰⁷

Within the Galatian letter there is a passage which is thought to give conclusive evidence for the abrogation of the law. Cranfield cites Galatians 3:15-25 as the one passage "which--perhaps more than any other single passage--has encouraged readers of St. Paul to assume that he believed that the law is done away by Christ."²⁰⁸ In particular, the statements in vv. 19 and 20 are thought to be the key verses demanding the cessation of all law-keeping in any of its aspects

²⁰⁶ J. Christiaan Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 262.

²⁰⁷ Moule, "Obligation," p.403.

²⁰⁸ Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," p. 60.

following Christ.

The content of these verses focuses upon Paul's assertion concerning the purpose of the law (19a). Paul asserts that it was added (prosetethē) for the purpose of bringing about (charin) transgressions, viz. "that there might be the conscious disobeying of definite commands."²⁰⁷ Sin, although it had existed from the time of Adam, "has only come to assume the definite character of parabasis in virtue of the existence of the law and its relation thereto."²¹⁰

It is important to recognize that this is an aspect²¹¹ of the law's function which does not summarize all that Paul taught regarding it. It is an aspect of the law which is only of a temporary (achris ou) significance. This function of the law corresponds to the time period during which the law serves as our tutor to Christ.²¹² However, "it is no longer an open possibility for those who believe in Him to regard the law merely

²⁰⁷ Cranfield, Romans, 2: 847.

²¹⁰ H. A. W. Meyer, Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7: A Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians, trans. G.H. Venables (Peabody, Mass.: Hendricksons' Pub., 1884 rep.), p.128.

²¹¹ John Calvin, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, ed. D.W. Torrence and T.F. Torrence, trans. T.H.L. Parker, vol. 11: The Epistles of St Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmanns, 1965), p.61. "The law has many uses, but Paul confines himself to one which suits his present purpose."

²¹² Cosgrove, "Preaches," p. 158.

in this nakedness," i.e. the law when viewed by one who sees it as apart from Christ, a law that is less than its true self.²¹³ The law can now be recognized according to its true nature, an aspect of God's "covenant of free adoption."²¹⁴

The expressions in 19d and 20 do contain a deprecatory tone concerning the law. However, the polemical nature of the epistle keeps one from overly stressing Paul's disparagement of the law. This is completely understandable in light of the exaltation of the law over the gospel by his Judaizing opponents. Their position necessitated the diminishing of the law in order to correct the perspective of the Galatian believers. Furthermore, Paul's statements must be balanced against his previously mentioned clear and unambiguous statements concerning the law in v.21 and 22.²¹⁵

It is possible, then, to view even these verses in a manner which does not call for the abrogation of the law. In addition, there are other statements which, although veiled²¹⁶ as an

²¹³ Cranfield, Romans, 2: 859.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.858. See also Cosgrove, "Preaches," p.159. Cosgrove cites the necessity of allowing those passages which are unambiguous to be the guide in ascertaining the meaning of passages such as 19d and 20 whose meanings are obscure.

²¹⁶ They are veiled in the sense that they are not as explicit as other passages in books whose occasion did not call for such an adverse position against law (cf. e.g. Rom. 3:31; 7:14; 8:4; I Cor. 7:19; 9:21).

understandable approach to readers enslaved by legalism, reveal that Paul did not abrogate the law in all of its aspects for the believer. Two such passages present even in Galatians are 5:14 and 6:2.

In these passages Paul maintains the abiding significance of the law as an expression of the will of God. Of special significance is the statement in 5:14 that "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (NASB). The incisive comments of Hermann Ridderbos on this passage warrant a full citation:

Love functions here not as a new Christian ideal or as a new norm, which comes in the place of the law or makes it superfluous. It is precisely required here as the summary of the law (anakephalaioutai; Rom. 13:9). In other words, the law does not find its criterion in love, but just the reverse, the requirement of love is so imperative because in it lies the summary of the law. This detracts nothing from the great significance of love as the summary of the law and thus the criterion for the fulfilling of the law: in this respect Paul's canticle of love, no less than Jesus' radical commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, is a matchless unfolding of the deep and unmistakable content of the law, an unfolding that can be such a radical and previously unattained pinnacle because it forms the reverse side of the preaching of God's unimaginably great revelation of love in Jesus Christ.²¹⁷

Indeed, far from being abrogated, the law plays an important role in establishing a rule for the life of the believer.

This same concept is expressed in the ton nomon tou Christou in 6:2. The very existence of this phrase in the Galatian letter has been problematic for those who see the abrogation of the law to be an aspect of Paul's teaching on the law, because it "seems

²¹⁷ Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, p.282.

to advocate what Paul had repeatedly rejected in his letter--that the Christian is obliged to do the law."²¹⁸ What exactly Paul means by this phrase is a crucial and thus, as is often the case, much debated issue.²¹⁹

It seems best to understand this phrase to be referring to "the whole tradition of Jesus' ethical teaching, confirmed by his character and conduct and reproduced in his people by the power of the Spirit."²²⁰ It was this teaching and example that formed both the substance and basis for the directives (corresponding to the needs of a particular body of believers) of the New Testament authors under the inspiration of the Spirit.²²¹ It was not 'another law' in the sense that it was wholly different from the OT law. It is the OT law included and transcended in the person and teaching of Christ, the "embodiment and implementation of that relation between God and man which was represented by the law as a revelation of God."²²² Thus, Christ and the NT writers,

²¹⁸ Betz, Galatians, p. 299. Cf. also Raeisaenen, Paul, p. 64f; Beker, Triumph, p.105.

²¹⁹ Cf. Raeisaenen, Paul, pp. 77-82 for a full discussion on the various interpretations.

²²⁰ Bruce, Galatians, p. 261. Cf. also Longenecker, "Pedagogical," p.61.

²²¹ Ridderbos, Paul, pp. 284, 285. The epistles represent the fact that the law, following the advent of Christ, is brought under a new norm of judgment. Christ "represents the new standard of judgment as to what 'has had its day' in the law and what has abiding validity."

²²² Moule, "Obligation," pp. 403-404.

based on and following from Christ's life/teaching, establish a continuity with the law in bringing out and building upon the essence of the law.

The 'law of Christ' is now the standard for the appropriate response²²³ of those who have experienced God's saving activity in Christ. There remains a clear law principle which is valid for the believer. The demands upon God's people are no less because they are now understood in different terms as a result of the life/teaching of Christ and the teaching of the New Testament writers.²²⁴

Finally, concerning this new terminology, one must not understand the dispensation of the Spirit to mean that the believer now no longer has any need for law or commandment. This is obvious by Paul's introduction of the imperative in 6:1-10 following his discussion on the need to walk by the Spirit in order to overcome the lusts of the flesh (5:16). The Spirit-walk has boundaries.²²⁵ In Paul's mind, it is necessary not only to define but also to describe. Nowhere in Paul do we find anything

²²³ This 'response' is expressed in the phrase eis hupakoēn pisteōs ("for the obedience of faith") in Rom. 1:5; 16:26. For Paul, the Christian experience began with the divine initiative and lead to a faith response which was given expression in a life of obedience. See Morna Hooker, "Paul and Covenantal Nomism," in Paul and Paulism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett, ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 48-49.

²²⁴ Hooker, "Covenantal Nomism," p. 48.

²²⁵ The expression 'to walk according to the Spirit', speaks of a standard for conduct as an ethical principle; see Ridderbos, Paul, p. 282.

of a spiritualism which makes an antithesis between the "decree coming from without and the inner disposition."²²⁴ The decree, as denoted by our description of the 'law of Christ', is that which God has given by the Spirit in Scripture and that which is worked out in the life of the believer by the Spirit's enabling (Rom. 8:4).²²⁷

Conclusion

To summarize, the law is not antithetical to gospel, when both are viewed according to their intended purposes, nor is the law now invalid for the one who has experienced the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ. The law, as delineated by the life/teaching of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament writers, remains as a standard for the proper expression of that faith relationship established by virtue of a response to the divine grace initiative.²²⁸

The following chapter will draw together the conclusions of the first two chapters in order to ascertain both their similarities and dissimilarities. This will serve as the basis

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 283.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ It is here conceded that in some respects, Paul may have felt that the law (temple sacrifices, food laws, etc.) was no longer binding. However, at the same time, the law retains a good deal of historical, moral, theological, and ethical significance.

for a critique of Bruce's views on Paul's understanding of the law in Galatians.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION: A COMPARISON OF THE VIEWS OF BRUCE AND PAUL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, we have attempted to set forth the key aspects of the function of the law as conceived by Bruce and Paul. Our focus has been upon the comments of Bruce on Paul's letter to the Galatians and on Paul's comments themselves. The results of our inquiry have led to positions which are both similar and dissimilar. This final chapter will be a comparison of these two views as well as a brief discussion of its implications. However, the main thrust of this chapter will be an attempt to identify and summarize the areas of agreement and disagreement; and, ultimately, to determine if Bruce's view is indeed, as previously concluded, excessively negative and thus, in that it obscures Paul's view, a hindrance to a proper understanding of Paul.

Paul and Bruce: Comparison and Contrast

The key to Bruce's understanding is his concept of salvation-history. The impact of the transition in salvation-history brought about by the life and work of Christ forms the foundational principle for his perspective on the function of the law. It has been demonstrated that the extent and import of this transition differs significantly from what Paul's statements would appear to allow.

Bruce contends that Paul is in a battle with Judaizers who were arguing that adherence to the precepts of the law was a necessary element of an individual's relationship to God. In his polemic against these opponents, Bruce understands Paul to be calling for a total abrogation of the law in its particulars and as a system. Paul argues that the law was temporary by divine intention, in force only until the coming of Christ. It is now an outmoded order, and to be bound to obey its precepts is to miss this salvation-historical transition. It is to revert to bondage from freedom and to immaturity from maturity.

In times past, the law had a four-fold function. It was an expression of the will of God, a means of salvation, a means to stimulate sin, and the basis by which one was imprisoned in the house of sin. Each of these functions, however, has now been abrogated by virtue of the work of Christ. For Bruce, Paul views these as functions of a system designed for another age. The law has no place in the present economy of God. In fact, the very

concept of law, as defined in the OT and applied to the life of the present-day believer (cf. Gal. 6:2), has been redefined by Bruce in a manner consistent with his (Bruce's) abrogation of the law.

For the individual under law, according to Bruce, obedience to the law was a necessary prerequisite for the enjoyment and maintenance of the covenant relationship offered by God. The law was a means of establishing and maintaining a righteous status with God. However, now that Christ has revealed that one must come to God by faith, as opposed to by works of the law, the law is ipso facto abrogated as a system of relating to God.

Furthermore, since the law has been set aside, it necessarily follows that the law has no place in the proper expression of the believer's relationship to God. This function of the law has been replaced by the work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit which internally guides the believer by a law written on his heart, enabling him to live a life which is fitting of a child of God. There is no more need for any written code of conduct which the believer must conform. "Walking by the Spirit" is "the antidote to nomism of every kind."²²⁹

In agreement with Bruce, Paul does portray his opponents as Judaizers, legalists. The Galatian problem has resulted from the Judaizers' promulgation of their particular understanding of the present relevance of the law, an understanding which Bruce believes was a correct perception of the law as divinely

²²⁹ Bruce, Commentary, p. 246.

intended. However, Paul's polemic against the law focuses upon this position because it is a perversion of the proper understanding of the law; for Paul, the Judaizers were not portraying the law as was divinely intended. Paul attacks this perverted understanding of the law by giving a correct perspective on the law in light of the work of Christ.

Paul does not call for an abrogation of the law. He conceives the law to be summed up in the life and teaching of Christ and the teaching of the apostles. This is to say that the essence of the law is brought to the fore and built upon by the Lord and the apostles. They stripped the law away from the Judaistic accretions, recognized those aspects fulfilled by the work of Christ, and maintained those aspects relating to the very essence of the law as divinely intentioned.

The resultant position at which Paul arrives is in agreement with Bruce in that the law is not now, since the life and work of Christ, a means of gaining a righteous status with God. However, Paul's contention is based on the understanding that the law was never intended to be a means of righteousness, not that it ceased to be such by virtue of a salvation-historical transition. The law and faith are not two means of establishing a relationship with God in their originally intended purposes. The law was never intended as a means of establishing a righteous status with God and only became such by virtue of the perversion of the Judaizers.

Furthermore, Paul argues that the law remains as a valid

principle for the present day. It is a divinely ordained mode of expression for that relationship with God which has been established on the basis of faith. Obedience to the precepts of the law, given by the Spirit through the life and teaching of Christ and the teaching of the apostles, is a proper expression of the faith-life.

The Spirit also enables the believer to obey the precepts of the law in its new form. Life in the Spirit is bounded by the written guidelines of the Scripture which are simply the written expression of the Spirit's desires. Therefore, the law can and does exist in a complementary relationship to life in the Spirit--the life of faith.

Paul does not set aside all aspects of the law as binding on the NT believer. However, that which has been set aside is limited and determined by the work and teaching of Christ and the teaching of his apostles. The law does have continuing validity. The law is not abrogated in its entirety.

In summary, when the views of Bruce and Paul are set alongside one another, significant differences appear between them. If these differences are valid, as this paper contends, Bruce's comments on Paul's letter to the Galatians serve to obscure the true nature of his message. One receives a picture of the law which is excessively negative in that the law could or can have only a negative role in the present age. To incorporate the law into any aspect of this present age would be an introduction of a foreign element which would result in a purely

negative impact upon the believer and the church as a body. It would be to revert to slavery from freedom.

Paul, on the other hand, reveals that freedom has boundaries which come in written as well as unwritten form. However, the written becomes the standard for the determination of whether one is indeed being led by the Spirit or by someone or something else. It is not faith or law, but faith expressed in obedience to law as one is enabled by the Spirit. Paul maintains his balance concerning the law in a situation of marked extremes.

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