

Paul and the Mosaic Law: The Third Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (Durham, September, 1994). Edited by James D. G. Dunn.

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Perhaps the most contentious issue in contemporary Pauline research is Paul's understanding of the law. The work edited by James Dunn contains a series of essays which were presented and discussed in Durham, England from September 19-23, 1994. The lineup of scholars who participated is truly impressive, and a wide variety of subjects is tackled. The work commences with an introduction by Dunn. Hermann Lichtenberger briefly describes the Jewish view of the Torah during Paul's day, and Martin Hengel explores Paul's understanding of the law from his conversion until his arrival in Antioch. Jan Lambrecht and Bruce Longenecker suggest alternate interpretations of Galatians 2:15-21, while Graham Stanton tackles the law of Moses and Christ in Galatians 3:1-6:2. The letter and spirit in 2 Corinthians 3 is examined by Karl Kertelge. N. T. Wright presents Paul's view of the law in Romans 2, and Richard Hays studies Romans 3-4. The contrast between Adam and Christ is carefully interpreted by Otfried Hofius, and the hermeneutical contribution of Romans 7 is sketched in by Hans Hübner. Stephen Westerholm sets forth Paul's view of the law in Romans 9-11. Heikki Räisänen responds to Westerholm, and Westerholm in turn reacts to Räisänen's critique. Peter Tomson helps us think about Paul's Jewish background in 1 Corinthians 7, and Stephen Barton ponders the sociological impact of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. John Barclay reflects on the contribution of Romans 14:1-15:6 for understanding Paul's view of the law, and Dunn concludes the work with an essay titled *A Search of Common Ground*.[@] A useful bibliography of works composed on the law between 1980-1994 is also included.

The essays are of high quality throughout. In a short review I can only mention a few which piqued my interest. Graham Stanton in his essay on Galatians 3-6 reminds us that the letter was experienced primarily at the oral level. This methodological observation prevents us from over-reading the letter, for the main theme--the opposition between faith and the law--is clear when one reads the letter as a whole. Stanton also provocatively contrasts and compares Galatians with Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. This comparison provides an entrée into the exegesis of Galatians 3-6 as a whole, an exegesis which is level-headed and stimulating. One of the most interesting and creative writers on the scene today is N. T. Wright, and his essay on Romans 2 does not disappoint. He rightly argues that the chapter must be interpreted in light of the OT witness. Thus, the Jewish failure to keep the law testifies that Israel is still in exile because of its sin and that the covenantal promises given to Israel were not yet fulfilled in the nation. Conversely, the doing of the law by the Gentiles indicates that the covenantal promises given to the Gentiles are becoming a reality. I find Wright's contention that the keeping of the law by Gentile Christians relates to a status less convincing. The Ezekiel 36 text, which informs Romans 2, teaches that those who have the Spirit *will keep God's law* (Ezek. 36:26-27).

Wright's exegesis also introduces a strange disjunction into the chapter, for on his reading the Jews are indicted for transgressing God's law, whereas the Gentiles are praised not because they keep God's law or because their lives are transformed but because they have a new status. It must be asked what evidence exists for the new status of Gentiles. After all, Jews *also* claimed to have a righteous relationship with God, but Paul argues that their behavior falsifies the claim. Conversely, he maintains that the changed behavior of the Gentiles testifies to their new status before God. Wright's view, on its own terms,-- if I understand him correctly--comes

dangerously close to the very charge which Paul levels against the Jews in Romans 2. Wright claims that the Jewish nation as a whole is culpable *if any Jews* are guilty of adultery, stealing, or temple robbery. But would the same standard apply to the church? Would a single adulterer in the new community show that the covenant is unfulfilled? Wright seems to escape by postulating a new community which is marked by *Astatus@* rather than by *Adoing.@* This solution seems to lift Paul's theology out of the realm of the real world into an abstract world in which his view could never be falsified.

Westerholm with his usual elegant and witty style explains Paul's view of the law in Romans 9-11 and relates it to Paul's understanding of divine election. He emphasizes the priority of God's grace, but maintains (rightly in my view) that God's grace does not rule out the importance of human response, even though human faith is invariably due to God's gracious work. Westerholm also takes issue with the view that Paul's critique of the law can be confined to salvation history or Jewish nationalism. A fundamental dichotomy between faith and works is also apparent. Barclay's essay on Romans 14-15 is also instructive. He rightly argues that the issue under discussion relates to food laws in Judaism and the observance of the sabbath. Attitudes toward these Jewish customs in the Greco-Roman world are helpfully sketched in. Barclay says that Paul's advice is that the strong should only eat food (and drink) which is inoffensive to Jews at their common meals. No prescriptions are imposed upon the strong for eating their meals in the privacy of their own homes. In effect, Paul protects the law-observance of the weak, even though he sides theologically with the strong. One of Barclay's most interesting observations, one that is correct in my opinion, is that Paul's instruction on these matters ultimately undermines the validity of the Mosaic law. The weak are required to maintain fellowship and to desist from judging those who do not observe the law. Such associations can

only have the effect of relativizing the law's importance in the long run. Paul has made it abundantly clear that abiding by the prescriptions of the Torah is finally irrelevant and unimportant.

In the concluding essay Dunn sketches in some of the areas of agreement and disagreement on the issue of the law in Paul. Some agreements exist, but the work as a whole does not really resolve the most contentious issues at stake in the argument, and doubtless any hope of such a resolution in five days is hopeless. The individual essays contained in the volume are insightful and thought-provoking, but to a reader who was not at the conference any sense of resolution or advance relative to the issue of Paul and the law is lacking. It is unclear to me that the essays are much different than they would have been if there were no conference at all. Such an observation, of course, may be incorrect. Perhaps some essays were substantially reworked because of the discussions at the conference, but such revisions are not apparent to the reader. I wonder if more significant advances would be possible if essays were crafted which responded more directly the various positions promulgated, and then the various participants specifically defend or revise their views accordingly. The Westerholm-Räsänen interaction is helpful in this regard. As it is, and perhaps this is inevitable, it is difficult for the reader to see how the conference advanced the agenda significantly on the matter of Paul and the law. Nonetheless, we can all be grateful for a host of stimulating essays.

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