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Newness in the Pauline Corpus (Lecture two)

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Lecture Two: Newness in the Pauline Corpus

by Donald Hagner

Galatians

The gospel that Paul defends so vigorously in Galatians involves a dramatic newness. It is a gospel, he insists, that came not through any human means, but “through a revelation (*apokalypseōs*) of Jesus Christ” (1:12).¹

Paul’s Call and Conversion

Paul’s call and conversion to his new faith—and here I think we should feel free to refer to his ‘conversion’ as long as we don’t mean changing religions—involved a significant break with his past life. This is clear from his reference to “my earlier life in Judaism” (1:13), to which he adds that he had “advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age.”² He notes further that he was “far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors” (1:14), by which he means his observance of the Law of Moses as a Pharisee. He was zealous to the extent of persecuting and even trying to destroy “the church of God” (1:13)—note the independent identity of this new reality created by God.

The newness implied in this language is not to be underestimated; yet, at the same time, underlying the narrative is important continuity. For Paul goes on to describe his experience using the language of God’s call to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah—“But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace [cf. Jer 1:5; Isa 49:1, 5], was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being” (1:15-16). As Jeremiah was appointed “a prophet to the nations”

¹All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

²These two instances are the only references to “Judaism” (*Ioudaismos*) in the NT.

and Isaiah “a servant” to Jacob/Israel, in the same way, Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. While a new stage of the story has now been reached, it is by no means a totally new story, but rather one that provides the culmination of all that preceded.

The Gospel to the Uncircumcised

Paul insists that, far from being dependent upon the apostles in Jerusalem for his gospel, it had been entrusted to him by God just as the gospel to the circumcised had been entrusted to Peter (2:7-8). The gospel to the circumcised and to the uncircumcised is the same gospel, stemming from the God of Israel in fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Perceiving the grace (*tēn charin*) that had been granted to Paul, the ‘pillar’ apostles (James, Peter, and John) gave “the right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas (2:9). More than simply a division of labor, this narrative points to the underlying unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ and, in turn, implies continuity with God’s purpose in the OT.

There is an important newness here, of course, in the proclamation of the gospel (the good news of salvation) to the Gentiles. This was anticipated as early as the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12:3, quoted by Paul in 3:8—“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’” But it is only with the coming of Christ—indeed, only after the resurrection and Pentecost—that the Gentiles become the direct subjects of God’s salvation and have the gospel preached to them. Here we have newness as well as continuity with the OT promises.

Paul’s Polemic Against the Works of the Law

Possibly his earliest letter, Galatians contains Paul’s harshest criticism of the Law. This harshness, of course, is explained by the fact that certain Jewish believers in Jesus, commonly referred to as ‘Judaizers,’ had recently come to the churches of Galatia teaching that Gentile believers had to accept circumcision and complete obedience to the Law in order to be saved. This amounted to a complete undermining of the gospel preached by Paul in fulfillment of his divine commission.

His polemical rejection of the Law in Galatians (and later in Romans) presents perhaps the most radical discontinuity with Judaism in the Pauline corpus. The issue concerns not merely whether full obedience to the Law is to be required of Gentile converts, rather it concerns the Law itself and its role in salvation history vis-à-vis all of

humanity. To be sure, what initiates the discussion is the question concerning *justification* (i.e., how a person is reckoned or declared righteous). The Jews who have believed in Christ know, as clearly do the Gentiles, “that a man is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ”³ (2:16). Paul continues redundantly (but deliberately for emphasis), “And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law” (2:16). The point could not be clearer—There is no justification “through the law,” for if that were possible then grace would be nullified and Christ would have “died for nothing” (2:21).

Paul goes so far as to say that to rely on works of the Law is to be “under a curse” (3:10). He repeats his main argument—“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous through faith will live’”⁴ (3:11).

The Parenthetical Purpose of the Law

Paul regards the Law as only a parenthesis in God’s purpose, not its center. He further believes (as he will say a little later in Galatians) that the closing bracket in that parenthesis has occurred with the coming of Christ. The beginning bracket, he notes, came at Sinai some 430 years *after* the Abrahamic covenant (3:17; cf. Septuagint [LXX], Exod 12:40). Now, by means of a clever play on the word *diathēkē*, which can mean both “covenant” or “will,” he argues that, just as a human will cannot be tampered with (3:15), so God’s covenant with Abraham is immutable. The late-coming Sinai Law, therefore, “does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God” (3:17). Paul adds that the covenant with Abraham came not through the Law but through God’s promise (3:18).

What then was the purpose of the Law? asks Paul. The answer is that, “It was added because of transgressions,⁵ until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made” (3:19). Maximizing the singular form of *spermati* (LXX Gen 13:15; 17:8; 24:7), Paul concludes that the single “offspring” is Christ (3:16). The Law, then, may be

³If taken as a subjective genitive, one could translate *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* “through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.”

⁴This translation of Habakkuk 2:4, given in the margin of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), takes *ek pisteōs* as modifying *ho dikaios* and is to be preferred as more consistent with Paul’s argument here (as in Rom 1:17).

⁵The sense of “because (*charin*)” is vague. It may mean the Law was meant to curb transgressions, to define transgressions, or indeed to increase transgressions (cf. Rom 5:20).

described as *a temporary insertion*. (Note the word “until,” pointing to the closing bracket of the parenthesis).

Freedom from the Law

There is little doubt that one of the greatest discontinuities between Judaism and Paul’s Christianity is to be found in his declaration concerning the end of the Law. The Law has accomplished its divinely limited purpose. Paul sees the matter clearly in terms of *before* and *after*. The turning point is the coming of “faith” (3:23, 25), meaning the coming of “Christ” (3:24), the beginning of the new age of the kingdom of God.

Before this turning point, the Law held sway over us. It “imprisoned and guarded” us (3:23); it was our “disciplinarian [*paidagōgos*]” (3:24, 25); we were “under the law” (4:5); although heirs, we were “minors,” “no better than slaves,” “under guardians and trustees” (4:1-3). But this dire situation was a temporary one. Hence, the repeated “until” in these passages (3:19, 23, 24) and the clauses “no longer [*ouketi*]” (3:25; 4:7), “until the date set by the father” (4:2), and “when the fullness of time had come” (4:4). The closing bracket of the temporary parenthesis of the Law has been drawn.

Paul expresses the great change of the *after* with exultation:

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, if a child then also an heir, through God (4:4-7).

He then thunders forth his conclusion—“For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1).

The displacement of the Law is again in view in Paul’s revolutionary statement that, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (5:6). The same point is made in 6:15, now with reference to the pivotal point of the turning of the ages and the arrival of eschatological fulfillment—“For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation (*kainē ktisis*) is

everything!”⁶ Here the importance of newness in Paul’s perspective is unmistakable. It is this that explains his revolutionary view of the Law. A few lines after 5:6, he reiterates, “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters” (5:13). Encouraging his readers to live by the Spirit, he says that, “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law” (5:16, 18).

The Allegory of Hagar and Sarah

Paul illustrates the strong discontinuity between old and new by the allegorical contrast he draws between Hagar and Sarah. He explicitly addresses those in the Galatian churches who “desire to be subject to the law” (4:21) to “listen” to the Law. Each of the two women bore Abraham a son. The son of Hagar (the slave woman) was born “according to the flesh,” while the son of Sarah (the free woman) was born “through the promise” (4:23). Paul takes the women as illustrative of the two covenants. Hagar is identified with Mount Sinai “and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children” (4:25). Sarah, on the other hand, “corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother” (4:26). The absolute contrast between slavery and freedom applies to believers’ relationship to the Law. Those who are Abraham’s descendants by faith are the children of Sarah and free from the Law, whereas the children of Hagar remain in slavery like their mother. The references to Jerusalem echo the contrast between old and new, between the earthly Jerusalem, which awaits its redemption, and the heavenly Jerusalem, which points to the new eschatological reality that has dawned with the coming of Christ.

The Israel of God?

Galatians 6:16 contains a famous interpretive crux—“As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” It is unclear whether the blessing is upon one group or two groups. The uncertainty arises from the ambiguity of the word *kai* (‘and’), which can be either a simple copulative joining two groups or an exegetical *kai*, meaning something like ‘even’ (in other words, providing further description of the one group). In the former case, “those who follow this rule” would be the Church, and “the Israel of God” would be the Jewish people. In the latter case, Paul would be referring to a single group—i.e., the Church as the Israel of God. The

⁶There is no Greek corresponding to NRSV’s “is everything;” but the statement implies the conclusion.

Revised Standard Version (RSV), in contrast to the NRSV, takes the verse this way, translating, “Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God,” leaving the *kai* untranslated.

So, is the Church being referred to here as “the Israel of God?” Although it is highly debatable, it seems slightly more probable to me that, given the emphasis on newness in Galatians and the strong discontinuity between old and new, the Church may be referred to here as the new or true Israel. Although in the immediately preceding context, Paul refers to circumcision and uncircumcision, which could suggest the two groups (Israel and the Church), his emphasis is on “a *new* creation,” which fits the reality of the Church exceptionally well (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).

Romans

Because of the similarity of content between Galatians and Romans, we turn next to the latter. In many ways, Romans is Paul’s definitive statement of the gospel as he understood it. We will see that he frequently touches upon issues of continuity and discontinuity.

Introduction: The Gospel of God

In his expanded salutation (1:1-7), Paul provides a beginning description of the gospel, probably employing early liturgical language. It is

. . . the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name (1:1-5).

The first note we encounter is one of strong continuity. Paul writes of God’s good news—namely, the fulfillment of what the prophets had promised in the Holy Scriptures. The gospel is about God’s Son, who, at one and the same time, is related to the old and the new. As for the old, he is a descendant of David “according to the flesh” (indeed, *the* “Son of David,” fulfilling 2 Sam 7:8-14a), bringing about the hope of Israel. As for the new, he is “declared to be Son of God with power

according to the Spirit⁷ of holiness by resurrection from the dead.” The Holy Spirit and Jesus resurrection are specific and vivid markers of the new age of the Kingdom.

The bringing about of salvation, “the obedience of faith,” to the Gentiles also points to fulfillment, in this case of the Abrahamic covenant, according to which all the nations of the earth will be blessed (cf. Gal 3:8). Here we have newness that finds its basis in continuity with the promise of Israel’s Scriptures (beginning with Gen 12).

The Thematic Statement of 1:16-17

Paul again refers to the universality of the gospel, which he defines as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16). As emerging with clarity in what Paul will write, faith is the determinative factor in salvation. Some may too quickly think that this view is discontinuous with the OT Scripture, but he does not think so. Indeed, he finds the dynamic of faith already articulated in the Scriptures. In the gospel, he says, “the righteousness of God⁸ is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous through faith will live’” (1:17. quoting Hab 2:4).⁹ The Pauline gospel is well known and involves a familiar polemic against the possibility of becoming righteous by works. Salvation is by faith.

The Law of Moses and the Human Predicament

One of the key elements in Romans leading to considerations of continuity and discontinuity is, of course, the Mosaic Law. Although Romans is known for its apparent negativity concerning the Law, the issue is not always that simple. Already in Chapter 2 we discover the complexity of the subject. Speaking of the coming day of eschatological judgment, Paul writes the following:

⁷Since in the early manuscripts the Greek *PNEUMA* is all capitals, it is difficult to decide whether the reference here is to the spirit of Jesus (in parallel to the flesh of Jesus) or to the Holy Spirit, which is probably to be preferred.

⁸The righteousness of God (*dikaiosynē theou*) here is probably not to be understood abstractly but in the active sense of “God’s saving activity”—i.e., his covenant faithfulness as an expression of his righteousness.

⁹I give the NRSV marginal reading in place of its text, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.” The Greek is ambiguous since it is unclear from the syntax alone whether “by faith” (*ek pisteōs*) is meant to modify the noun “righteous” or the verb “will live.” Given one of the main arguments of Romans, it is more likely that the phrase modifies the noun—i.e., “one who is righteous by faith” will live, not “one who is righteous will live by faith” or “will live faithfully.”

For he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality (2:6-11).

Then for good measure, he adds, "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (2:13; cf. James 1:22-25). Furthermore, he faults the Jews for not obeying the laws of Moses (2:17-24). The viewpoint articulated here seems no different from the standard Jewish view on the subject.

How is one to reconcile these statements with the conclusion to which Paul is driving at the end of his indictment of all of humanity? — "Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For 'no human being will be justified in his sight' by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (3:19-20). The Law cannot produce righteousness in the believer; it brings only greater awareness of our sinfulness.

Are we to think of 2:6-11 as purely a hypothetical possibility? That is, *if* there were any who *could* live in obedience to the Law (which there aren't), they would be rewarded with eternal life. But that it is possible to obey the Law, at least to some extent, seems to be the case in the reference those Gentiles who do so "instinctively" in accordance with the Law "written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness" (2:14-16). Continues Paul, "So if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?" (2:26).

On the issue of righteousness and the Law, remarkably Jews and Gentiles are in the same situation. Circumcision is the mark of covenant grace that distinguished the Jews as the people of God from the Gentiles. Paul relativizes the issue. "True circumcision" is not "something external and physical," but rather, it is "a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal" (2:28-29). He presses the argument a little further so that it bears upon the identity and significance of being a Jew. In so doing, he reveals the tension between continuity and discontinuity. What is the advantage of being a Jew, of being circumcised? he asks (3:1). "Much in every way," he answers,

mentioning, in particular, being “entrusted with the oracles of God” (3:1-2). He then repeats the question in 3:9, “Are we any better off?” and this time answers, “No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin.” He backs this up with the well-known catena of OT quotations (3:10-18), beginning with the statement, “There is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Eccl 7:20). The human predicament is universal. There is no possibility of attaining righteousness through obedience of the Law—neither for the Jew nor for the Gentile.

God’s Answer: Justification by Grace Through Faith

Following the grim description of the human predicament in 1:18-3:20, Paul describes the divine remedy as follows:

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ¹⁰ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith (3:21- 25).

The opening words, “but now,” signal the new era of salvation that begins with Christ.

The opening sentence in this passage provides echoes of both continuity and discontinuity. The “righteousness of God” (i.e., God’s saving action in Christ) is described as “apart from law.” Paul restates his point in 3:28—“For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.” The Law is neither necessary nor adequate for salvation. At the same time, however, God’s provision of salvation is attested “by the law and the prophets.” The Scriptures of Israel ultimately pointed in this direction.

“The righteousness of God” (the salvation he provides) is available “through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (3:22). The reality of universal sin means that there is only one way to righteousness—namely, being “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (3:24-25).

¹⁰NRSV takes the phrase *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* as an objective genitive. Another possibility is to take it as a subjective genitive, giving the translation “through the faith (faithfulness) of Jesus Christ.”

The only answer to universal sin is the free gift of God's grace. Justification (i.e., being *declared* righteous) is possible only through the redemptive work of Christ's sacrificial death. God "put forward" Christ as "a sacrifice of atonement." This last phrase translates the Greek word *hilastērion* as literally "cover" or "lid," referring to the lid covering the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies in the inner sanctuary of the temple. In view is the place of atonement—i.e., the lid upon which the High Priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement to atone for the sins of the people. The place of atonement is a metonym for the atoning sacrifice itself; hence, most translations refer to the sacrifice. The place of atonement is no longer in the seclusion of the innermost part of the temple on one day of the year but in the once-for-all public sacrifice at Calvary (cf. Gal 3:1).

Faith is the single way to justification for both Jews and Gentiles. Having stressed that God is the God of Jews and Gentiles alike (3:29), Paul writes that God "will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith, and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (3:30). The way of salvation is the same for both. What about the Law then? It was the Law, after all, that was the pride of the Jews because it marked them off from the Gentiles. Paul is very aware of the radical character of the view he is articulating. Thus he asks, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (3:31). We will return to this subject momentarily.

How Does the "Pauline" Gospel Relate to the OT?

Paul was no doubt elated to be able to illustrate the gospel of justification by faith from OT examples. We have already noted his quotation of Habakkuk 2:4. In Romans 4, he turns to the examples of Abraham and David. In each case, the verb "reckon" (*logizomai*) is of key importance. The verb occurs no less than 11 times in the chapter and means "to count" or "to credit." Paul's key text is Genesis 15:6—"Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (4:3). Here the text of the LXX contains three of the most important words in Paul's vocabulary: believe (note that in Greek this verb [*pisteuō*] is the same root as the noun "faith" (*pistis*), thus "faithed" or "have faith in"), reckon, and righteousness. If Abraham was righteous because of his works, Paul adds, the language of deserving would be appropriate, not that of reckoning (4:4).

Paul turns to a second example, calling attention to the fact that "David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works" (4:6). Again, Paul has found a highly relevant text to support his argument as follows—"Blessed are those

whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin” (Ps 32:1-2). Here the reckoning is negative—i.e., the non-reckoning of sin to the sinner, the obverse of the positive reckoning of righteousness. Sins are not put to the account of the sinner but are forgiven.

But does this reckoning of righteousness and non-reckoning of sin apply only to Jewish believers who are circumcised and thus to be considered as law-obedient, in contrast to the Gentiles? Just as he does in Galatians 3:17, Paul appeals to the temporal priority of the Abrahamic covenant—in this case, not priority to the giving of the Law at Sinai but priority to the circumcision of Abraham, which occurs some years after the declaration of Genesis 15:6. It was not until Abraham was ninety-nine years old that he was circumcised (Gen 17). As Paul observes, Abraham

. . . received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised (4:11-12).

Paul’s gospel of justification by faith apart from works of the Law is found in the Scriptures of Israel. This is a strong and basic element of continuity between the Old and New Testaments, between Judaism and Christianity. Thus, Paul writes—“The words, ‘it was reckoned to him,’ were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (4:23-25). At the same time, together with the continuity, the question lingers about the Law and its ongoing place in Pauline Christianity.

The Law of Moses in the Epistle to the Romans

The subject of the Law in Romans is infamous for its complexity. We encounter both the positive and the negative, both continuity and discontinuity with the Scriptures and Israel. If, as we have seen, the Law is not the pathway to salvation, what role, if any, does it play in the Pauline gospel?

A brief look at the data will put us in position to appreciate the dilemma posed by the Law. It is Paul's negative statements that first come to mind. In our discussion of Galatians, we have already encountered the negative side in Paul's polemic against the Judaizers. We have also seen the disjunction between Law and gospel in Romans—righteousness coming as a gift apart from the Law (1:18; 3:28). Those who are justified are *sinner*s, as Paul indicated in this statement that must have shocked Jewish readers—"But to one who without works trusts him who justifies *the ungodly (ton asebe)*, such faith is reckoned as righteousness" (4:5) [author italics].

Paul was well aware of the implication of his views; and thus, as early as 3:31, after stating that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith (and not works), he adds the caveat, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." Nevertheless, the polarity of promise and Law is important for Paul. The promise to Abraham, "that he would inherit the world"¹¹ did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (4:13; cf. Gal 3:17-22).

Continuing with the negative for the moment, we discover strong discontinuity concerning the Law in Romans 7. Just as a widow is discharged from the law concerning her husband, so "Now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (7:6). Paul continues with a pertinent question—"What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means!" (7:7). Quite the contrary:

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual (7:12-14).

Sin, personified by Paul, is the real problem, not the Law per se. Nevertheless, he does categorically state that Christians are "discharged from the law" and "not under the old written code." So, here as elsewhere, an underlying continuity is overlaid with clear discontinuity.

Perhaps the classic text on the Law in Romans is 10:4. Lamenting the Jewish rejection of his gospel, Paul writes, "For being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God and seeking to establish their

¹¹The Greek word here is *kosmos*, and not the expected *gē*, referring to the Promised Land.

own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (10:3-4). The word *telos* can mean 'end' in the sense of termination, but also can mean 'goal;' and it may well be that. Since both fit the context, both ideas are present here. This would allow us to see both continuity and discontinuity in the statement. As to discontinuity, the Law has come to an end as a (misguided or misunderstood) means of arriving at righteousness. It had only a temporary function to perform and was never to effect righteousness, but rather to heighten condemnation. As to continuity, in Christ the Law has arrived at its goal. The promises find their fulfillment in him; a new era has dawned, one in which major changes occur.

Paul began to read the Scriptures in new ways. In 10:5-6, he contrasts "the righteousness that comes from the law (*ek [tou] nomou*)"¹² with "the righteousness that comes from faith (*ek pisteōs*)."¹² He then proceeds to reinterpret Deuteronomy 30:14 so that it refers not to the performance of the commandments ("The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe"), but rather to his gospel—"That is the word of faith that we proclaim;" because "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (10:8-10).

In what sense is Paul's positive affirmation of the Law to be understood? It is clear from much in his letters that he has given up on the Law as the means of arriving at righteousness. In that regard, the Law is impotent and, being part of Scripture and God's gift to Israel, Paul continues to value it highly because it instructs in righteousness, even though it cannot produce righteousness. Therefore, what Paul is ultimately interested in is not the commandments per se, but paradoxically *the righteousness that is the goal of the Law*.

In short, there is a righteousness that comes from God that's available to all who believe (10:3-4), in contrast to righteousness resulting from obedience to the Law. Believers in Jesus are no longer under the Law or subject to it but, in fulfillment of the promised new covenant (Jer 31:33), have the Law written on their hearts. *A new path to righteousness is thus available by faith in Jesus.*

¹²Paul quotes Moses (Lev 18:5) concerning the righteousness that comes from the Law, "The person who does these things will live by them" (10:5; cf. 2:13).

Freedom from Law as the Paradoxical Means of Sanctification

Justification (i.e., being declared righteous by faith through grace) has seemed to some to provide no motivational basis for ethical living. Indeed, some at the beginning thought it was virtually an invitation to sin, an idea to which Paul reacted strongly. When he observes that where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more, he raises the question in the minds of his critics, "What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!" (6:1). And again in 6:15, "What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" On the contrary, for him, to be free from the Law is to be free to live righteously. "Sin will have no dominion over you," he writes, "since you are not under law but under grace" (6:14). Paul puts it very succinctly: "You have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. . . . But now we are discharged from the Law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (7:4, 6).

The argument throughout Chapter 6 is that identification with Christ's death means a dying to the Law and to sin. "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (6:4). Christians are to consider themselves "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11), no longer as slaves to sin (6:6, 12, 17) but "set free from sin" (6:18, 22).

The consequences of this argument are elaborated in Chapter 8. Paul begins with the declaration that, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and then continues "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (8:2). The result of Christ's work is that, "the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4). We see, then, that despite Paul's strong polemic against the Law, he believes that the Christian, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, will live righteously and so fulfill the Law.

Here then is the paradox—the Christian is free from the Law in order to produce the righteousness of the Law. In keeping with Jeremiah's promised new covenant (Jer 31:33), the Law is internalized and in agreement with Joel 2:28-29, which affirms that the new dynamic of the indwelling Holy Spirit is able to empower for righteous living. For Paul, righteous living is not optional; it is required. Again, as often seen, we have here a mixture of discontinuity as well as an

underlying continuity. Newness there is, but not an absolute newness; rather, it is newness built upon the past promises.

The People of Israel

An important final subject for our interests is the place of Israel in the circumstances of the newly arrived kingdom of God. We have seen plenty in Romans that can raise the question of whether, given the fulfillment of the promises, Israel still has a role in God's purposes. In particular, the indictment of not only the Gentiles, but also the Jews in the opening chapters of Romans has the effect of demolishing the distinction between Jews and Gentiles (2:25-29; cf. Gal 3:28). "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3:9; cf. 3:19-20). Then too, the Law, the prize possession of Israel, has been voided. Importantly, there is only a single way of salvation for both Jews and Christians—the atoning work of Jesus on the cross (3:21-24). The Promised Land has all but disappeared, the promise to Abraham being greater—namely, the entire world (4:13).

Having served her primary role in the history of salvation, is Israel any longer significant in God's purposes? What about the promises to Israel as a nation? Are they nullified? And then there is the problem that Paul wrestles with in Chapters 9-11. What about the Jews' rejection of Paul's gospel? "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" (11:1). "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (11:2). God's faithfulness is seen in the remnant of Jewish believers in Jesus, chosen by grace (11:5). The majority of Jews have stumbled at the gospel, but not "so as to fall. . . . But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles" (11:11).

Beginning in 11:12, Paul starts on a new tack—"Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!" As we proceed, we encounter more optimistic language in 11:15—"If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!" Israel remains holy (11:16). The unbelieving Jews are like branches broken off from an olive tree (11:17-19). Gentile believers are like branches of a wild tree grafted, against nature, into a cultivated olive tree (11:17-24). Jews who do not persist in their unbelief in Jesus can be grafted back into the tree from which they were broken off. "And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again" (11:23).

The passage comes to its climax in 11:25-26 as follows—"I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved." This is how Paul finally resolves his dilemma—Israel remaining the special people of God. "As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (11:28-29).

In Chapter 15, Paul confirms that Christ came to show both God's faithfulness to Israel and His mercy to the Gentiles. "For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (15:8-9). This statement is followed by a series of four OT quotations that express hope for the Gentiles. Paul then also affirms his own calling to the Gentiles, referring to "the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (15:15-16; cf. 16:25-26).

Israel thus retains her privileged place, but it is modified both by the new circumstances brought about through the dawning of a new age (namely, the changes already noted), but also in particular by the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God with equal standing before Him. Preceding the doxological passage that ends Chapter 11, Paul again affirms the universality of his gospel—"For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (11:32; cf. 3:23-24).

Colossians

The Christ Hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 contains a high Christology analogous to its sister hymn in Philippians 2:6-11. Christ is shown to be the head not only of the first creation, but also of the new creation, the Church:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in

him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell; and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

In the first stanza, Paul alludes to the incarnation. Christ is “the image (*eikōn*) of the invisible God.” As the agent of creation, he is the apex¹³ of all that exists; he is “before all things” and the unifying principle of all reality. In the second stanza, as the risen one—indeed, as the beginning of the eschatological resurrection—he is the head of “the body” (i.e., “the church”) and “the beginning” (*archē*) of the community of the new era, the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (1:13). The result is that he holds “first place in everything.” “All the fullness of God” dwells in him, a point made again in 2:9—“In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” The Church exists only by means of the reconciliation accomplished by the atoning work of Christ, whereby peace was made “through the blood of the cross.” The created order and the redeemed order, old and new, both depend upon the person and work of Christ.

In 1:25-29, Paul refers to his commission to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, “to make the word of God fully known.” This he further refers to as

... the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Here, the newness of the universal gospel is described as a mystery only now revealed. At the center of Paul’s gospel is the mystery of Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3).

Gentile Christians, according to Paul, “have come to fullness” in Christ and in him “were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision” (2:11). There are, as usual in Paul, important implications for the Law.

¹³The word *prōtotokos* is usually translated as “firstborn,” which would seem to make Christ the first created being. But given the high Christology of the passage and his agency in bringing the creation into existence, that translation is misleading. The idea is “holding prior rank” over all that exists, as for example in the use of the word in the LXX of Ps 89:27.

“When you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross” (2:13-14). The legal demands of the Law have been set aside (i.e., cancelled).

Paul then draws out some practical consequences. “Therefore, do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons or Sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (2:16-17). So too the purity rules are no longer relevant for:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch?” All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings (2:20-22).

Paul refers to the Christian as having “stripped off the old self with its practices” and as being clothed “with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal,” he adds, “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (3:9-11). Again, Paul stresses that in the new age brought by Christ, the old divisions between humanity are destroyed.