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Paul in his Jewish Context

Mr Fischer is a Hungarian Jewish Christian who has studied and worked extensively in the United States. He has been involved in the establishment of Messianic Jewish Congregations and after a period as Editorial Director of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance he is now Executive Director of Menorah Ministries. The relation of Paul to Judaism is obviously a congenial subject for him, and we are grateful for this fresh look at the topic.

Through the centuries the study of the Apostle Paul has produced many differing analyses of his life and thought. Each stressed different aspects of the first century environment to demonstrate Paul's dependence on that particular strand. The perceived roots of his worldview virtually covered the expanse of first century thought: Greek philosophy, the mystery religions, Gnosticism or contemporary Judaism in some form. From Bauer and the Tübingen school certainly to the time of Bultmann, the dominant position has viewed Paul against the backdrop of the Greek world in some form or other. More recently some scholars have attempted to recapture his Jewish roots.¹

The welter of conflicting analyses has produced Pauls of vastly differing natures only remotely resembling each other. Much of the discussion has centered on his attitude toward the Law or Torah. Paul has been evaluated as almost everything from anti-nomian through schizophrenic to Pharisee on this issue. Two examples should suffice. His defence of his approach against Peter's actions in Galatians "is nothing other than a defense of his "antinomianism" . . . The manner of Paul's defense amounts to the virtual abrogation of the Law."² Or, to put it quite differently:

¹ This is the basic analysis of Stephen Neill's survey of New Testament studies, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1961* (New York: Oxford Press, 1966).

² Samuel Sandmel, *The Genius of St. Paul* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 39-40.

. . . the greatest single failing of Jewish attempts to understand Paul has been a persistent refusal to take Paul seriously as both a loyal Jew and a theologian of extraordinary competence. . . . the issues to which Paul addressed himself arose entirely within the religious and symbolic universe of the Judaism of his time and he never ceased to regard himself as a believing, faithful Jew.³

Interestingly, the two authors cited, Sandmel and Rubinstein, are both Jewish and illustrate that the divergence of opinion concerning Paul transcends 'party' lines.

Paul's Environment

Scholars have frequently attributed much of Paul's perspective to the milieu of Gnosticism which he encountered. Before beginning any survey of Gnosticism and its potential influences on Paul, one must distinguish between Gnosticism and Gnosis, as recent scholarship has demonstrated. The former is the developed movement of the second century, while the latter is the vague and fluid complex of ideas not yet crystallized into any coherent system and described as a 'shadowy no-man's land', 'the germs out of which later Gnosticism developed', and something which 'may be no more than a number of varied trends and tendencies'.⁴

Although many cultures influenced this developing mass of ideas, Judaism played a significant part. 'The Jewish contribution to Gnosticism is unmistakable'.⁵ So one would expect to see similarities between Gnosis and Jewish writers. In comparing Gnosticism and the New Testament, many scholars have opted for speaking of Gnostic influence on the New Testament, although chronologically the fact remains that the Gnostics adapted the New Testament to propound their ideas. However, the issue is not so much the source of certain concepts as their usage. 'And it is here that the distinctive character of the New Testament and Christian tradition, over against the Gnostics, begins to emerge. Paul, for example, can accept the contemporary *Weltanschauung* of his time, but he rejects the Gnostic interpretation of it.⁶ Machen goes beyond this in analyzing a series of similarities between the two 'movements' and shows the dependence of

³ Richard Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 4, 114.

⁴ R. McL. Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 9, 48, 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

Gnosticism on Christianity, for example, in its perspective on the role of spirit. He then raises an all-important question.

Why should similarity of language between Hermes and Paul . . . be regarded as proving dependence of Paul on a type of paganism like that of Hermes, rather than dependence of Hermes upon Paul?

. . . Gnosticism has admittedly been influenced by Christianity. Who can say, then, exactly how far the Christian influence extends? Who can say that any element in Gnosticism, found also in the New Testament, but not clearly contained in pagan sources, is derived from paganism rather than from Christianity?⁷

Apparently several assumptions of the 'Gnostic influence theorists' can be questioned. The direction of influence may not be from Gnostic to Christian but the reverse. The mere existence of similarities does not indicate direction. The existence of Gnosticism in the second century does not demand a pre-Christian system as well. That leap backward in time may be an unsubstantiated leap in faith. If so, then the influence seems to flow from New Testament to Gnosticism, especially so as the Nag Hammadi and Qumran discoveries push the scholars into an earlier dating of the New Testament documents. William F. Albright, perhaps the leading archaeologist of our century, illustrates this trend. 'In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D.'⁸ If the approach is made from the second century and then moving back into the first, interpretation of the New Testament from the Gnostic systems becomes natural, and a pre-Christian Gnosticism becomes apparent. Moving from the first century into the second, however, yields different results, as Wilson has so well summarized.

On the other hand, (1). there is no conclusive proof of the existence of a fully-developed Gnosticism in the pre-Christian period; (2). some of the material quoted as evidence for Gnostic influence does not demand an exclusively Gnostic interpretation, but can equally be understood in quite non-Gnostic terms; and (3). some of this material can be traced back to other movements of thought, to the Old Testament or to the Jewish apocalyptic or wisdom literature . . .⁹

In the specific instance of Paul, he can more easily be pictured and discussed as fighting Gnosticism rather than being influenced by it. Corinth is just one example of several cities in which this is

⁷ J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 248.

⁸ *Christianity Today*, Jan. 1963, 18.

⁹ Wilson, 60.

the case.¹⁰ In fact, both Wilson¹¹ and Ridderbos¹² extensively analyze Paul's concepts and Gnostic ideas and deduce that Paul and the Gnostics were at odds. Paul frequently uses the term 'gnosis'. But even this term appears frequently elsewhere in Jewish writing, e.g. in the Septuagint and the Apocrypha.¹³ Since Paul and the Gnostics come to opposing conclusions, how then do we deal with the 'similarities'? Doresse raises and answers the question quite categorically.

What, then, is the meaning of these undeniable parallelisms that we find between the subjects discussed by Paul and those developed by the sectaries? Firstly, that in fact the Gnostics we have brought to light evolved their Christianity largely from an interpretation of the New Testament which was their own.¹⁴

Apparently, then, the Gnostics took Paul's statements and became antinomian. They 'drew from the Gospel the extreme conclusions which Paul had striven to combat in his letters . . .'¹⁵

The Jewish environment in which Paul lived was inhabited by a number of sects. Each of these claimed to be faithful to the Scriptures and often criticised opposing parties for their 'deviations'. The Pharisees, the forerunners of Rabbinic Judaism, were powerful but certainly not unchallenged. So a rejection of Pharisaism was by no means a rejection of Judaism. 'Other groups, including the followers of Jesus; considered themselves loyal and faithful Israelites, although they offered competing interpretations of God's covenant with Israel. Paul offered one such interpretation'.¹⁶

An important part of Paul's Jewish world was the Essene movement as represented by the Qumran community. This community was apparently even more rigid in its observance of Judaism than the Pharisees and more detailed in its legislation (cf. Josephus, *The Jewish War* 11.8.9).¹⁷ Yet, despite the great concern for ritual purity, the emphasis was not on 'external'

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51ff.

¹¹ R. McL. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem* (London: Mowbray and Co., 1958), 75-80.

¹² Herman Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1957), 119-130.

¹³ F. J. A. Hort, *Judaistic Christianity* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898), 140-141.

¹⁴ Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1960), 308. With this Machen also concurs, 268.

¹⁵ Wilson, *Problem*, 101.

¹⁶ Rubenstein, 116-117.

¹⁷ Richard Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 80.

observance but on the 'inner' attitudes. They concentrated on 'God's *hesed*, and from this basis spring true righteousness, true motivation, and true strength to be pleasing unto him in obedience to his commandments (1QH 10.16, 11.18-19, 1QS 11.2-5, 13b-15, 17). A mere formalistic piety is condemned (1QS 3.4-12).'¹⁸ Two citations should suffice. 'He cannot be cleared by mere ceremonies of atonement, nor cleansed by any waters of ablu-tion, nor sanctified by immersion in lakes or rivers, nor purified by any bath.' (1QS 3.4) 'So I am come to know that Thou art ever just, yet in Thy lovingkindness lies salvation for men, and that without Thy mercy theirs is but doom and perdition.' (1QH 11.18-19)¹⁹

In all these passages it is clear that the justice which man possesses in God's sight is beyond his own powers to gain; it is a gift from God's goodness and favour, His mercy and grace.²⁰

A response of obedience was expected as a result of God's gift,²¹ but of a certainty 'they realized . . . man's congenital inability to carry out his part in God's plan of salvation.'²² These are all themes appearing in Paul as well (Rom. 3:9-31; 7:14-25; Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:4-8).

In surveying the situation in the Rabbinic (technically, the pre-Rabbinic or Pharisaic) tradition of Paul's time, the prevailing attitudes toward the Law are most crucial. The term 'Law' itself is not the exact representation of the concept of 'Torah', and must not be restricted to the idea of legislation. In fact, it is more appropriately translated 'instruction'. To understand the first century concept; it 'must be taken to include the whole of revelation—all that God has made know of his nature, character, and purpose, and of what he would have man be and do. The prophets call their utterances "Torah"; and the Psalms deserved the name as well.'²³

Several statements summarize the 'accepted' attitude toward the Torah during the time of the writing of the Hebrew Scriptures.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Theodor Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1964), 49, 179. Abbreviations for Dead Sea Scrolls: 1QS=Manual of Discipline; 1QH=Psalms of Thanksgiving; 1QHab=Habbakuk Commentary.

²⁰ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul and Qumran* (Chicago: Priory Press, 1968), 97.

²¹ Compare the identical statements in Paul, Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5-8.

²² J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judea* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 120. Compare this to the same theme in Paul, Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:7-25; 8:3, 8.

²³ George Foote Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. I (New York: Schocken Books, 1958), 263.

The laws have their place in the doctrine of the covenant. Yahweh has chosen Israel as His people, and Israel has acknowledged Yahweh as its God. This fundamental Old Testament principle is the divine basis of these laws. They express the claim of Yahweh to dominion over the whole life of this people which belongs to Him in virtue of His election. The first commandment of the Decalogue expresses this with full clarity.

. . . In particular, it is not achievement which establishes the divine relationship. The laws are in the strictest sense the requirements of the God to whom Israel belongs because He has revealed Himself in the exodus from Egypt and because in all future wars He will show Himself to be the God of this people. Thus the motive for keeping this law is simply that of obedience in so far as there is any conscious reflection on the question of motivation.²⁴

It is not the Law which makes man righteous, but God, the Lord of the covenant and the Founder of the Law as a system of polity. It is not the meticulous fulfilling of the Law which is the main point, but the fulfillment of and adherence to the Law in the faith that is the expression of the will of the God of the covenant.²⁵

It is designed to bind the people and the individual to Yahweh. Hence the commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Hence the separation from magic and sorcery. But linked with this is also the fashioning of the people as the people of God, and the exclusion of deeds which disrupt the relationship of the members one to another, and which threatens the life of the whole . . . Hence the law seeks to regulate the relation of the covenant people and the individual to the covenant God and to the member of the people belonging to this God, to regulate it on the basis of the election of this people by this God, and by the avoidance of things which might disrupt or destroy the relationship.²⁶

The emphasis throughout is obedience springing from relationship rather than resulting in it.

As theology developed into the time of Paul, two distinct responses to the Torah had emerged. Torah was important to both but for different reasons. There was the position of 'acting legalism' which consisted of the 'ordering of one's life in external and formal arrangement according to the Law in order to gain righteousness and/or appear righteous'.²⁷ On the other hand 'reacting nomism' consisted of 'molding one's life in all its varying

²⁴ W. Gutbrod, 'νομος,' *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 1036.

²⁵ H. J. Schoeps, *Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 282.

²⁶ Gutbrod, 1037-1038.

²⁷ Longenecker, 78.

relations according to the Law in response to the love and grace of God'.²⁸ Both perspectives were rooted firmly by Paul's time.

For some the period had developed an

... increasing stress on the importance of the law and its observance for the well-being of the individual and the people. God's acceptance or rejection depends on this observance. The whole history of the people is, so far as possible and more consistently than hitherto, viewed from the standpoint of reward or punishment for the keeping or transgressing of the law, 1 Esdras 8:81ff.; Bar. 4:12; Prayer of Manasses . . . that the reward for observance of the law may be attained in the hereafter is naturally a great help to this whole theory. The reward of resurrection is assigned for faithful observance, 2 Mac. 7:9. The schema of reward for observance and judgement for violation dominates to a large extent the eschatological expectation of the future in the Apocalyptic . . . as in Jub. 1:23ff. . . For God the observance of the law decides the verdict on individual and people. It thus fixes their temporal and eternal destiny.²⁹

Baruch further emphasizes man's justification by 'works' and law: 'Those who have been justified in my law . . . saved by their works . . .' (51:3,4).³⁰ For Josephus also, man's relationship with God is established by Law (cf. Ant. 13. 257ff).³¹ This understanding of Torah

... may be summed up in two inwardly related principles: 1. God has revealed Himself once and for all and exclusively in the Torah; 2. man has his relationship with God only in his relationship with the Torah. Thus the basic starting-point of the Old Testament, which can be summed up in the proposition that God has revealed Himself to Israel as its God, and hence Israel is bound to obey this God, is characteristically and decisively changed . . . Theoretically the two principles remain in force, but for all practical purposes the Torah comes fully to the forefront, primarily as the law which claims the will of man.³²

For others, the response was quite different. For example,

... a nomistic Pharisee . . . while he insisted that faith was wholehearted trust in God *and* fidelity to His instruction, his emphasis, as opposed to the legalist, was upon God and trust in Him. He agreed that 'God demands obedience', but likewise insisted that

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Gutbrod, 1049.

³⁰ Quoted in Henry St. John Thackeray, *The Relation of St. Paul to Contemporary Jewish Thought* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900), 62. Cf. Longenecker, 67-69.

³¹ Gutbrod, 1051.

³² *Ibid.* 1055.

such was 'only as the proof and expression of something else; the intimate personal attitude of trust and love'. Yet he did not forget for a moment that such faith is 'of value only so far as it is productive of faithful action'. Thus *emunah* was both 'trust in' and 'fidelity to'; reliance and faithfulness. (cf. 1QHab 2.4 and 1QS adjunct). The emphasis must always be upon the former, though without negating the importance of the latter. In this he was a true child of Old Testament piety.³³

Several other passages convey much of the same emphasis. Pesikta 98b: 'Even when we behold our good works, we are ashamed because of their insignificance besides God's benefits to us.' Pesahim 118b: 'The congregation of Israel spoke before the Holy One, blessed be his name: Lord of the universe, though I am poor in meritorious acts, yet nonetheless I belong to thee, and it is thy power to help me'.³⁴

For a proper understanding of the mindset in which Paul grew up, it is important also to grasp the essence of the discussion about the Torah in the Messianic Age, which was quite possibly distinguished from the 'Ha-Olam Ha-Ba'.³⁵ According to the prophet Jeremiah, in the Messianic Age Torah would be spontaneously observed by all (31:30ff.). In the pre-Christian pseudepigrapha *Messiah* expands the Torah (1 Enoch 49:1-3). Later Rabbinic literature apparently demonstrates similar ideas although, as Davies points out, passages specifically mentioning Messiah as bringing *Torah hedashah* (New Torah) are late. He does note, however, that the passages undoubtedly reflect earlier beliefs. It is important to realize, though, that 'when the Rabbis taught . . . that the Messiah when he came would bring a new Law, they thought of that Law as new not in the sense that it would be contrary to the Law of Moses but that it would explain it more fully. (Lev.R. 13 on 11.1; Targum Jonathan on Isa. 12.3).'³⁶ In his discussion Jocz finds it significant that Klausner admits that some kind of abrogation of Torah is in some way connected with

³³ Longenecker, 82-83. Cf. Paul's identical statements, Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5-8.

³⁴ Quoted in H. J. Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963), 43.

³⁵ W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1970), 288, writes concerning the Messianic Age. 'This harmonization was accomplished ingeniously in the first century A.D., when we find that the Messianic Kingdom comes to be regarded as one of temporary duration preceding the final consummation of the historical process, which was supernatural, the Age to Come. Thus the eschatology of the first century falls into the framework: this Present Age (ha-olam ha-zeh), the Messianic Era, the Age to Come (ha-olam ha-ba). Cf. Moore, vol. II, 338.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

the Messianic Age. He (Jocz) inclines to the view that Rab Joseph in Niddah 61b: 'The ceremonial laws will be abrogated in the world to come', may be reinterpreting an earlier view. Jocz then points out that Strack-Billerbeck are careful to explain that *Torah hedashah* should not be understood in the sense of pushing the old Torah into the background or widening it by means of addition. He concludes: 'But they admit that . . . it was expected to receive a new and deeper interpretation. They also cite instances which seem to go beyond their own words. It would appear that in at least a few cases the Rabbis expected an abrogation or alteration of some Mosaic laws.'³⁷ Longenecker summarizes the situation, then, that Paul faced when he sought to explain and understand the relationship of Jesus the Messiah to the Torah.

. . . while Judaism expected the law to continue in the days of the Messiah as the expression of the eternal will of God, it also realized that some abrogation and/or alteration would take place within the law as a result of Messiah's presence . . . It seems that both elements are present: the affirmation of the Torah on one level and the recognition of some type of modification and abrogation on another.³⁸

In concluding the brief survey of Paul's environment, it seems best to conclude with Wilson's observation about the rise of Paul's message in the context of the first century.

The new faith arose out of Judaism, but it came with a mission and a message to all men; it had therefore to speak in a language understood by all. Like the Judaism of the Diaspora before it, it had to be reinterpreted in terms of contemporary thought, its message expressed in the language of its environment.³⁹

Unfortunately, a problem arose in the course of history. People were quite willing to accept the new beliefs, but then merged them with their already existing ones.

Paul's Practice

In Paul's day being a Jew was synonymous with keeping the Torah. Granted that the different sects differed widely in their ideas and even in the interpretations of certain commandments, but they all kept the Torah. ' . . . the religious orientation of the

³⁷ Jakob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London: SPCK, 1962) 155-156.

³⁸ Longenecker, 132.

³⁹ Wilson, *Problem*, 65.

individual depends, not on his membership of the people, but on his attitude to the Law.⁴⁰

Long before Paul's day being a Jew . . . had become synonymous with keeping the law. Sadducee and Pharisee, Qumran covenanter and Zealot varied widely in their interpretation of how this or that commandment was to be carried out, but they all agreed that the law was supreme and had to be rigorously applied.⁴¹

Jews, therefore, could not have believed the message that Jesus was the Messiah of Jewish Scripture if his followers had left God's Torah. Any such heresy on their parts would have immediately resulted in rejection of their founder from the outset. 'That Paul could agree with this view is shown beyond question in 1 C. 9:20f. . . . He neither demands nor makes any demonstration of his freedom from the Law which might consist in transgression of the Law.'⁴² It follows that, if Paul wanted to be accepted by Jews as a Jew, he had to observe or avoid a number of things, e.g., Sabbath and the dietary laws. Since he was a Pharisee by upbringing (Acts 23:6), he in all probability observed these traditions in the manner of the Pharisees.⁴³

The situation being what it was, Paul really had only two options: either not observe the Torah at all, or be strict in his observance all the time. In Acts 18:7 he moved into the house next to the synagogue. Apparently, in Corinth as well as elsewhere, he conducted much of his activity in or near the Jewish community because of his work among the 'God-fearers'. These were people on the fringe of the synagogue and who observed some of the Jewish customs. These people lived in or near the Jewish community to make their semi-Jewish lives easier. Since he was so close to the Jewish community, Paul was easily and usually watched by that community—critics, antagonists and friends alike. If he was not scrupulous in his observance, he would have quickly been found out and disregarded. A good example of Paul's carefulness in observing Torah is his keeping Yom Kippur under conditions which it might not have been expected of him (Acts 27:9). Yet the manner of Luke's recording of the incident shows that Luke did not find Paul's observance remarkable even in these adverse circumstances.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Gutbrod, 1048.

⁴¹ H. L. Ellison, 'Paul and the Law', in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. F. F. Bruce, W. W. Gasque, R. P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 198.

⁴² Gutbrod, 1067.

⁴³ Ellison, 198.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 197–198.

It is clear that Paul throughout his life continued to practise Judaism; and that he expected Jewish converts to do so, cf. 1 Cor. 7:18; Acts 16:3; 21:26; 23:6, where it is incredible that Paul should have been guilty of the dishonesty of proclaiming himself a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee if his only claim to the title was that he believed in the resurrection of the dead; for this belief was widely held by Jews who had no claim to be regarded as Pharisees. The only objection that can be brought against this view is the language of 1 Cor. 9:21, where St. Paul seems to imply that when dealing with the Gentiles he behaved as if not bound by the Law. On the other hand this interpretation of the passage is impossible. St. Paul could not behave as a Jew when dealing with Gentiles . . . Obedience to the Law was a life-long matter.⁴⁵

Moreover, Paul observed the Law and that in the pharisaic manner, throughout his life. In 1 Cor. 7:18 he implies that obedience to it is his duty . . . Acts 21:21f. make it clear that he regarded the observance of the Law as incumbent upon all Jewish Christians.⁴⁶

Acts 21:23–30 is highly instructive of both Paul's attitude and the tenor of his times. In verse 23 he goes into the Temple to purify himself and make an offering in order to demonstrate that 'he walked orderly and kept the Law'. While there, a riot ensues. The issue that upset the city was the claim of his antagonists that he had brought Gentiles into the Temple, i.e. he had violated the Law and the Temple.

This is in keeping with what we know of Judaism. The latter was very tolerant of ideas; it could comprehend the greatest variety of beliefs; Gamaliel's attitude to the early Christian movement is typical of Rabbinic tolerance (Acts 5:34f.). This is also attested of course by the numerous groups and movements within Judaism. But on the other hand Judaism was equally intolerant of any neglect of the Law.⁴⁷

The keeping of Torah and the Temple observances in no way contradicted the early church's developing understanding of itself. In fact, as Goppelt notes, 'these supported just such self-understanding'.⁴⁸ In view of this, Davies⁴⁹ makes the point that if Paul had stopped observing Torah, the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) might never have taken place. The Jerusalem-based movement would never have taken a non-practising Paul seriously. On the

⁴⁵ W. L. Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1925), 122. Cf. Ellison who expands this treatment of 1 Cor. 9 in his article.

⁴⁶ Davies, 70.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁸ Leonhard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (London: A. & C. Black, 1970), 30.

⁴⁹ Davies, 74.

other hand Paul's reputation as a strict Pharisee provided him with considerable influence. Those who were Galilean Jews like Peter had only lived up to the standards of 'ordinary' Judaism. This put them at a disadvantage when arguing with a trained Pharisee like Paul (cf., for example, Gal. 2, where Paul does argue against Peter). The tendency would be to yield to his 'superior' understanding. 'With a view to both his prestige within the Church and to his relationship with Judaism, it was expedient for Paul to maintain his devotion to the Law.'⁵⁰

Ellison provides a good summary of the historical situation.

But in the historical setting of the first century to deny the law in practice was to deny that one was a Jew. As has always been the case within Jewry, not one's theory about the Torah but one's practical relationship to it was the important point. So out of no soteriological theory, but from the sheer logic of historical fact Paul continued to live as he always had, only with a new power and motive behind his living. When he told a Jew that he had found the long-promised Messiah, he appeared to his hearer as a Jew telling of a Jewish discovery.⁵¹

Ellison then goes on to deduce historical verification for this evaluation of Paul's life.

Elisha ben Abuyah (c. A.D. 90–150) was one of the great rabbis of his time, and he has left his name in *Pirqe Aboth* 4.20. He was excommunicated and is almost always referred to as *Aher* (the other one). There was never any danger in tradition's keeping his memory green, for it told also how he had deliberately profaned the Sabbath. In other words, his false teaching had been sterilized and rendered harmless, not so much by his excommunication but rather by his notorious breach of the law. With Paul, however, his memory had to be forgotten, for there were no stories that could be told about him that would neutralize his teaching.⁵²

Some scholars have argued for Paul's weak background in traditional Judaism of his day and therefore also for his lax observance of Torah and his indifference to the Temple.⁵³ But, as the foregoing discussion has already indicated, '... the facts of Paul's continuing conformity to the practices of traditional Judaism are there plainly on the face of Scripture, for those willing to find them.'⁵⁴ A survey of these practices is therefore in order.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Ellison, 200.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵³ Sandmel, 45.

⁵⁴ Ellison, 201.

Acts 18:18 and 21:24,26 indicate that Paul continued to observe the traditional customs for taking vows and purifying himself. Acts 20:5-6 reports his celebration of Passover. Verse 16 describes his journey to Jerusalem for Shavuot. As already noted, Acts 27:9 records Paul's observance of the fast day, Yom Kippur. The incident in Acts 21:24-26 started out as a demonstration of Paul's continued observance of Torah, evidence of his teaching that Jewish Christians were to observe it, and the means to dispel the rumour that Paul was teaching Jews to forsake Torah. In Acts 25:8 he claims, in all good conscience, that he has 'committed no offence either against the Law of the Jews or against the Temple,' an all-inclusive defence of consistent lifestyle as an observant Jew. In Acts 28:17 he repeats this defence, 'I had done nothing against (contrary to) our people or the customs of our fathers.' His description of himself in Acts 23:6 as a Pharisee and what that implied for his lifestyle has already been discussed.

In Acts 26:5 the RSV is probably correct in translating ἔζηρα by 'I have lived', instead of being the past tense as in AV, RV, NEB. Not merely would there have been little point in stressing to King Agrippa what he had done, if he no longer did it, but in addition it hardly brings out the force of the *καὶ νῦν* (and now) that follows, which implies not a contradiction but rather an intensification. So we are justified in thinking that . . . Paul lived in a way that would have called for no adverse comment from a Pharisee who might have met him however much he would have rejected his teaching.⁵⁵

The very fact that Paul, in Acts 13:15, was so readily invited to speak in a strange synagogue indicates that Paul was recognizably Jewish, and even rabbinic, by his dress; e.g., the wearing of tzitzit.⁵⁶ In Galatians 5:11 he had to defend himself against the charge that he was preaching a gospel of circumcision, or observance of Torah. Apparently, his consistent observance led to this accusation. One further example should suffice.

In II Corinthians 11:24 we find the statement: 'From the Jews five times I received forty (lashes) less one.' There is no doubt but that these lashes were received in the synagogue and administered at the hands of the officials of Judaism. Now as a Roman citizen, a Jew could escape the synagogue whippings for . . . misconduct by an appeal to the imperial authorities . . .⁵⁷

The fact that Paul refused to do so in all these cases testifies to his continued tie to the synagogue, even to the extent of discipline.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁷ Longenecker, 247.

Paul's Teaching

In dealing with the source of Paul's teaching, the observation can be made that it 'lies in the fact of Christ, but in wrestling to interpret the full meaning and implications of that fact Paul constantly draws upon concepts derived from Rabbinic Judaism; it was these that formed the warp and woof if not the material of his thought.'⁵⁸ For example, Paul uses *nomos* (the Greek equivalent of Torah, and used with much the same flexibility) with the same kind of distinctions in usage as *torah* in Rabbinic Judaism. He uses it broadly in the sense of the whole content of revelation or narrowly in the sense of the commandments.⁵⁹ Paul also reflects an awareness of some of the current Rabbinic ideas.

It is fully allowed that the law confers life on him who does it (4 Esr. 7:21; 14:30). But this is precisely what makes the position so hopeless when the fact of transgression is recognized and taken seriously. For sin prevents the bringing forth of the fruit of the law; 4 Esr. 3:20 . . . The very knowledge of the law gives weight to sin; 7:72.⁶⁰

These passages are reminiscent of the terminology Paul uses in Galatians 3:12; 5:17; Romans 7:7-25; 8:3,8. 2 Esdras mentions the difficulty of keeping the Torah in words much like Paul's. 'Who is there among them that be alive that hath not sinned, and who of the sons of men that hath not transgressed thy covenant?' (7:46)⁶¹ Both 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch also reflect the feeling of impossibility about obtaining righteousness by keeping the Law, thereby leaving man only to the grace of God.⁶² In fact, in Ezra 3:20-22 sin is looked on almost as an inescapable power in terms very similar to Romans 5:12f.

There are other instances as well of Paul drawing on Rabbinic imagery or concepts. In discussing Genesis Rabba 1, Schechter states, 'The Torah was simply the manifestation of God's will, revealed to us for our good; the pedagogue, as the Rabbis expressed it, who educates God's creatures.'⁶³ Although he takes it further, Paul uses the same image and concept in Galatians

⁵⁸ Davies, 323.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁰ Gutbrod, 1050.

⁶¹ Quoted in Thackeray, 62.

⁶² Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. by W. Montgomery (London: A. & C. Black, 1931), 213-217. Although he prefers to see Palestinian Judaism as nomistic, even Sanders is forced to concede this point about 4 Ezra, E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 546.

⁶³ Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 136.

3:24f. In that same chapter he refers to Moses as the mediator of the covenant and to the angels in a similar manner. Assumption of Moses i, 13 and Philo in *Vita Moysis* iii, 19 speak of Moses in the same way. Jubilees 1 and 2 and Josephus in *Antiquities* 15.5.3 refer to angels as mediators of the Torah.⁶⁴ So once again Paul has drawn on contemporary concepts. In this particular argument Paul (Gal. 3) stresses the grammatical form of a key word much like the techniques of Philo in *De Mutatione Nominum* 26 and of the Rabbis of Paul's time.⁶⁵

For the Rabbis the Oral Law was the authoritative interpreter of the written, and the two were in harmony. For Paul the Messiah was the authoritative interpreter of the written Law, and the two were in harmony.

His belief that Scripture could only be understood in the light of Messiah's career was in some respects derived from the rabbinic doctrine of the twofold Law.⁶⁶

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 where Paul contrasts the spirit of the Torah with the letter, he employs the Rabbis' interpretive strategy when they opposed the Sadducees, who acknowledged only the written text.⁶⁷ The indications certainly seem to point toward Paul's extensive use of Rabbinic concepts and terminology as a primary source of his teaching.

But what about the apparent controversy between Paul and the Pharisees? It centered around a very specific field of ideas, as several authors have noted.

. . . Jews of Paul's day were, in fact, little interested in what his converts did. They considered that if they were Jews they were under obligation to keep the law; if they were Gentiles, they were not. Indeed they expected no more of the latter than that they should keep the Noahic commandments—so did Paul, but not because the synagogue had formulated them in this way . . . Their objection was that Paul placed the Gentile believer in the Messiah on the same level as the Jewish believer in him and higher than the Jew who did not believe, in spite of the fact that he was not asking him to accept the obligations that came on the Jew in virtue of Sinai.⁶⁸

The measure of clarity reached thus far was simply that purely Gentile churches were free from the Law with the consent of the primitive community, and purely Jewish Christian churches should keep the Law with the consent of Paul.

⁶⁴ Thackeray, 74, 162.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

⁶⁶ Rubinstein, 117.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 117–118.

⁶⁸ Ellison, 200.

The findings of the Apostolic Council, then, are that the Law is not to be kept as though one could be righteous by its observance, that faith in Jesus brings salvation to both Gentiles and Jews, and that the Law is still binding on Jews.⁶⁹

The fundamental issue between Paul and the rabbis has nothing to do with such questions as whether Paul's theology was an 'advance' over first-century Judaism. The issue is whether Jesus is the Messiah and Redeemer of Israel, and through Israel of mankind.⁷⁰

The question was 'Is Jesus the Messiah of Israel?' If the answer was 'yes', as it was for Paul, then his resurrection ushered in the Days of the Messiah. In Paul's understanding, the Days of the Messiah was the time when the Gentiles were on an equal footing with the Jews before God, not as a result of Torah but because of Messiah. But, this did not mean that Jews would suspend their observance of Torah. He expected that they naturally would continue to live as devout Jews (1 Cor. 7:18). However, they were to understand that observance and obedience do not produce salvation; they result from it.

Crucial to Paul's teaching is his perspective on man's responsibility to completely observe the whole Torah and the implication this has for man. Romans 3 and 7 make the clearest Pauline statements about man's dilemma in attempting to observe God's Torah, and therefore his inability to in any way justify himself. In describing the man under the Torah, he does not take the illustration of the man who rejects the Torah but one trying to keep it. He describes Torah as something holy, righteous and good, its standards lofty. But the very fact that its standards prohibit certain actions produces a response in man such that he wants to violate the prohibition and do the prohibited thing. Man is in a dilemma. He realizes that he should observe Torah, but its very loftiness and holiness preclude this; his tendencies lead him into violations. He recognizes that by its very nature '... the Law is the good will of God. Hence not to be subject to the Law is enmity against God.'⁷¹ But this does not help him fulfill his obligations, which he is unable to do. Rubinstein's experience shows that Paul's analysis is both common and contemporary, as well as Jewish.

I came to feel that some of Paul's observations parallel my own experience. When Paul wrote, 'I should not have known what it means to covet if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet', I recognized a

⁶⁹ Gutbrod, 1066.

⁷⁰ Rubinstein, 19.

⁷¹ Gutbrod, 1071.

psychological reality I had also encountered. Every attempt I made to comply with the Law, thereby subordinating myself to God, contained an incitement to rebel against him. In spite of this incitement, I felt that the Law was holy and the fault mine . . . Like Paul, it never occurred to me to challenge the sanctity of tradition. Unfortunately, belief in its sanctity only intensified my feeling of guilt.

I found myself divided between what I knew to be right and something almost foreign within me that compelled me to do things of which I disapproved.⁷²

One of the inferences to be drawn from this passage in Romans is that man cannot make his appeal to God on the basis of Torah; it is the Torah itself which shows him as a sinner.⁷³ Therefore, when Paul speaks of the 'weakness of the Law', he means that it cannot justify man before God. It cannot overcome sin, but because of sin brings judgement on the sinner (7:9).⁷⁴ The Torah does not have the power to change man's nature and help him to break his ties with sin and stop violating the Torah. Because man is unable to do God's will as it should be done, he cannot gain righteousness in this way; he must depend on God's mercy.

Rightly understood, then, the Law prevents any attempt on man's part to secure righteousness before God in any other way than by faith in Jesus Christ and by the pardoning grace of God, i.e., in any other way than that promised to Abraham.⁷⁵

The attitude that Paul is combatting seeks to get right with God by observing Torah. Paul shows in both Romans 3 and 7, and Galatians 3, that this is not possible. And, he was not alone in this perspective. As the previous citations from 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch indicate, other important strands of Jewish 'theology' reflected the same thing. His analysis was Jewish.

Paul . . . may well be conducting a justifiable polemic against the erroneous opinions of this or that scholar among his Pharisaic opponents. But he is not saying anything contrary to Scripture which no more teaches the law gives justifying merit than that, as Paul said, through the law comes the knowledge of sin.⁷⁶

Since observance of the Law does not justify, that leaves man only

⁷² Rubinstein, 11, 14.

⁷³ Gutbrod, 1074.

⁷⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6f. where Law as the letter which kills may be synonymous to this statement.

⁷⁵ Gutbrod, 1074.

⁷⁶ Schoeps, *Argument*, 42. On his last statement see the earlier discussion.

with God's mercy which from Paul's perspective was extended through the Messiah.

Paul was convinced that no matter how diligently a man observed the Law, he was doomed to fall short and perish . . . Paul now believed that Christ had done what observance of the Law could not do. He had overcome mankind's terminal affliction and had made his victory freely available to all.⁷⁷

Since Paul saw the Messiahship of Jesus as the critical point in his interpretation, a survey of his view of the relationship between Messiah and Torah is in order. He did not deny that Scripture was the vehicle of God's will for his people but he insisted that it be interpreted in view of Messiah's death and resurrection, the starting point of his new understanding of Torah. For one thing, Paul transfers much of the tradition concerning Torah to Jesus.⁷⁸ So, as Torah is broader than legislation, Paul in thinking of Jesus as the Torah of God pictures him as the full revelation of God and his will for man.⁷⁹ Coupled with this is Paul's perspective that, true to the expectation of Messiah,

. . . Jesus had come and preached a new Torah from the mount and had yet remained loyal to the old Torah, displaying "universalism in belief and particularism in practice". In view of all this, it would not be unnatural for Paul also to believe that loyalty to the new law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) did not involve disloyalty to the Torah of his fathers, while at the same time holding that the latter, in its full sense, had also predicted that the Gentiles should share in the glories of the Messianic Age. There was no reason why Paul should not reject the view that Gentiles be converted to Judaism before entering the Messianic Kingdom and at the same time insist that for him as a Jew the Torah was still valid. In so doing he was being true both to the universalist tradition of Judaism and at the same time showing his identity with the Israel after the flesh.⁸⁰

So in some sense there is a merging of two concepts in Paul. Jesus is God's Torah and he has preached a new Torah, as was expected of Messiah, but neither involves disloyalty to the old Torah.

Gutbrod has noted a very important principle.⁸¹ By recognizing the cross as an affirmation of Torah, the positive link between it and Jesus is readily observed. First, the cross affirms Torah's verdict. It fulfilled the sentence of judgement on sin (Rom. 5:6ff.). The

⁷⁷ Rubinstein, 40.

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Problem*, 79.

⁷⁹ Davies, 149.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸¹ Gutbrod, 1076.

central purpose of the Torah was also fulfilled by the death of Jesus. His death was a full achievement of obedience to God (Phil. 2:5ff). At the same time it perfectly demonstrated love for men (Rom. 8:34ff), one of the goals of Torah. Paul's concern is '... one of showing how the law comes to fulfilment in believers with faith in Christ... To attempt to be justified by works of the law necessarily weakens its verdict or renders it innocuous.'⁸² Some have argued that this view nullifies the Torah. But that does not appear to be true.

That's precisely the question I would like to ask, since Paul asked in that passage (Rom. 3:31): 'Do we make void the Law—especially now that faith is here?'... Then listen to his answer... 'Never.' 'No.' 'May it never be true'.

He says we don't do away with the Law through faith. So I must understand that Paul himself is not anti-Law. He has asked the same question... I was attempting to ask, and he says, 'No, faith has not replaced it.' 'Rather', he says, 'we establish the Law by faith.'⁸³

But how could the same person say, 'We establish the Law', and 'We are free from the Law'? For one thing, faith in Jesus frees the believer from 'slavishly' attempting to earn his righteousness from God through the regulations of Torah, which were not given for this purpose. This is nothing more than legalism, as the term 'law' should perhaps be translated here.⁸⁴ And against this he argues quite strenuously. Faith in Jesus also frees him from bearing the judgement of Torah on sin because of Jesus' death on his behalf. Further, Paul follows through on the emphasis on the internal suggested by Jeremiah (31:30ff). Rather than the constant attention to external regulations, as some had distorted the biblical message into, there is now the spontaneous fulfilment because of a changed nature and the working of God's Spirit, as the Torah had anticipated (Rom. 8:4; 6:6; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:33–34; Ezk. 36:25–27). This obviously represents a new-found freedom; spontaneity has replaced 'toil'. 'For Paul, the fulfilment of the Law through the Spirit in believers is the real intention of the Law. This view controls his understanding of the Law...'⁸⁵ This, then, is also the way in which one establishes the Law, or uses it rightly as Paul has said elsewhere (1 Tim. 1:8), namely, by following the leading of the

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Walter Kaiser, *The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 51–52.

⁸⁴ Paul appears to use *nomos* frequently in the sense of legalism, as a synonym for works, or in conjunction with it or the activities of the 'flesh' (cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:2–3).

⁸⁵ Gutbrod, 1072, n. 225.

Spirit of God out of a loving response to God's grace so as to carry out God's will and instructions as expressed in the Torah. The Law was not given in answer to the question, 'What must I do to be saved? or have a relationship with God?' Torah came, as it were, to answer a people already related to God and who asked, 'Because of all you have done for us, how can we show our gratitude, love and loyalty?'

This perspective of Torah, frequently associated with 'covenantal nomism', was apparently not radical in Jewish thinking. As Sanders,⁸⁶ after a meticulous analysis, points out, Rabbinic literature reflects the same thrust. Obedience does not earn 'salvation', God's grace or standing before him; it maintains the ongoing relationship. Election and salvation cannot be earned but depend on God's grace (e.g. Mekilta Shirata 9 on 15:13). Man cannot be righteous enough to be worthy; God's gifts depend on his mercy.⁸⁷

The same position characterizes Qumran.⁸⁸ Election resulted from grace, although without precluding human choice. And the covenanters were also aware of 'being chosen not as a nation, but as individuals'. Once a part of the community, the members took on the responsibility to follow its regulations, and there was a notion of reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience. However, obedience was not viewed as earning salvation but was expected as part of remaining in the covenant community or remaining righteous.⁸⁹

For the Rabbis, God has provided salvation for faithful members of Israel, whose standing is based not on heredity but on election and atonement for transgression, and resulting in obedience to Torah. For Qumran, the Jewish people must join a new covenant and community for 'salvation', by repentance and then following their understanding of covenant and Torah.⁹⁰ For Paul, much like for Qumran, a further identification and commitment (beyond that of being Israel) is necessary. For him this is related to Jesus (cf. Eph. 1:5–8; Rom. 3:21–24), and also involves repentance (e.g. Rom. 2:4; Acts 17:30). While some⁹¹ have argued that this led Paul

⁸⁶ Sanders, 420f., 235–238.

⁸⁷ This same perspective is clear in the Tahanun liturgy ('And he, being merciful . . .') of the daily Shaharit service in the synagogue.

⁸⁸ Sanders, 230.

⁸⁹ E.g., 1QH 2.23; 4.33; 7.20, 30–31; 11.9; 13.17; 1QS 1.8, 21–23; 1QM 11.3f.; 14.4; 18.7f.; 1QH fragment 7.

⁹⁰ Sanders, 548.

⁹¹ E.g., David Flusser, 'The Dead Sea Sect and Pre-Pauline Christianity', in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. by Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1965), 226–227; and Sanders, 15–16 *et al.* To reply to

to set aside the Law, he remains a 'covenantal nomist' in good standing. Although definitely stressing the necessity for faith in Jesus, he also emphasizes the life of obedience which should follow (Eph. 2:8–10; Tit. 3:4–8; Rom. 6:12–23; 8:4; Col. 1:9–12). He speaks of a new covenant relationship with God (1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6) but in no way sets aside the Torah. In fact, he states that faith in Jesus 'establishes it' and enables believers to carry out its requirements (Rom. 3:31; 8:4). He argues that Torah teaches 'righteousness by faith' (Rom. 10:6–8; cf. Deut. 30:12–14) and also asserts that he lives consistently in obedience to the Law (Acts 25:8; 28:17; cf. 23:6; 26:5; 21:20–26).

But if Paul is a true nomist, and the Rabbis and Qumran both do teach 'election by grace', against whom does Paul argue? Paul apparently combats the teachings reflected by 4 Ezra, and possibly 2 Baruch. For these people, the righteous *merit* redemption by their efforts (4 Ezra 8.33), and salvation comes by obedience to the Law (7.116–131), an obedience which must be complete (7.89). These are the legalists—a more accurate term than 'Judaizers'—Paul concentrates his efforts on in Galatians and elsewhere.

Paul's emphasis on sin may trouble the modern Jewish reader. But here as well, Paul remains thoroughly Jewish. Both the Rabbinic and Qumran materials reflect themes similar to those of Paul, as for example in Romans 3:9–23. No one is really righteous in God's sight; all have sinned and face judgement (e.g. Sifre Deut. 347 to 33:6; Rosh Hashanah 18a; 4 Ezra 7.68, 72, 120, 138–140; 8.35–38; IQH 7.28; 9.14f; 'Al Chet' liturgy of the Yom Kippur service). As Sanders⁹² points out, both those in Palestinian and Hellenistic synagogues would have readily assented to Romans 1–3.

Some Possible Problems

Despite all the similarities several concepts or passages appear to separate Paul from his Jewish environment.

Sanders⁹³ cites the idea of being transferred from one lordship or sphere to another (as reflected, e.g., in Col. 1:13) as one important instance of this. Yet, passages such as 1 Enoch 95–97 manifest similar themes. There are opposing powers at work in the universe. The individual is oppressed during this evil age, unable to achieve

Sanders is outside the scope of this paper, but a general observation is in order. In his desire to describe a 'pattern of religion' in Paul, Sanders seems to have gone beyond his data. While he points out valid tendencies, he makes Paul serve the pattern rather than the converse.

⁹² Sanders, 499 footnote 66.

⁹³ Sanders, 497–498.

complete victory until the final resolution at the *eschaton* or Messianic Age to come. Then man will no longer be oppressed but under God's rule. Paul reflects this same basic conceptual framework; but for him this transfer has already taken place in the Messiah, although it awaits its final manifestation (Col. 1:12–14; Rom. 8:18–23).

At Qumran the situation was similar.

One of the most important themes of the Qumran literature is that of man caught in tension between light and darkness. Here light and darkness oppose one another as cosmic forces which determine the existence of man. Thus darkness seeks to lead him astray by means of its representative Belial (1QM 13.11f.; 1QS 3.21–24). Man can extricate himself from the influence of darkness and its ruling power by deciding to enter the covenant. By this means he can be changed from a child of darkness into a son of light for whom is prepared life eternal in everlasting light (1QS 4.7f.).⁹⁴

One can almost hear Paul saying the same thing.

Actually, a covenant concept underlies the idea of transfer from one kingdom into another. Those who entered the covenant of Israel (e.g. Rahab and Rught) left one kingdom for another. Even the idea of incorporation 'in Christ' (or Messiah) is but an extension of membership in Israel. Viewed from the framework of corporate personality, Messiah can be pictured as the ideal Israel, Israel personified, or Israel in its full glory. Therefore, membership 'in him' through the new covenant (1 Cor. 11:25; 10:16–17) is quite parallel to membership in Israel by means of the former covenant. This makes one a part of the remnant of faithful Israel (cf. Qumran), a community within a community. Therefore, 'in Messiah' and 'in Israel' are not contrary formulations, but the former is a refining of the latter. However, this definitely does not mean, according to Paul, that God has set aside Israel or the former covenant, or that the church has replaced Israel (Rom. 11, especially 1–2, 29; also 3:1–4; 9:3–5).

Sanders,⁹⁵ for one, considers it significant that Paul says little or nothing about the place of repentance, an important Jewish construct. Since Galatians 2:1–10 clearly indicates that Paul's message was the same gospel as that of the other apostles (compare Acts 11:18 and 17:30), which included repentance (Acts 3:19; 26:20), repentance was undoubtedly part of his presentation. In fact, several passages demonstrate its importance (2 Cor. 3:5–11;

⁹⁴ H. C. Hahn, 'Darkness', in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 1, 423.

⁹⁵ Sanders, 499–501.

7:9–10; 12:21; 1 Cor. 11:29f.). That it is not more prevalent in his writings is readily understandable. He assumed his readers knew such basics (cf. Heb 6:1–2).⁹⁶

Several passages in Paul's letters seem to convey a negative attitude to the Torah, especially in Galatians. Here Paul faced a radical party which insisted that Gentile Christians must keep the Law or they could not enjoy salvation or belong to the community of the Messiah.⁹⁷ 'It must be remembered that Paul, according to his Epistles, did not demand that Jewish Christians should give up keeping the Law, but only required them not to force the keeping of the Law upon the Gentiles.'⁹⁸ In combatting this latter tendency on the part of the radical party in Galatia, Paul draws a sharp contrast between working to earn God's favour by observing the Law and a faith that trusts and obeys God. The principle thrust of Galatians is 'not by works of law' (2:16; 3:1–5; 7, 9–11, 14, 18, 21, 22, 26). It is against *works*, or legalism, that he carries on his polemic, not against the Law. In fact, he expressly states that the Law is not opposed to, or against, the promises (3:21); it, too, teaches that faith is the proper approach to God and results in obedience. This is the principle found throughout the Jewish Scriptures, which he cites to prove his points, over against the developing principle of justification by doing the Law. As part of his argument (3:21–22) he points out that even if justification before God could be achieved through observing the Torah, no man could ever achieve it because no one can keep the whole thing. If righteousness could have been obtained in this way, Paul maintains, then a law would have been given to accomplish this, and Jesus would not have needed to die (2:21); but this is not the case.

Paul's statement in 3:13, 'redeemed from the curse of the Law', has often been construed to mean that he views the Torah as a curse, not as the blessing God intended. However, the context, going back to verse 10, indicates that Paul is simply referring to the judgement or penalty for disobedience that the Law prescribes and all deserve for their disobedience. In introducing his commentary Cole effectively summarized the Galatian situation and Paul's attitude.

Paul never seems to have compelled the Gentile Churches to act like Jews . . . but it remains equally true that he does not expect Jewish Churches to act like Gentile believers. He never says that it is wrong for them to be

⁹⁶ Hebrews, though admittedly not Pauline, shows strong Pauline influence.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1068.

⁹⁸ Machen, 92–93.

circumcised, or to keep the law, or to observe the festivals. All he insists is that these things have nothing to do with the gift of salvation.⁹⁹

Another passage, 2 Corinthians 3, is often presented as evidence of Paul's hostility to the Torah. On closer inspection Paul merely attempts to show that Jesus, not Torah, was the ultimate revelation of divine glory and light; the latter was just a reflection of the former. Verse 10 is the key. This passage is a comparison, not a denigration; i.e., by comparison to the far greater splendour, that which has splendour is as if it has no splendour at all. 'In any event, Paul wanted to contrast the old and new way of understanding God's Law. That is very different than rejecting the Law entirely.'¹⁰⁰ But what about his calling the Torah 'the ministry of death'? In 2:15-16 he calls the gospel a 'savor of death'. Paul is stressing the consequences of being out of tune with its purposes and requirements in both these cases. There is a penalty for disobedience.

There is still the matter of the contrast between letter and spirit (3:6), but a closer examination of this verse yields some interesting results.

But the truth of the matter is that the Greek word here is not *graphe*; it's *gramma* . . . Hence what he is talking about is the outward form merely, not the spiritual import nor the content of that Law . . . We find here that he is talking about the outward, formal, ostensible part of both Testaments, versus the internal, living, vitalizing ability of both Testaments which is able to make alive.¹⁰¹

A couple of observations about two other verses is now in order. Frequently Romans 10:4 is quoted to show that, for Paul, Jesus brought the Law to an end. However, *Telos*, as used here, bears no such meaning (nor does it, e.g., in Jas.5:11). It means rather that he is the 'goal' (its definition in this context) of the Law. Paul then goes on to cite the Law (Deut. 10:6-8; cf. 30:12-14) to demonstrate that it does in fact point to Jesus as its goal.

In Galatians 3:24-25 since we are no longer under the tutorship of the Law, it is easy to assume the Law no longer has any relevance to us. However, the purpose of having a tutor is not to ignore or set aside all he has taught once maturity is reached. It is to use, apply and build on that which has been learned. So it is with the Law and our relationship to the Messiah.

⁹⁹ R. Alan Cole, *Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 12.

¹⁰⁰ Rubinstein, 121.

¹⁰¹ Kaiser, 50-51. Cf. the thrust of the prophets, e.g. Mic. 6:6-8.

There are still several terms that need to be dealt with which seem to point to an alien, unJewish influence in Paul's thinking.

The term 'knowledge' or *gnosis* frequently raises questions about a Gnostic influence on Paul. Yet, this emphasis appears in Qumran as well. The covenanters thank God for enlightenment (1QH 7.26f.) and acknowledge that he provides wisdom and eternal knowledge (1QS 2.3). They also receive further knowledge concerning the elect and non-elect. This all sounds similar to Paul's teaching (e.g. Eph. 1:9–12, 18–23).

Paul's contrast between flesh and spirit sounds Platonic. But for Paul, humans were not divided into flesh and spirit (i.e. body and soul, as in Plato) as opposing categories.¹⁰² It is not the human spirit fighting against the corporeal; man's aspiration is *not* the loosing of one's own spirit from the tomb of the body. Rather, for Paul, it is similar to the formulation of the Rabbis. Man faces a constant inner struggle because he possesses both the *yetzer ha-tov* (good inclination) and the *yetzer ha-ra* (evil inclination).

The term 'mystery' may conjure up images of the mystery religions. Yet, as Brown¹⁰³ concludes, after a thorough analysis:

. . . We have been able to draw from the Semitic world good parallels in thought and word for virtually every facet of the NT use of mystery—and this despite the fact that we possess only a fraction of the Jewish literature available to Paul. We believe it no exaggeration to say that, considering the variety and currency of the concept of divine mysteries in Jewish thought, Paul and the NT writers could have written everything they did about *mysterion* whether or not they ever encountered the pagan mystery religions. "Mystery" was a part of the native theological equipment of the Jews who came to Christ.

Conclusion

A number of oversights or assumptions have hampered studies of Paul. Some have assumed that when Paul taught that righteousness did not come through keeping the Law, he was setting aside the Law; however, this is not the case. Others have assumed that when Paul opposed the Law's being forced on Gentile Christians that he was acting as an antinomian, or that he also advocated rejection of the Law for Jewish Christians. This is also not true. Still others have forgotten that Paul must be judged on the basis of the time in which he lived and not by later standards such as fully-

¹⁰² Sanders, 454, 553–554.

¹⁰³ Raymond Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term 'Mystery' in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 69.

developed Gnosticism or Rabbinic Judaism, or by twentieth century preconceptions. The end result, after eliminating faulty standards and assumptions, will then yield a Paul who, while opposing some trends in the Judaism of his time, was well within the boundaries of Judaism and used the concepts and arguments of his contemporaries to make his point. The fact that his particular brand of Judaism, like that of the Essenes or Sadducees, did not emerge as the normative form does not diminish his Jewishness. It simply means he is part of pre-normative Judaism rather than normative Judaism, although he belongs to the latter as to his lifestyle.

. . . his acceptance of Christ did not involve rejection by him of the usages of his people nor a denial of community with them . . . The Faith was the full flowering of Judaism, the outcome of the latter and its fulfilment; in being obedient to the Gospel he was merely being obedient to the true form of Judaism. The Gospel for Paul was not the annulling of Judaism but its completion, and as such it took up into itself the essential genius of Judaism.

But in his life and thought, therefore, Paul's close relationship to Rabbinic Judaism has become clear, and we cannot too strongly insist again that for him the acceptance of the Gospel was not . . . the rejection of the old Judaism and the discovery of a new religion . . . but the recognition of the advent of the true and final form of Judaism, in other words, the advent of the Messianic Age of Jewish expectation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Davies, 323-324.