Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God

Rosner, Brian S.

https://myrrh.library.moore.edu.au:443/handle/10248/10072
Downloaded from Myrrh, the Moore College Institutional Repository
WARNING

This material has been provided to you pursuant to section 49 of the Copyright Act 1968 (the Act) for the purposes of research or study. The contents of the material may be subject to copyright protection under the Act.

Further dealings by you with this material may be a copyright infringement. To determine whether such a communication would be an infringement, it is necessary to have regard to the criteria set out in Part 3, Division 3 of the Act.

WARNING

This reading is NOT complete.

Copyright restrictions limit the amount included in this file.

To complete the reading the book may be accessed through the Moore Theological College Library.
Titles in this series:
1 Possessed by God, David Peterson
2 God's Unfaithful Wife, Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr.
3 Jesus and the Logic of History, Paul W. Barnett
4 Hear, My Son, Daniel J. Estes
5 Original Sin, Henri Blocher
6 Now Choose Life, J. Gary Millar
7 Neither Poverty Nor Riches, Craig L. Blomberg
8 Slave of Christ, Murray J. Harris
9 Christ, Our Righteousness, Mark A. Seifrid
10 Fire Festal Garments, Barry G. Webb
11 Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien
12 Now My Eyes Have Seen You, Robert S. Fyall
13 Thanksgiving, David W. Pao
14 From Every People and Nation, J. Daniel Hays
15 Dominion and Dynasty, Stephen G. Dempster
16 Hearing God's Words, Peter Adam
17 The Temple and the Church's Mission, G. K. Beale
18 The Cross from a Distance, Peter G. Bolt
19 Contagious Holiness, Craig L. Blomberg
20 Shepherds After My Own Heart, Timothy S. Laniak
21 A Clear and Present Word, Mark D. Thompson
22 Adopted into God's Family, Trevor J. Burke
23 Sealed with an Oath, Paul R. Williamson
24 Father, Son and Spirit, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain
25 God the Peacemaker, Graham A. Cole
26 A Gracious and Compassionate God, Daniel C. Timmer
28 The God Who Makes Himself Known, W. Ross Blackburn
29 A Mouth Full of Fire, Andrew G. Shead
30 The God Who Became Human, Graham A. Cole
31 Paul and the Law, Brian S. Rosner

An index of Scripture references for all the volumes may be found at http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/resources/nsbt
Contents

List of tables 9
Series preface 11
Author’s preface 13
Abbreviations 15

1 ‘Circumcision is nothing’: The puzzle of Paul and the law 19
   Paul’s apparent inconsistency 24
   Definition of terms: ‘Paul’, ‘law’ and ‘believer’ 25
   An initial sounding: 1 Corinthians 7:19 33
   Three moves 39
   The way forward 41
   A hermeneutical solution 43

2 ‘Not under the law’: Explicit repudiation of the law as law-covenant 45
   Not under the law 47
   The law as a failed path to life 59
   Clarification and confirmation 73
   The origin of Paul’s view 79
   In Paul’s own words (a summary and paraphrase) 81

3 ‘Not walking according to the law’: Implicit repudiation of the law as law-covenant 83
   The absence of ‘walk according to the law’ in Paul’s ethics 85
   Jewish identity and the law in Romans 2:17–29 88
   The omission of other terms in connection with the law 101
   Paul’s selective use of texts from Deuteronomy 106
   Paul’s labels for the law as law-covenant 108
   Not in Paul’s own words (a summary and paraphrase) 109

4 ‘Under the law of Christ’: Replacement of the law 111
   The Christ–Torah antitheses 114
   Law of Moses substitutes 115
PAUL AND THE LAW

Fulfilling the law 121
Walking in newness of life 124
The language of newness 127
‘Circumcision is nothing’ complements 128
The centre of Paul’s theology 133
In Paul’s own words (a summary and paraphrase) 134

5 ‘Witness to the gospel’: Reappropriation of the law as prophecy
Deuteronomy 9:4 and 30:11–14 in Romans 10:6–9 135
The ‘prophetic’ character of the law 139
The law as prophecy in Romans 142
In Paul’s own words (a summary and paraphrase) 148

6 ‘Written for our instruction’: Reappropriation of the law as wisdom
Paul, Scripture and ethics 159
The use of the law in the Psalms 160
The ‘wisdom’ character of the law 165
Paul the wisdom teacher 174
The law as wisdom in precept 181
The law as wisdom in practice 183
In Paul’s own words (a summary and paraphrase) 188

7 ‘Keeping the commandments of God’: A hermeneutical solution
A hermeneutical solution 207
The three signature steps across Paul’s letters 208
Paul and the pillars of Judaism 209
The usefulness of the law 216
In Paul’s own words (a summary and paraphrase) 218

Tables

1.1 Paul and the law in 1 Corinthians 42
2.1 The law and Paul’s apocalyptic perspective 69
7.1 Paul and the law in Romans 210
7.2 Paul and the law in 1 Corinthians 211
7.3 Paul and the law in 2 Corinthians 212
7.4 Paul and the law in Galatians 213
7.5 Paul and the law in Ephesians 214
7.6 Paul and the law in Philippians 214
7.7 Paul and the law in Colossians 215
7.8 Paul and the law in 1 and 2 Timothy 216

Bibliography 223
Index of authors 237
Index of Scripture references 239
Chapter One

‘Circumcision is nothing’
The puzzle of Paul and the law

Paul’s views on the law are complex.
(Ben Witherington III)1

Paul and the law – The subject is complex.
(Donald A. Hagner)2

Current discussion of Paul’s view of the law . . . has become extraordinarily complex.
(D. A. Carson)3

There is nothing quite so complex in Paul’s theology as the role and function which he attributes to the law.
(James D. G. Dunn)4

There is a general agreement that Paul’s view of the law is a very complex and intricate matter which confronts the interpreter with a great many puzzles.
(Heiki Räisänen)5

Understanding Paul’s relationship to the Law of Moses is fraught with difficulty.6 Not only is the subject notoriously complex and much studied (some would say studied too much), but major positions are also entrenched. Difficulties begin with questions of definition, of

3 Carson 2004a: 393, italics added. Hafemann (1993: 671) has written similarly, ‘Paul’s understanding of the Law is currently the most debated topic among Pauline scholars.’
4 Dunn 2008: 441, italics added.
5 Räisänen 1987: xii, italics added. Cf. N. T. Wright 1991: 211, commenting on the law in Rom. 8:4, ‘This is complex.’
both the extent of Paul's corpus and the meanings of 'the law', and are exacerbated with numerous problems of interpretation of the key texts, decisions about which lead to vastly differing syntheses of Paul's teaching. Like a big jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing, and the box lid thrown out, there seem to be numerous possible configurations, none of which fits every piece. Some doubt whether Paul himself knew what he was talking about.

Those who write about Paul and the law are typically greeted with a barrage of accusations, ranging from unthinking conservatism to complete eccentricity, from advocating licence to imposing legalism, from cheapening grace to ignoring the demands of God. If few scholars know exactly what they think about the subject, most can tell you what they do not think.

Indeed, it is tempting to agree with 1 Timothy 1:7, which judges that those who want to be 'teachers of the law' do 'not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm' (TNIV). Many would counsel with Titus 3:9 that it is best to avoid 'arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless' (TNIV!8 Those who write on Paul and the law may feel an affinity with Hebrews 5:11: 'We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn' (niv 1984). However, given the failure to arrive at a consensus at many points on the subject this would hardly be a fair retort!

Too much, however, is at stake to ignore the topic. It is not only the study of Paul and his letters that depends on a clear understanding of the apostle to the Gentiles' stance towards the Jewish law; his teaching concerning salvation, salvation history, Israel, the church, anthropology, ethics and eschatology are all inextricably linked to his view of the law. Needless to say, no serious examination of Paul's relationship to the Law of Moses can afford to underestimate the complexity of the subject, which is after all a subset of one of the biggest questions in the study of early Christianity, namely the parting of the ways between the nascent movement and the mother faith.

The reason understanding Paul and the law is so critical to the study of the New Testament is that it touches on the perennial question of the relationship between the grace of God in the gift of salvation and the demand of God in the call for holy living. Misunderstanding Paul and the law leads to distortions of one or both. From the beginning, even in Paul's day, his teaching on the law has raised hackles on one of two fronts. People think either that the free gift of salvation has been compromised, or a solid basis for the demand of God for obedience and a holy life has been removed. If justification is not by works of the law, does that not lead to licence? If one removes the law, is the result not lawlessness? Do those without the law not end up as outlaws? And if we are still under the law in some sense, does that not compromise the free gift of salvation?

With reference to the history of research, Richard Hays warns, 'Like the stone steps of an ancient university building, the topic of "Paul and the Law" has been worn smooth by the passing of generations of scholars.' John W. Martens uses a different metaphor to make the same point: 'Scholarship on Paul and the law is a vast array of acres and acres of cultivated fields.' Three theological positions in particular have a strong interest in Paul's view of the law. Each tends to focus on an emphasis in Paul's letters that is clearly present, but plays down other aspects of the subject. Broadly speaking, Lutheranism holds that Paul believed that Christ abolished the law and that the law is the counterpart to the gospel. The primary role of the law is to lead us to despair of any hope of obedience leading to God's acceptance and to drive us to seek God's mercy in Christ. For the most part the law is not seen as playing a big role in the Christian life (although Luther himself made effective use of the law in his catechisms). Secondly, the Reformed view agrees that salvation is by grace and not by obeying the law, but once saved we are under the moral law and must obey it in order to please God. Thirdly, the so-called New Perspective on Paul, which is really a new perspective on Paul in relation to Judaism, thinks that the problem of the law for Paul is not that salvation is by grace and not works, but that Paul's opposition to the law was simply that it was used by Jews to exclude Gentiles from the people of God; Jewish ethnocentrism is the reason Paul opposed the law. There is something to learn from each of these perspectives. In my view the challenge is to hold on to their valid insights in a manner that does justice to the full range of evidence and, with important qualifications, does not deny the validity of other perspectives.

---

7 Cf. Bassler 2007: 'No aspect of Paul's thought is as hotly disputed as his view of the law.'
8 These warnings are of course not about valid questions of interpretation but concern false teaching. But the sentiment is frequently expressed in response to the subject of Paul and the law.
10 Martens 2003: xiii. To me, rather than a well-cultivated field it feels more like a minefield!
However, the present study does not focus on the history of interpretation. Nor do I document the pedigree of every position I defend; this is not merely to avoid the toil and tedium, but to prevent prior treatments obscuring a fresh appraisal of the primary sources themselves. Neither does this book offer a comprehensive investigation and typology of the usage of ‘law’ in Paul’s letters; much can be missed by focusing too tightly and too early on the explicit evidence to the neglect of other lines of enquiry that set such things in context.\(^{11}\)

Instead, my goal is to bring some neglected evidence to the discussion and to defend some proposals that sharpen and build on the work of others. Every researcher approaches the subject with a particular profile that impacts the shape of his or her investigation. Most scholars come at Paul and the law above all as interpreters of Romans and/or Galatians. This is understandable, given the fact that the vast majority of Paul’s references to nomos occur in these two letters. To use a metaphor, if the ‘law is the main subplot of Romans’,\(^ {12}\) in Galatians the law is personified and appears as a main character in the drama.

The exegetical problems in connection with the law in Romans and Galatians alone are well known:

- Is Christ the end of the law or its goal, or both?
- Are we no longer under the law’s jurisdiction or just its condemnation?
- Do believers fulfill the law or does Christ do it for us?
- Is ‘the law of Christ’ the law reconfigured, or a new set of commandments, or something else?
- Are we under the moral law? Must we keep the Ten Commandments?
- Are ‘works of the law’ identity markers separating Israel from the nations, or works demanded by the law?
- Is Paul’s opposition to doing the law just his concern that it marks off Jews from Gentiles?

To make matters worse, the standard positions on these questions are entrenched. Paul and the law is the New Testament studies version of the Battle of the Somme, the 1916 World War One allied attack on the Western Front in France: lots of close fighting in trenches, with no clear winners, hardly any progress, many casualties and no sign of an armistice or even a détente. My strategy, to extend the metaphor, is not to enter the fray head on, but to come in from a different direction. More precisely, it is not Paul and the law that is the Battle of the Somme, but Paul and the law fought on predictable lines in Romans and Galatians that fits this unflattering description. There is much vital evidence that has been neglected. Many books on the subject concentrate exclusively on what I cover just in chapter 2!\(^ {13}\)

My background and perspective are somewhat different. Although I have taught the exegesis of both Romans and Galatians, most of my research has been in three different areas: 1 Corinthians, Paul’s ethics, and the Jewish background to Paul’s letters.\(^ {14}\) With these interests to the fore, I am as much concerned about what Paul does with the law, especially for questions of conduct, as I am about what Paul says concerning the law (the exclusive focus of many studies). Driving the investigation is the question, according to Paul, how does the law relate to the issue of how to walk and please God (cf. 1 Thess. 4:1)? Even if Paul’s answer may at first sight seem very un-Jewish, the question itself sits comfortably in a first-century Jewish setting.

Many book-length investigations of Paul and the law seek to be exhaustive in their treatment of the relevant Pauline texts and/or the history of interpretation. An unintended consequence of this is that they are also exhausting to read, and ironically readers are put off developing a comprehensive grasp of the subject. On the other hand, chapters on Paul and the law in various textbooks, while concise, tend to skip over the problems and are therefore unsatisfying. Even the most casual readers of Paul’s letters recognize real difficulties in understanding the subject and object to simplistic generalizations and a selective review of the evidence. Most students and ministers, and even scholars, cannot remember what they think about the key texts, let alone have an idea of how they all fit together. The result is often an inconsistent approach to interpreting Paul when he discusses the law and a confusion that hinders a confident Christian reading of the Law of Moses. My aim is to write something fresh and readable,

\(^ {11}\) Cf. Barclay 2011: 37: ‘In the history of scholarship on “Paul and the law” by far the greatest attention has been paid to Paul’s theoretical statements on our topic, with numerous attempts to plot the location of the law in relation to faith, Christ, grace and works on the complex map of Pauline theology.’

\(^ {12}\) Dunn 1997: 131.

\(^ {13}\) In responding to my book on Paul’s use of Scripture for ethics, published in 1994, Witherington (2010: 608) offers a four-point critique, culminating with the objection that my approach ‘does not account for Paul’s approach to the Mosaic law’. He is right that a high view of the importance of Torah for Pauline ethics does require some explanation as to how this fits with Paul’s view of the law, especially Paul’s negative critique of the law. The present study takes up the challenge.
which examines enough trees to sketch a reliable guide to the wood, along with a map of the broader lie of the land (for subjects related to the law, like justification and ethics).

Paul's apparent inconsistency

The crux of the problem of Paul and the law is the fact that his letters present both negative critique and positive approval of the law. James Dunn makes this observation with reference to Romans and Galatians: Paul does not hesitate to describe it [the law] as “holy, just and good” (Rom. 7.12), a very positive gift of God (Rom. 9.4). . . On the other hand, he clearly speaks of the law as an enslaving power, increasing trespass and used by sin to bring about death (Gal. 4.1–10; Rom. 5.20; 7.5). Some specific examples in Ephesians and Romans underline the problem. (An apparent contradiction in a single verse appears in 1 Corinthians 7:19 and will be dealt with in detail in a following section of this chapter.)

Ephesians 2:15 is a clear example of negative critique of the law: Christ has ‘abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances’. The sheer redundancy of the expression ‘the law with its commandments and ordinances’, typical of the style of Ephesians, indicates that Paul intends to refer to the entire Law of Moses. The precise syntax is not the point so much as the impression left by the repetition: Christ has abolished every last bit of the law.

The words in question echo the introduction to the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:1: ‘This is the command — the statutes and ordinances — the Lord your God has instructed me’ (HCSB). ‘Command’ (Hebr. miswah) in the singular is often interpreted as the law-covenant in its entirety, and the plural, ‘statutes and ordinances’, sums up the contents of the law-covenant.

The verb ‘to abolish’, katargeō, is equally unambiguous. BDAG’s (526a) glosses include ‘abolish, wipe out, set aside’. A survey of Pauline usage confirms the strength of the term, along with frequent apocalyptic overtones. The following translations appear in the NRSV: ‘nullify’ (Rom. 3:3; 4:14; Gal. 3:17); ‘discharge’ (Rom. 7:2, 6); ‘reduce to nothing’ (1 Cor. 1:28); ‘doom to perish’ (1 Cor. 2:6); ‘destroy’ (1 Cor. 6:13; 15:24, 26); ‘come to an end’ (1 Cor. 13:8 [2x], 10–11); ‘set aside’ (2 Cor. 3:7, 11, 13–14); ‘cut off’ (Gal. 5:4); ‘remove’ (Gal. 5:11); ‘annihilate’ (2 Thess. 2:8); and ‘abolish’ (Eph. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:10). To paraphrase Ephesians, using Louw and Nida’s definition of katargeō (13.100), ‘Christ has put an end to the law in its entirety.’

Ephesians 2:15 stands in obvious tension with two other verses in Paul’s letters, the first of which is in the same letter. If Ephesians 2:15 typifies negative critique, just a few chapters on, in Ephesians 6:1–2, we find positive approval of the law. Paul quotes one of the ‘commandments’ that Christ had presumably done away with and uses it as an instruction for Christian living: ‘Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honour your father and mother” — this is the first commandment with a promise.’ The word ‘commandment’ in Ephesians 6:2, entolē, is the same word used in Ephesians 2:15 to describe what it is that Christ has abolished. Christ has abolished the law and yet the law is still of value for Christian conduct. It is genuinely puzzling how an author could write both things in the same letter.

If Ephesians 6:1–2 stands in tension with Ephesians 2:15, Romans 3:31 is its formal contradiction. There Paul asks whether his teaching about the critical nature of faith abolishes the law: ‘Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?’ Paul answers, ‘By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.’ The verb translated ‘overthrow’ is katargeō, the same word that appears in Ephesians 2:15. If in Romans Paul insists his teaching about Christ and faith by no means abolishes the law, in Ephesians he affirms that Christ has indeed abolished it.

Andrew Errington suggested the following apt and wry analogy:

Discussing Paul and the Law is a bit like being watched while you carve a chicken: it’s fairly easy to start well, but you quickly have to make some tricky decisions (about which everyone has an opinion), and it’s very easy to end up in a sticky mess with lots of bits left over that no one knows what to do with. Studies of Paul and the law distinguish themselves by whether they face these unmistakable tensions in his letters and how they explain them.

Definition of terms: ‘Paul’, ‘law’ and ‘believer’

Three terms call for definition before proceeding with our study of Paul and the law.

15 See the section in chapter 2, ‘Clarification and confirmation’, for a full discussion.
16 I am indebted to Dr Andrew Shead for this observation.
The apostle Paul

By Paul I mean both the Jew who was seized by Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:12) and became his apostle to the Gentiles and the letters he wrote that are collected in the New Testament. The extent of his corpus is of course a matter of dispute. While I am convinced of the authenticity of all thirteen letters traditionally attributed to Paul, little hangs on this decision for a study of the subject at hand. As already noted, Paul's most sustained discussions of Israel's law and the church's faith are in the undisputed letters. Nonetheless, significant evidence in Ephesians (see e.g. 2:15 and 6:1–2 above) and the Pastoral Epistles, for example, should not be ignored and sometimes offers support to one interpretation over another of texts in Romans and Galatians. Even those scholars who work with a truncated Pauline corpus should recognize that if the law is a central concern for Paul, the pseudo-Pauline epistles provide early reflections of, or on, his views. It is a mistake to disregard such evidence, even if it is not accorded primary status.

The meaning of 'the law'

What Paul meant by law is no less contentious and his use of the term nomos may not be univocal. When we study Paul and the law, what are we talking about? With respect to the sense of nomos in the New Testament, BDAG (677–678) is typical of most lexica in noting three general meanings of the word in the New Testament: 'rule, principle, norm', 'legal system' and 'collection of holy writings'. Most treatments of the subject of Paul and the law take 'law' in the second sense of 'legal system' as their primary, if not exclusive, focus. Westerholm is a clear example: '[T]he “law” in Paul's writings frequently (indeed, most frequently) refers to the sum of specific divine commandments given to Israel through Moses.18 This concentration often leads to a tight focus on the law's commandments: “The law that can be kept, done, fulfilled, or transgressed is clearly the “legal parts” of the Pentateuch.”19 Schreiner concurs: "In the NT . . . the term law most often refers to what is commanded in the Mosaic law."20

18 Westerholm 2004a: 299.
19 Ibid. Cf. Winger 1992: 104: nomos refers to '[t]hose words given to and possessed by the Jewish people, which guide and control those who accept them and according to which those who accept them are judged.'
20 Schreiner 2010: 21, italics original.
references to the ‘law’ in Deuteronomy are limited to one book (which is predominantly laws, but not exclusively – see Sloane above), the other references point to a broader referent taking in all of the five books of Moses.

Correspondingly, Paul generally deals with the law as a unity, customarily referring to Mosaic ‘law’, not ‘laws’. This means that, in the main, his responses to the law are not to its various parts, however we may wish to divide it, but to the law as a whole. And he can not only introduce ‘laws’ from the Pentateuch (see e.g. ‘you shall not covet’ in Rom. 7:7, noted above) as ‘law’, but also narrative as ‘law’, as in Galatians 4:21 (Hagar and Sarah, discussed below).

In terms of referent, both Hebrew תּוּרָה and Greek νόμος in Jewish and Christian writings frequently denote the first five books of the sacred Scriptures attributed to Moses, often labelled the ‘Pentateuch’ or ‘Torah’. Paul can write of ‘the law [the Pentateuch] and the prophets’, as in Romans 3:2. He can also introduce quotations from the Pentateuch as being found in the law, as in 1 Corinthians 9:8–9 where ‘law’ and ‘law of Moses’ are equivalent: ‘Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: [quotation of Deut. 25:4].25 Watson is correct: ‘When Paul speaks of “the law”, he has in mind the text known as “the Law of Moses.”’26

A test case for the meaning of νόμος for Paul occurs in Galatians, where in a single verse Paul writes of the law in apparently different ways: ‘Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?’ (Gal. 4:21 TNIV).

If the first part of the verse sums up the dilemma facing the Galatian Christians, the second introduces Paul’s allegorical interpretation of the Genesis story of Hagar and Sarah. F. F. Bruce’s comments are instructive:

[N]ote the transition in this sentence from νόμος in the strict sense of ‘law’ – ‘you who wish to be under the law’ – to νόμος in the general sense of the Pentateuch. The patriarchal narrative [of Hagar and Sarah] does not belong to any of the law-codes of the Torah, but it is part of the Torah, and it is doubtful if Paul and his contemporaries made the explicit distinction in their minds between

Galatians 4:21 contains two references to ‘the law’, one negative and one positive. Many scholars seem to take Paul as saying, ‘Tell me, you who want to be under [the legal parts of] the law, are you not aware of what [another bit of] the law says?’ (TNIV). But the most straightforward interpretation is to understand Paul as simply referring to the Pentateuch in both cases. As Hays puts it, for Paul νόμος is always the same collection of texts, but the import of those texts shifts dramatically in accordance with the hermeneutical perspective at each stage of the unfolding drama.28 It is better to read the two occurrences of νόμος in the verse in question as referring to different functions or, better, construals of the Law of Moses.

For further examples where ‘law’ means the

the narrower and wider senses of the term that modern students readily make.27

As it turns out, Westerholm (2004a: 37) is close to this view when he comments, ‘The law, as law, is meant to be observed’ (italics original). Cf. Schreiner 2010: 22: ‘the law is conceived as a body of commands summarized in the Mosaic covenant’. My point is that while this conception is the most common in Paul’s letters, Paul also ‘conceives’ of the law as a testimony to the gospel (prophecy) and as instruction for living (wisdom).

25 TNIV. For further examples where ‘law’ means the Pentateuch, see Matt. 12:5; Luke 2:23; 24:44; John 8:5, 17; Heb. 9:19.
29 Carson 2004a: 139. In terms of this book’s construal, Carson points to law as legal code and prophecy respectively.
30 Hagner 2007: 108, italics added. As it turns out, Westerholm (2004a: 37) is close to this view when he comments, ‘The law, as law, is meant to be observed’ (italics original). Cf. Schreiner 2010: 22: ‘the law is conceived as a body of commands summarized in the Mosaic covenant’. My point is that while this conception is the most common in Paul’s letters, Paul also ‘conceives’ of the law as a testimony to the gospel (prophecy) and as instruction for living (wisdom).
the same thing in my 1994 study Paul, Scripture and Ethics: 'There is a sense in which the Law as Mosaic covenant is abolished, but the Law as Scripture has ongoing value for Christians.'

My aim in this book is to sharpen this point and to develop it more comprehensively, constructing what might be called, to recall Hays's words quoted above, a hermeneutical solution to the puzzle of Paul and the law. Rather than studying 'the law's commandments', we are more in tune with Paul when we consider 'the law as commandments', as well as 'the law as prophecy' and 'the law as wisdom'. This is my approach in chapters 2–3, 5 and 6 respectively.

As it turns out, John P. Meier detects the same three categories (legal, prophetic and wisdom) when he describes the dominant Old Testament conception of the Law of Moses:

[T]he word torah has clearly come to mean a written document that comes from God to Israel by the hands of Moses, a scroll in which the foundational stories and ordinances of Israel are woven into a literary whole that retains traits of prophetic and sapiential [wisdom] as well as legal torah.

Meier pinpoints the three attributes of law, prophecy and wisdom in the Pentateuch in Moses' depiction in Deuteronomy: 'In Deuteronomy, Moses is not only lawgiver but also prophet [and] wisdom teacher.'

A final note on the meaning of nomos for Paul concerns a couple of exceptions to the rule that nomos for Paul refers to the five books of Moses. Perhaps surprisingly, on two occasions Paul uses nomos to refer to Jewish Scripture outside the Pentateuch. In Romans 3:19 he cites a catena of texts from Psalms and Isaiah (Rom. 3:10–18) as evidence of what 'the law says'. And in 1 Corinthians 14:21 he introduces a quotation of Isaiah 28:11–12 with the words 'in the law it is written'.

BDAG suggests (nomos, 3b) this 'wider sense' was employed 'on the principle that the most authoritative part gives its name to the whole'. Synecdoche, substituting a part for the whole, is common in many languages and cultures, including those of the Bible. The figure of speech is present for example in Romans 3:15, where 'feet' (swift to shed blood) stand for whole persons. The usage of 'law' for the whole Hebrew Bible suggests the latter part was considered to have the same authority as the first five books; but clearly the Pentateuch was foundational.

Paul's description of the Scriptures as 'law' is in fact explicable in both of the abovementioned apparent exceptions. The texts quoted in Romans 3 function as the verdict on all of humankind, climaxing Paul's indictment of the whole human race in 1:18–3:9, in which the Law of Moses played a prime role in the condemnation of the Jews. To say 'the law says' that no one is righteous and so on is to appeal both to the judgment of the psalter and Isaiah and also to the basis of the judgment in the Law of Moses.

In the citation of Isaiah 28:11–12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21 Paul may not only be identifying the text as a quotation from Scripture, but possibly also be hinting that he locates its primary significance within the dispensation of the Mosaic covenant. His argument depends on a contrast between the situation of the Israelites and Jews under the law (in need of the redemption that has come in Christ) and the situation that already holds for those who have now experienced the redemption that was especially associated with part of the prophetic message.

The meaning of 'believers in Christ'

A third term calls for comment when discussing Paul's teaching about the relationship between believers in Christ and the Law of Moses. Which believers are we talking about? Paul was a Jewish apostle to the Gentiles and both Acts and his own letters testify to his evangelism among both Jews and Gentiles.

Does Paul distinguish between Jewish believers and Gentile believers when it comes to how they relate to the Law of Moses? The answer is yes and no. The best way to answer the question is in reference to the phrase 'under the law', which I will take up in detail in chapter 2. For now it is worth noting that there is a sense in which all believers, both Jewish and Gentile, are not under the law, and a more limited sense in which Jewish believers may choose to live under the law.

This more limited sense is clearly demonstrated in Romans 14:1–15:6, a passage in which Paul addresses the observance or non-observance of certain laws from the Law of Moses in the Roman churches. Two topics are mentioned directly, namely the restriction...
of diet (see 14:2, 21) and observing certain days in preference to others (14:5). Barclay summarizes the consensus of commentators: 'In common with many others, I take these verses to refer to Jewish scruples concerning the consumption of meat considered unclean and the observance of the sabbath and other Jewish feasts or fasts. Whereas 'the weak' keep Jewish kosher laws and observe the sabbath, 'the strong' do not. Paul counts himself among the strong (see 15:1) and is convinced that the Christian believer may 'eat anything' (14:2); Christians are not under the law (6:14-15; 7:1-6). But while holding his own convictions, Paul accepts an element of subjectivity in the definition of proper conduct relating to diet and calendar. On such matters, individuals are to act in accordance with their own convictions (14:5-6). As Paul states in 14:22, 'The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God.' In effect, he allows for the expression of Jewish cultural tradition, living under the law's direction, but not its dominion. Chapter 2 of this book, in exploring Paul's use of 'under the law', explains this distinction in greater detail.

As it turns out, the great bulk of Paul's teaching about the law concerns all believers regardless of their ethnic or religious background. Jews in the ancient world conceived of just two categories of people, setting the people of God off against the rest, namely the Gentiles. And at many points Paul's letters reflect a similar classification. However, Paul identifies believers in Christ, from whatever background, as the people of God, effectively dividing the human race into three groups rather than two. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 10:32, where Paul refers to 'the church of God', 'Jews' and 'Greeks'. It is this new grouping, 'the church of God', that is Paul's main and undifferentiated focus when it comes to his various interactions with the law.

Having dealt with some preliminaries and offered some preview, an investigation of 1 Corinthians 7:19, a text that gives the subtitle to this book, will serve to open our discussion of the subject. As Dunn has observed, 'the ways in which 1 Corinthians 7:19 is interpreted by different commentators is very instructive'. Beginning inductively with one text will help us to identify the points of tension and to frame more sharply the questions that the study of Paul and the law must address.

An initial sounding: 1 Corinthians 7:19

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God.

This verse is properly described by E. P. Sanders as one of the most amazing sentences Paul ever wrote. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more un-Jewish statement than the opening words 'Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing'. Far from an ill-considered slip, Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5:6 and 6:15. His attitude to circumcision was also borne out in practice: in Galatians 5:2 he tells Gentile believers not to be circumcised.

Circumcision was a sign of membership of the covenant community and virtually all Jews considered it a principal command. When Antiochus Epiphanes wanted to eradicate Judaism, one of the things he did was have all those who circumcised their children killed (1 Macc. 1.60-61). Philo firmly criticizes some who argued that the Mosaic laws (including that regarding circumcision) had merely symbolic significance and thus did not need to be literally obeyed (Migr. 89-93). Jubilees 15.33-34 warns against 'children of Israel ... [who] will not circumcise their children according to the law'. 1 Maccabees 1.15 denounces Jewish men who remove the marks of circumcision. For a Jew to be selective about the law was tantamount to disobeying it. To abandon circumcision was as good as annulling the law.

The story of Izates from Josephus provides the exception that proves the rule. When the Gentile King Izates pondered whether to get circumcised, the Jewish merchant Ananias advised him 'that he might worship God without being circumcised, even though he did

35 Barclay 2011: 39. See his full treatment, 37-59, for an illuminating study that arrives at similar conclusions to my own.
36 The two groups probably did not divide neatly into Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians: 'the weak' may have included some Gentile Christians and 'the strong' may have included some of Paul's Jewish-Christian friends in Rome, such as Pricca and Aquila.
37 Barclay 2011: 51. Barclay (2011: 54) notes that Paul's response to the issue is echoed by Justin, in Dial. 46.46-47, who accepts that Jewish Christians may practise circumcision, keep the sabbath and observe other Jewish laws, but strongly opposes attempts to persuade Gentile Christians to follow suit.
38 Dunn 2009: 204.
39 My tr.
resolve to follow the Jewish law entirely (Ant. 20.41b–42). However, the advice of another Jew, Eleazar, underscores Jewish scruples concerning circumcision:

But afterward, as he had not quite abandoned his desire of doing this thing [getting circumcised], a certain other Jew that came out of Galilee, whose name was Eleazar, and who was esteemed very skilful in the learning of his country, persuaded him to do the thing; for as he entered into his palace to greet him, and found him reading the law of Moses, he said to him, ‘You do not consider, O king! that you unjustly break the principal of those laws, and are injurious to God himself [by failing to get circumcised]; for you ought not only to read them, but chiefly to practice what they enjoin you. How long will you continue uncircumcised? but if you have not yet read the law about circumcision, and do not know how great impiety you are guilty of by neglecting it, read it now.’ (Ant. 20.43–45)

How are we to understand Paul’s extraordinary words in 1 Corinthians 7:19, ‘Circumcision is nothing?’ The context in 1 Corinthians 7 is worth reviewing. The paragraph of which it is a part, 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, is the central element in a ring composition or ABA pattern, with 7:1–16 and 7:25–40 being the A elements. The function of 7:17–24 is to reinforce Paul’s advice to be content in one’s life situation. Paul states repeatedly in the chapter not to seek a change in marital status (7:2, 8, 10–16, 26–27, 37, 40). Then in verses 17–24 he says three times to remain in the situation in which one is called, with reference to the two great social dividers of his day concerning the questions of race and social class (7:17, 20, 24). Whether a Christian is married or single, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, makes no difference to God, or more accurately ‘before God’ (as v. 24 literally says), so there is no need to change.

That Paul chose circumcision and slavery to make his point takes on greater significance in the light of Galatians 3:26–28, where Paul lists the same three pairs relevant to 1 Corinthians 7 when he proclaims that ‘in Christ Jesus . . . there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female’ (my tr.). The great divisions of the ancient world are redundant in the light of the new creation. What matters in Galatians 3 is being ‘children of God through faith’ (Gal. 3:26). The more we recognize the imminence of the final transition to the fullness of the new creation, the greater our indifference to the

Paul's sentiments in verses 18–19 concerning the relative irrelevance of circumcision, despite the obvious contradiction of Genesis 17:10–14, and other texts, finds some sympathy in passages like Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4, where membership in the covenant community is a matter of the heart, not an outward sign. Other figurative uses of circumcision (see Exod. 6:30; Jer. 6:10, 9:26, which speak of uncircumcised lips, ears and heart respectively) also point in Paul’s direction. Nonetheless, 1 Corinthians 7:19a is radical by comparison with these Old Testament attitudes. It is one thing to say circumcision has a deeper significance, but quite another to say it has no significance. Paul’s opinion here with respect to the Law of Moses could not be more negative. In Acts 21:21 refusing circumcision is equated with ‘apostasy [apostasia] from the teaching of Moses’ (my tr.).

However, Paul’s next words (1 Cor. 7:19b) come as even more of a surprise and apparently create a confusing paradox: literally, ‘but [or instead] keeping God’s commands’, an idiom well translated as, ‘Keeping God’s commands is what counts’ (TNIV). Translations differ on whether the relationship between the clauses suggests simply that while (un)circumcision does not matter, keeping God’s commandments does, or if opposites are implied, such that while (un)circumcision means nothing, keeping God’s commandments means everything. Other translations say keeping God’s commandments ‘matters’ (NAB, NASB) or is ‘what counts’ (NET, NIV), is ‘what is important’ (NJB, NLT) or ‘is everything’ (NRSV). Either way, if the first half of 1 Corinthians 7:19 assaults the law, the second half seems to contradict this, saying something strongly in its favour.

Both the main terms ‘keeping’ and ‘commands’ seem to point to Paul’s saying that what is paramount is observing the Law of Moses. Apart from here in verse 19, the noun ‘commandments’ or ‘commandment’ is used thirteen times in Paul’s letters. In the majority, ten times, it refers unambiguously to the Jewish Law (Rom. 13:9; Eph. 2:15; 6:2; Titus 1:14; and six times in Rom. 7). In the other three occurrences of the word (1 Cor. 14:37; Col. 4:10; 1 Tim. 6:14) it refers

Gk. entolē.
to Paul’s own instructions. The verb ‘to keep’ can mean ‘obey’ in the New Testament and is used regularly with reference to keeping the Law of Moses, namely ‘God’s commandments’ (Rev. 12:17; 14:12), the ‘commandments’ (of Moses; Matt. 19:17), ‘the Law of Moses’ (Acts 15:5), the sabbath commandment (John 9:16) and ‘the whole [Jewish] law’ (Gal. 2:10). In 1 Corinthians 7:19 the related noun is used, which refers to ‘persisting in obedience’ (BDAG 1002d).

Thielman is right to observe that ‘keeping the commandments/laws’ in Jewish and Christian literature regularly referred to obeying the Mosaic law (Sir. 29.1; 32.23; Wis. 6.18; Matt. 19:17; Josephus, Ant. 8.120, 395; 17.159). Since circumcision was an essential part of the law (Gen. 17:10–14, 23–27), what could Paul possibly have meant when he said that ‘circumcision is nothing’ but the important thing was ‘keeping God’s commands’? How is this paradox to be resolved?

A common way forward is to draw on the venerable distinction between different parts of the law (civil, ceremonial and moral), dating back, in part at least, to the time of Origen. According to Thielman, for example, Paul distinguishes between parts of the law that count and parts that do not count. Circumcision falls squarely into the latter category. But most of the rest of the law is still valid as ‘the commandments of God’.

The problem with this explanation is threefold. First, while the distinction between moral, ceremonial and civil law may be a useful heuristic in a limited sense, and it does acknowledge the salvation-historical distinctions between Israel as a theocracy in the land and the church, scholars rightly judge it to be anachronistic. Paul K. Jewett explains with reference to the Old Testament:

> It should always be remembered, however, that the distinctions Christians make between ‘moral’ and ‘ceremonial’ laws in the Old Testament, was hardly perspicuous to the Hebrew mind. In the Old Testament, cultic and ethical, moral and ceremonial, religious and civil enactments are all worked together, with no sense of propriety, since they all express the will of Yahweh for his covenant people Israel.

Hermann N. Ridderbos makes the related point in relation to Paul’s letters: ‘In the epistles that have been preserved to us, nowhere is a distinction made explicitly between the moral and ceremonial, particularistic parts of the law.’ Paul, Jews contemporary with him, and early Christians make no such distinctions.

Secondly, the distinction is also impractical, with many laws defying classification. Schreiner writes, ‘Many of the so-called ceremonial laws have a moral dimension that cannot be jettisoned.’ The same goes for the civil laws, such as in Deuteronomy 25:4, which speaks of not muzzling an ox while treading out the grain, a law from which Paul (in 1 Cor. 9:9 and 1 Tim. 5:18) and many Jews contemporary with Paul derive a moral lesson.

The third problem for the resort to moral, ceremonial and civil categories of law is that such a strategy ultimately proves unsuccessful in explaining the tensions in Paul’s thought on the law. It fails to do justice to the absolute nature of Paul’s negative statements about the law (see chapter 2) and misses the rhetorical function of the other statements.

Two parallel texts in Galatians undermine further treating 1 Corinthians 7:19 as a paradox expressing both negative and positive assessments of the Law of Moses. In both cases the thing contrasted with the irrelevance of circumcision is not part of the law that remains (contra Thielman et al.) but something that replaces the law entirely:

> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love. (Gal. 5:6)

> For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (Gal. 6:15)

The complement to the repudiation of circumcision in both Galatians 5:6 and 6:15 is a substitute for the law. Since ‘faith through love’ and ‘a new creation’ cannot be understood as the Law of Moses in part
or in any sense,\(^{54}\) it seems only reasonable that neither should ‘keeping the commandments of God’ in 1 Corinthians 7:19 be taken that way.

A fourth example of Paul’s contrasting law observance with something far more important appears in Romans 14:17. There, in the context of discussing Jewish laws of diet and Sabbath, he concludes that such laws are not determinative of Christian community or character: ‘For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ Paul regularly puts something in the place of the law (see further chapter 4).

In this light 1 Corinthians 7:19 thus turns out to be not a paradox, marking off one part of the law from another, but polemic. Instead of obeying the law, Paul says the important thing is to obey ‘the commandments of God’, which, I believe, the Corinthians would have understood as Paul’s own instructions in the letter. The only other place where ‘command’ appears in 1 Corinthians is in 14:37: ‘what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.’\(^ {55}\) Furthermore, if ‘God’s commands’ in 1 Corinthians 7:19 refer to the Law of Moses, in whole or in part, this would be the only place in his letters where Christians are instructed to ‘keep’ them. Christians do not ‘keep’ the commandments of the Law of Moses, but instead ‘keep’ some other commandments (that are nonetheless from God). When Paul speaks of Christians positively vis-à-vis the law, he does not say that they ‘keep’ or ‘obey’ it but rather that they ‘fulfil’ it.\(^ {56}\) Paul’s words in 7:19 are formulated in a deliberately polemical fashion.

What, then, is the precise referent of the divine commandments? Paul expects the Corinthians to keep in 1 Corinthians 7:19? Barrett suggests Paul has in mind ‘an obedience to the will of God as disclosed in his Son [which is] far more radical than the observance of any code, whether ceremonial or moral, could be.’\(^ {57}\) Can we be more specific than saying Paul is referring to God’s will? Furnish looks for a more contextual definition of ‘God’s commands’ in this text, taking the phrase to mean ‘leading one’s life in accordance with God’s call’ (v 17a), as one who belongs to Christ (v 22).\(^ {58}\) Without developing the thought, Garland suggests that verse 19b might be a reference to avoiding porneia: ‘What matters is keeping the commandments of God (7:19), in particular, avoiding fornication (7:2) . . . Paul implies that the important distinction is not between those who are married and those who are celibate but between those who avoid fornication and those who fall prey to it.’\(^ {59}\) The context supports Garland’s reading of the text.\(^ {60}\)

As I have argued elsewhere (with Roy Ciampa), the commands to flee sexual immorality (NET) in 6:18 and glorify God with your body (NET) in 6:20 dominate chapters 5–7 and are never far from view.\(^ {61}\) As it turns out, from 6:12 to 7:16 Paul uses ten imperative mood verbs. Interestingly, six of these refer either directly or indirectly to keeping away from sexual immorality: 6:18, 20; 7:2–3, 5, 9.\(^ {62}\) And it would certainly not be unlike Paul to give this command prominence, as 1 Thessalonians 4:3, penned by Paul in Corinth, demonstrates: ‘It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you avoid sexual immorality [porneia]’ (my tr.). In its broader context, then, 1 Corinthians 7:19 resonates with Paul’s argument in chapter 7 and its significance would not have been lost on the Corinthians. The better readers would have seen its relevance to the main message in the chapter and ‘connected the dots’ to conclude that not only is circumcision nothing, but marriage and singleness are also nothing, and keeping God’s commandments is what counts, especially avoiding sexual immorality.

**Three moves**

In my view Paul does three things with the law and each one must be fully heard without prejudicing the others: (1) polemical repudiation; (2) radical replacement; and (3) whole-hearted reappropriation (in two ways). These respectively correspond to treating the law as legal code, theological motif and source for expounding the gospel and for doing ethics. When describing Paul’s view of the law, too often scholars notice only one or at best two of these impulses and minimize, ignore or deny the other(s).\(^ {63}\) All three moves occupy a vital place in what Paul says about and does with the law.

\(^{54}\) On the meaning of these phrases see the section in chapter 4, ‘“Circumcision is nothing” complements’.

\(^{55}\) Cf. Col. 4:10 and 1 Tim. 6:14, where ‘command’ likewise refers to apostolic instruction.

\(^{56}\) See further chapter 3 in this book.

\(^{57}\) Barrett 1968: 169.

\(^{58}\) Furnish 1999: 62.


\(^{60}\) In the broader context of the whole letter, perhaps a second basic command of God that Paul would have the Corinthians think of is the avoidance of idolatry (cf. 10:14 and 10:31).


\(^{62}\) The other four consist of commands concerning divorce: 7:11–13, 15.

\(^{63}\) Davies (1982: 4) was right when he noted in 1982 that ‘Paul’s view of Torah [the law] has led interpreters, concentrating on one aspect to the exclusion of others, to oversimplify his response to it’ (italics original).
The three moves are evident in 1 Corinthians.

1. The first move, of repudiation, can be seen in the negation of circumcision in 1 Corinthians 7:19a. Another instance is in 1 Corinthians 9:20, where Paul says simply 'I myself am not under the law'.

2. The second, replacement, is evident in 7:19b with the call to keep God's commandments, that is, apostolic instructions. Elsewhere in 1 Corinthians replacement of the Law of Moses can be seen clearly in 9:21, where Paul says, 'but am under Christ's law'.

3a. The first form of the third move, the reappropriation of the law as prophecy, as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, can be seen in 8:5–6, where the language of Deuteronomy 6:4 governs Paul's wording and argument. Alluding to Israel's Shema, Paul reaffirms strict Jewish monotheism along with finding Christ embedded within the very definition of that one God/Lord of Israel. It is also evident in 15:45, where Paul uses Genesis 2:7, 'the first man, Adam, became a living being', to point to the significance of Jesus Christ, who is of equally universal bearing as our first ancestor.

3b. The second form of the reappropriation of the law, using the law for questions of conduct, can be seen at various points. For example, Paul closes 1 Corinthians 5 and his call to exclude the incestuous man with the words 'Expel the wicked person from among you' (5:13b NIV), a quotation of a frequent expression of the LXX of Deuteronomy, where it is used on six occasions to signal the execution of a variety of offenders (13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 24:7; cf.Judg. 20:13). In 9:24 Paul asserts that Deuteronomy 25:4, the call not to 'muzzle the ox', 'was written for us', helping to establish that ministers of the gospel deserve to be supported financially. And in 10:11 Paul asserts that the events of the exodus and wilderness wanderings 'were written down as warnings for us', supporting his warning against sexual immorality and idolatry.

Evidently, Paul does not think his utter repudiation and radical replacement of the Law of Moses entail its complete redundancy. The question to ask in these cases is not which bits of the law are still useful,

but in what sense is the law valuable for Christians. In short, Christians are instructed by the law, but not as Jewish law. Instead, Paul models reading the Law of Moses as prophecy and as wisdom.

The subtle influence of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 itself points indirectly to a rejuvenated role for the law in determining Christian conduct. Paul conceives of conduct as 'walking' (in v. 17) 'before God' (v. 24), appeals to a saving event as forming the identity of the people of God in verse 23a (reminiscient of the exodus), possibly alludes to Leviticus 25:42 in verse 23b and gives the 'call of God' a key place in everyday life throughout the paragraph. All these show that Paul continues to draw on the Hebrew Bible, including the law, when he formulates moral teaching and seeks moral guidance.

To summarize, the table overleaf suggests Paul's approach to the law in 1 Corinthians consists of three moves. As we will see in the following chapters, the same pattern can be observed in most of Paul's other letters (see chapter 7 for seven more summary tables).

The way forward

In terms of method, three guidelines steer the solution to the puzzle of Paul and the law that I am defending and expounding in this book.

Look at all of the evidence

As already mentioned, in my view too many studies of the subject limit the investigation to the undisputed Pauline epistles and concentrate on texts using the word nomos. Along with widening the net to the traditional Pauline corpus, we need to take into account four classes of evidence: (1) what Paul says about the law; (2) what he does with the law; (3) what he does not say about the law (that one might have expected him to say); and (4) what he says about other things (that one might have expected him to say about the law).

The Jewish context of Paul's interactions with the law must also be kept in mind. The question of Paul and the law is a subset of the larger question of the relationship between Paul and Judaism. Critical evidence in this connection includes Paul's use of certain Old Testament texts, such as Leviticus 18:5 (see chapter 2), the character of the Pentateuch itself and the use of the law in the Psalms. And intertestamental Jewish texts that bear on the subject of the Law of Moses supply critical background to Paul's teaching on the law and often set it in sharp relief.
The subject of Paul and the law can be investigated from many angles. It is, for example, a topic in New Testament exegesis, Christian ethics, church history and systematic theology. While not disputing the legitimacy of such work, the present study is a biblical-theological investigation. This means that as far as possible I seek to adopt the terms and categories Paul himself uses and take seriously the way in which he frames the question in terms of salvation history. Many studies impose categories of thought and terminology that are alien to Paul's historical context and consequently skew the results of the investigation. The best biblical theology comes from patient, inductive enquiry. To signal my intention, Paul's own words form the chapter titles of this book and each chapter closes with a section 'In Paul's own words (a summary and paraphrase)'.

As noted in my discussion of the meaning of 'law' earlier in this chapter, Paul generally deals with the law as a unity. If his letters are marked by negative and positive statements about the law, the question to ask is not 'which bits' of the law he refers to in each case, but the hermeneutical question of 'in what sense', or 'as what'? In my view asking the question of 'the capacity in which' or 'the force with which' the law meets the Christian resolves the tension between the negative and positive material.

In developing a hermeneutical solution to the puzzle of Paul and the law I am seeking to apply the widely held view that early Jews and Christians treat the law as a unity. I am also following the lead of a number of scholars who have on occasion responded to the question of Paul and the law in this light, even if in most cases only in passing. These include F. F. Bruce, D. A. Carson, Roy E. Ciampa, Donald Hagner, Richard B. Hays, Markus Bockmuehl, P. T. O'Brien and, at points, Thomas Schreiner and Stephen Westerholm.

### A hermeneutical solution

In his letters Paul undertakes a polemical rereading of the Law of Moses, which involves not only a repudiation and rejection of the law...
as ‘law-covenant’ (chapters 2 and 3) and its replacement by other things (chapter 4), but also a reappropriation of the law ‘as prophecy’ (with reference to the gospel; chapter 5) and ‘as wisdom’ (for Christian living; chapter 6). This construal finds support not only in what Paul says about the law, but also in what he does not say and in what he does with the law. And it highlights the value of the law for preaching the gospel and for Christian ethics.

Chapter Two

‘Not under the law’
Explicit repudiation of the law as law-covenant

The Law of the Decalogue has no right to accuse and terrify the conscience in which Christ reigns through grace, for Christ has made this right obsolete.

(Martin Luther)\(^\text{1}\)

The law, as law, is meant to be observed: only so can the life and blessings that it promises be enjoyed.

(Stephen Westerholm)\(^\text{2}\)

The Law originally had the primary function of defining the identity of God’s elect people, the Jews. Within that hermeneutical perspective, the Law was understood primarily as commandment.

(Richard B. Hays)\(^\text{3}\)

If the crux of the problem of understanding Paul and the law is the tension between Paul’s negative critique and positive approval of the law, the task of this and the next chapter is to look squarely at Paul’s negative stance towards the Law of Moses. Chapters 5 and 6 will consider the positive things he says about (and does with) the law. As it turns out, ‘circumcision is nothing’ is nothing out of the ordinary in Paul’s thought. The apostle to the Gentiles makes negative remarks about the Jewish law at a number of points in eight of his letters. This material raises critical questions: What is the nature and extent of Paul’s opposition to the law? Does Paul abolish only parts of the law? Does he just take issue with a legalistic misunderstanding of the law or a nationalistic abuse of the law? Or is his critique more radical?

1 Luther 1962: 4.
2 Westerholm 2004b: 37, italics original.
3 Hays 1996b: 163, italics original.