

2011-08-19

# Written for our instruction : Re-appropriation of the Law as Wisdom

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Annual Moore College Lectures  
2011

# Paul and the Law

## Keeping the Commandments of God



**Five-Lecture Series**  
Friday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2011  
Lecture Five



# Paul's Re-appropriation of the Law

## *“Written for our instruction”*

### I. Paul's Use of the Law for Moral Instruction

“Any continuing role for the Torah (Jewish law) in Paul's ethics is a matter of continuing controversy.” (James D.G. Dunn)

“It is likely that these [Paul's use of the laws of Deut.] and other scriptural laws have exercised a far more pervasive influence over Pauline parenesis than the small number of explicit citations and direct allusions would suggest (as argued by Brian Rosner).”  
(Francis Watson)

“While Rosner probably tries to argue for too much and some of his links are more convincing than others, his work has been widely received as an important corrective to the approach of von Harnack and others opposed to Paul's use of the Old Testament [for ethics]” (Richard Burrige)

“In contrast to Rosner, I take it that the OT plays a rather subsidiary role in Paul's ethic.”  
(Christopher Tuckett)

Rosner's work “does not account for Paul's approach to the Mosaic law.”  
(Ben Witherington III)

### II. Does Paul quote the law as law?

Ephesians 6:2-3 and obeying your parents?

“The direct quotation of the seventh word about parents in Ephesians 6:2–3 appears to be the exception subverting the thesis here presented, for it is a direct quote in support of an apostolic instruction. But in this passage no other law is used in this way, and this one is singled out for the promise attached to it. It is at least plausible that the Christian child is being asked to grow in wisdom about the moral realities of honour to parents, rather than being commanded merely on the basis that the seventh word exists.”  
(Andrew Cameron)

The context in Ephesians is instruction about how to walk in wisdom (5:14).

Other possible instances?

### III. Paul the Wisdom Teacher

“Just as our dear brother Paul, according to *the wisdom* given to him, has written to you.” (2 Peter 3:15)

#### *A Wise Walk*

Paul calls the Corinthians to “become wise”(1 Cor 3:18); deplores the fact that none of the Corinthians is wise enough to settle the dispute between brothers (1 Cor 6:5); calls the Roman Christians to “be wise about what is good” (Rom 16:19); prays that believers will be filled with the perception of God’s will in all wisdom (Col 1:9-10); admonishes and teaches “in all wisdom” (Col 1:28) and expects believers to do the same (Col 3:16); and tells the Colossian Christians to be “wise in the way you walk” (Col 4:5) and the Ephesian Christians to “be careful how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise” (Eph 5:15). Note not only how widespread is this material, but also how Paul uses language expected of Jewish Torah observance, transferring it to Christian wisdom.

#### *Wisdom motives*

Various motives are similar to, if not identical with, motivations in the wisdom literature. Examples include: the appeal to “common sense” (1 Cor 5:6; 6:12; 9:7; 11:15-16; 2 Cor. 9:6; Col 3:21; 2 Thess 3:10); the appeal to a sense of shame (1 Thess 4:4; 1 Cor 11:6; 2 Cor 9:4; Rom 2:17ff; 16:17-18); and social reasons (1 Thess 4:12; 1 Cor 7:4; Rom 13:1-6; Gal 5:15; Col 3:20-25).

#### *Wisdom appeals*

The appeal to the orders of creation, such as nature (Rom 1:26), marriage (1 Cor 7), state (Rom 13:1-7 [see your P,S and Ethics on this]) and work (1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6-7,11), as well as convention (Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 7:35; 13:5; 14:40; 1 Thess 4:12) and custom (1 Cor 11:14). Note also the appeal for discernment (e.g., Phil 1:10).

### IV. Paul and the Law as Wisdom

“These things happened to them as examples and were written for our instruction (*nouqesi+a*), on whom the ends of the ages have come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11)

“For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction (*didaskali+a*), so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.”(Romans 15:4)

Note the use of the related verbs in connection with wisdom:

“We proclaim him by *instructing* and *teaching* all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28)

“ ... *teaching* and *admonishing* one another in all wisdom.” (Colossians 3:16)

Cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

## V. The 'Wisdom' Character of the Law

“You must observe them diligently, for this will show *your wisdom and discernment* to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a *wise and discerning people!*’” (Deut. 4:6)

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the LORD are sure, *making wise the simple.*”  
(Ps 19:7)

“Your commandment *makes me wiser* than my enemies,  
for it is always with me.” (Psalm 119:98)

“The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak justice.  
The law of their God is in their hearts; their steps do not slip.”  
(Prov 37:30-31)

“Those who keep the law are wise children,  
but companions of gluttons shame their parents.”  
(Prov. 28:7)

“And that Law that is among us will help us,  
and *that excellent wisdom* that is within us will support us.”  
(2 Baruch 48:24)

“Therefore, be wise and sensible in God (σοφοὶ ἐν θεῷ καὶ φρόνιμοι),  
understanding the order of His commandments, and the rules of every deed,  
so that the Lord will love you.”  
(Test. Naph. 8:10)

“It is necessary that these (books) should be made accurate for your library  
since the law that they contain, in as much as it is of divine origin, is full of  
wisdom and free from all blemish.”  
(Aristeas 31)

Philo writes of the wise Moses and wise laws.  
And Ben Sira equates law with wisdom.

## VI. The Creation Basis of the Decalogue

“When one rebels against the rules and regulations revealed by God  
in the Torah ... he or she rebels against the order of creation.”  
(Bruce K. Waltke)

“If any man carries out in deeds whatever is enjoined there [in the law], he will express the image of God, as it were, in his own life.” John Calvin

“Calvin appears to think that the law of Moses sets forth the pattern of the image of God as it would have been originally created. The fullest pattern for image is, according to Calvin, Christ himself: ‘Christ, more than the law of Moses, forms the pattern and example of the Christian life.’”  
(Randall C. Zachman)

## **VII. The Limitations of Law as Law(s)**

*Gordon Wenham, Story as Torah*

*The Wisdom / Torah Psalms*

*Job 31*

*Ethics is bigger than laws*

NB. Paul doesn't just use 'the moral law' for moral instruction. Paul can use 'ceremonial law' (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7) and 'civil law' (e.g., 1 Cor 9:9; 1 Tim 5:18) for moral instruction.

## VIII. Test Cases in Paul's Moral Teaching

### *Stealing*

Paul mentions the subject three times. In Romans 2:21, he challenges his Jewish opponents as to whether they transgress the commandment not to steal. For Jews, the law remains a legal code. In Romans 13:8-10 he cites the commandment not to steal in a discussion for Christians of how love fulfills the law. And in Ephesians 4:28 he addresses Christians and instructs them not to steal, going deeper than just the law itself by reflecting on the responsibility to work in order to be able to share with the needy. The law against stealing is not cited as law, but it is still the basis of his moral instruction.

Romans 2:17-24	Ephesians 4:28	Romans 13:8-10
<p>But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?</p>	<p>Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.</p>	<p>Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.</p>

### *Sexual Ethics*

### *Murder*

## *Tithing*

The practice of giving ten percent of your income is found in the Law of Moses (e.g., Lev. 27:30-33) and is still taken by many Christians to be an obligation. Does Paul recommend it? Despite having numerous opportunities to do so in his many discussions of giving Paul gives no endorsement of tithing. He is consistent – Christians are not under the law. In passages like 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul talks against any form of compulsion when it comes to giving: “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

But that does not mean that he considers the laws relating to tithing to be irrelevant to Christian living. In 1 Corinthians 16:2 he recommends giving that is deliberate and proportional to your income: “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income.” And in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 he appeals to the generous character of God in creation as a motivation to give generously: “Command those who are rich in this world to be generous and willing to share, not to put their hope in wealth, but in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (passage abbreviated).

## **IX. The Thirty-Nine Articles**

"The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore there are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral." (Article VII)

Michael Jensen and Tom Frame:

“Some of the earliest descriptions we have of the Christian community references their meeting together to pour over the Scriptures in the light of the gospel of Christ. And yet again and again there have been those who have sought to pit the Old Testament against the New, as if they were two opposing and contrary dispensations - or, as if the Old Testament deity was in fact a different and rather nasty character in opposition to the gentle New Testament God of love. This was the Marcionite heresy; and it led to the affirmation by the church that the Christian Bible most definitely included, and indeed was unthinkable without, the Hebrew Scriptures.

This was not an unproblematic move. The Old Testament was, it proved, a hard book to like in many respects. The challenges of interpretation (not to mention the linguistic difficulties) seemed all but insurmountable. And yet, determined as they were to consider the whole Scripture as Holy Scripture, the fathers of the church concocted allegorical ways in which they could read the Old Testament. Unfortunately, the way in which the NT modelled reception of the OT was, at least in the Alexandrian school, rather neglected.



In the Protestant Reformation, it could have been argued that the spirit of Marcion lived again. Luther's polemic against law was read by his accusers as a very negative depiction of the OT indeed, and led him to defend himself from the charge of antinomianism at great length (see his Larger Catechism). He had set up the grace/law antimony with such vigour that the charge had some weight. The other evangelical thinkers were less dialectical, less polemical; less inclined to equate OT religion with the practices of Rome's church.

The key to this article is that Christ holds both Testaments together. The Old Testament is Christian because it testifies to Christ. The history that the Bible narrates is a continuous one, driven forward by the promises and covenants of God with Israel, and consummated in the coming of Jesus and the inauguration of his church. And so, the Old Testament is not merely a book of antiquarian interest, whose promises and ordinances have in some way lapsed.

But then there is a problem: what to do with the Old Testament law, with its combination of local ceremonial bye-laws and universal truths? The threefold division of the law was the hermeneutical solution, one shared by Calvin. Ceremonial and civic laws as given in the OT were particular to the time and place, to the stage of salvation history that they were given in. This is not an unreasonable suggestion, because of the effort that the New Testament writers spend in saying that the Old Testament rituals and sacrifices are fulfilled in Christ and that the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God meant the end of the necessity for a civic law. The moral law is not in the same way abrogated, not at all - it is, if anything, intensified by the teaching of Jesus.

The weakness of the scheme is that the division of the law is not found in the text of the OT itself. What is more, the neat division into the three types of law is not so easy: is looking after widows, for example, a moral or a civic law? Is the principle of respect for animal life now no longer demanded of Christian people? On close reading, the division seems somewhat artificial.”

# **Paul and the Law**

## *“Keeping the commandments of God”*

### **I. Three Signature Steps**

Scholars continue to debate the interpretation of “works of” / “righteous requirements of” / “end of” / “fulfilment of” the law, and so on, along with “law of Christ / faith / the Spirit,” etc. However, the precise meaning of particular terms and phrases in Paul’s letters can actually become a distraction from the main task of understanding Paul and the law, which to my mind is to track the big moves he makes over against and with the law. Whether “law of Christ” is an example of replacement of the law or its re-appropriation, or “end of the law” is its repudiation or its replacement, or both, does not change the fact that all three moves are evident at different points in his letters.

It is possible to disagree with my understanding of some of the details and still see the three signature steps as characteristic of Paul’s dance with the law. To my mind, along with engaging in careful exegesis, the biggest task for students of Paul is to clarify the sense in which, and the extent to which, the apostle repudiates, replaces and re-appropriates the Law of Moses.

The problem with understanding Paul and the law is that Paul’s letters present both negative critique and positive approval of the law. These lectures propose a hermeneutical solution to this puzzle. Rather than asking “which bits” of the law Paul endorses, it is more accurate to consider Paul’s negative response to “the law as commandments,” as well as his positive response to “the law as prophecy” and “the law as wisdom”. This construal finds support not only in what Paul says about the law, but also in what he doesn’t 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.

### **II. The Analogy of the Psalter**

### III. The Three Moves Across Paul's Letters

#### *Paul and the Law in Romans*

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Wisdom</i>
6:15	believers are "not under the law"	"but under grace"		
8:1-4	"you have been set free from the law of sin and death"	"by the law of the Spirit"		"in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us"
4:1-3			Gen. 15:6 quoted, "Abraham believed God ...," to argue that Abraham was justified by faith, in connection with the promise in Gen. 12:1-3, which is now being fulfilled in Christ	
5:12-21			Adam as a type of Christ clarifies Christ's achievement	
12:19				Deut. 32:35 quoted, "Vengeance is mine ...," to support the call for non-retaliation

#### *Paul and the Law in 1 Corinthians*

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Wisdom</i>
7:19	"circumcision is nothing"	"Keeping God's commands is what counts"		
9:20-21	"I am not under the law"	"I am under the law of Christ"		
8:5-6			Allusion to Deut. 6:4, "there is but one Lord," establishing Christ as Lord	
15:45			Use of Gen. 2:7, "the first Adam became a living being," to underscore the universal significance of Christ	
9:9				Deut. 25:4 quoted, "Do not muzzle an ox," to support the argument for paying ministers
10:11				the exodus and wilderness wanderings "were written down as [moral] warnings for us"

*Paul and the Law in 2 Corinthians*

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Wisdom</i>
3:6	“he made us competent as ministers ... not of the letter, for the letter kills”	“but of a new covenant, of the Spirit .. the Spirit gives life”		
6:16			Lev. 26:11-12 quoted, “I will live with them,” to identify Christians as the new people of God	
8:15				Exod. 16:18 quoted, “the one who gathered much ...,” in support of argument for material equality among God’s people
13:1				Deut. 19:15 quoted, “by the testimony of two or three witnesses,” to add force to the prospect of Paul’s third visit

*Paul and the Law in Galatians*

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Wisdom</i>
2:5, 14		“the truth of the gospel”		
3:23-25	“we were held in custody under the law” but “are no longer under the supervision of the law”	Christ and faith have now come		
5:18	“you are not under the law”	“if you are led by the Spirit”		
6:2		“fulfill the law of Christ”		
4:21-31			Exposition of Gen. narrative of Sarah and Hagar to contrast two covenants, two Jerusalems, slavery under the law and freedom in Christ	
5:14				“the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”

***Paul and the Law in Ephesians***

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Wisdom</i>
2:15	“abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations”			
2:20; cf. 3:5; 4:11		“built on the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone”		
5:31-32			Gen. 2:24, “... the two will become one flesh,” quoted to show that Christ and the church are one body	
6:1-3				Exod. 20:12 quoted, “Children obey your parents. ...,” as advice concerning how to walk in wisdom (5:15)

***Paul and the Law in Philippians***

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-Appropriation as Wisdom</i>
3:9	“not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law”	“but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith”		
2:6-8			Paul’s ‘Adam Christology’ exhibits “an undeniable network of associations between Phil. 2 and Gen. 1-3”	
4:18				Exod. 29:18 allusion, “a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord,” describing Christian giving in priestly terms

***Paul and the Law in Colossians***

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Wisdom</i>
2:14	“[God] cancelled the written code, with its regulations that was against us and stood opposed to us; he took it away having nailed it to the cross”			
2:17		“the reality is found in Christ”		
1:6, 9-10			Paul applies the creation mandate in Gen. 1:28 to indicate that believers are a part of the inaugurated new creation and are beginning to fulfill in Christ what has been left unfulfilled in Adam	
2:8-23			Circumcision, festivals, Sabbath days and dietary requirements prescribed in Torah find their reality in Christ	
3:9-10				New creation lifestyle framed as discarding the clothes of Adam and putting on the clothes of the last Adam, alluding to Gen. 3

***Paul and the Law in 1 and 2 Timothy***

<i>Text</i>	<i>Repudiation</i>	<i>Replacement</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Prophecy</i>	<i>Re-appropriation as Wisdom</i>
1 Tim. 1:8-9	“the law used lawfully (as law) is for the lawless”			
1 Tim. 1:11		“the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me”		
1 Tim. 5:18				Deut. 25:4 quoted, “do not muzzle the ox ...,” to argue for financial support of elders
2 Tim. 3:15			“the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation”	
2 Tim. 3:16-17				“All Scripture is useful for ... training in righteousness ... [to be] thoroughly equipped for every good work”

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